

Building Research Collaboratives Among Schools and Universities: Lessons From the Field

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ABSTRACT—In a previous issue of *Mind, Brain, and Education*, Hinton and Fischer (2008) argue that educational research needs to be grounded in the lived realities of school life. They advocate for research schools as a venue for accomplishing this. The Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives represents an alternative model—a research collaborative among independent schools and university-based scholars. This article describes the Center's experience with democratic, participatory action research. It discusses major roadblocks encountered doing such work, including difficulties selecting research topics collaboratively, epistemological differences in methods and design, the scarcity of time, and resistance to results when they challenge gender stereotypes or the status quo or involve student researchers. The article concludes with strategies for overcoming these roadblocks, including clearer, up-front negotiations with schools and a compact that specifies roles and responsibilities for both school and Center personnel.

THE NEED FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

In their article in the most recent issue of *Mind, Brain, and Education*, Hinton and Fischer (2008) argue cogently for the need to ground scholarly research in practice and practice in scholarly research. Without such rootedness, they claim, researchers often misconstrue schools' pedagogical goals and fail to appreciate the nuances of practice, whereas educators often misunderstand scientific findings and are subject to the latest pseudoscientific claims of popular literature; what Hinton and Fischer term “brain scams.” The solution they call

for is research schools, in which scientists and teachers work together to overcome the differences in language and methods, in understandings about the nature of evidence, and even in epistemologies that have kept them apart at grave cost to both. In such schools, they envision scientists educating teachers to conduct research and educators helping scientists to discern what kinds of inquiries can result in findings relevant to their educational practice. Hinton and Fischer see scientists gaining deeper understanding of the cultures of schools, which would enable them to shape more appropriate and effective investigations, and they see them linking schools together in order to create richly textured databases that help both them and educators assess what results are unique to the ecology of particular schools and what are generalizable across them.

The very reasons that make school–university collaborations necessary also suggest potential roadblocks to establishing and sustaining them. The Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives (CSBGL) was founded as a research collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and what has now become nine independent, private schools (www.csbgl.org). Its member schools¹ each contribute to its financial maintenance. Together with Center staff, schools define the research areas they are interested in and are supported by the staff in framing research questions, developing appropriate methods, conducting the research, identifying the actions or interventions that are suggested by the data and then iteratively evaluating those efforts, making appropriate alterations and identifying the next set of questions to explore.

Historically, the Center was created to help schools address concerns related to boys. Amidst a politically charged discourse about boys' and girls' relative school performance, schools acknowledged problems—moral, behavioral, academic—with boys and wished to develop evidence-based improvements in their educational practice. They found unusual cross-school common ground in a search for better understanding of how the force of gender influenced the development of their male students. In the course of this work, it became evident that to consider boys

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was always also to consider girls (not to mention the school as a unique context) and the Center expanded its focus to include them as well.

To help schools with its gender work, the Center positioned itself outside of the politics and polemics of the gender wars by encouraging a phenomenological, inductive, theory-building process. Instead of importing ideas and recommendations from theories steeped in ideology and “neuromyth” (e.g., Gurian & Stevens, 2005; James, 2007; Sax, 2005), the Center would support schools to discover “grounded theory” from direct conversations with and observation and evaluation of their own students. What member schools have discovered from this empirical work is the realization that boys’ and girls’ responses to schools’ “hidden” opportunity structures, their “gender regimes” (Connell, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) is a prime example of what Hinton and Fischer refer to as the “profound inconsistencies” between theory and educational experience. What male and female students experience, what essentialist theories claim, and what schools believe they are offering to their students are often remarkably at odds.

It was a short distance for schools to travel from this realization to a broader acceptance of the need to base programming more solidly in evidence. To help them with this, the Center has offered member schools training in democratically based, participatory action research (PAR). Although this general approach seems straightforward and representative of the kind of joint school-university effort suggested by Hinton and Fischer, experience has taught us that there is nothing straightforward about the actual process of PAR. In this article, we will explicate our approach to PAR and then describe several of the key roadblocks we have encountered in our efforts to practice it. We will illustrate our efforts to overcome the roadblocks with examples drawn from our research within our schools. Finally, we discuss the lessons we have learned from these efforts and draw out implications for others who wish to develop such research collaboratives.

CSBGL’S APPROACH TO PAR

As collaborative, university-based researchers, the Center is committed to helping schools engage in research in the service of action. Our PAR model is rooted in several principles. First and foremost, it is fundamentally democratic and constituency based. This principle means we want to help schools look at problems related to the Center’s core mission that administrators, teachers, and students care about and believe are important. Except for delineating these broad areas of focus (e.g., identity development and the intersection of gender, race and class, school culture as it affects such development, equity, and justice, and the like), we do not decide what problems should be examined. Further, once we have come to an agreement with the school on what questions to look at,

we do not research them by ourselves but only in collaboration with a school-based team. Depending on the problem and what is appropriate that team may include teachers, administrators, and students. Sometimes, too, when appropriate, we have involved parents.

Second, we make every effort to conduct research that is rigorously empirical. This principle means we want to help school-based research teams ask questions in ways that can be answered and in ways in which the answers themselves can be verified in terms of commonly agreed-on scientific standards. When teams do not have the methodological, statistical, or analytic backgrounds to design and execute the research we have agreed upon, we provide the technical support. Sometimes, however, faculty members have skills as good as or better than ours and then they take the lead, though almost inevitably our staff does much of the labor-intensive computational and qualitative analytic work because we simply have more time than our school-based colleagues.

The third principle underlying our approach to PAR is that the school projects are both reflective and interpretive. This means that, as the data we collect generate answers to our questions, we also work actively to foster reflection about their meanings. It commits us to ask the school team and ourselves what the data are telling us about our boys and girls and our schools. A subsidiary of this principle is that we are committed to examining our findings through a systemic lens. It is not enough to discover something about boys’ and girls’ lives. We also regularly ask what the relationships are among our findings about students and the school in which they study.

Fourth, PAR should lead to action. By this, we mean the findings of our joint research efforts should result in practical outcomes that matter to the people involved (boys, girls, teachers, administrators, and parents). This principle might mean a change in methods of teaching, in the curriculum, in the advisory system, or in the ways in which a school evaluates or cares for its students. PAR leads to action through a fairly straightforward model: *What, So What, Now What*. The model causes us to ask: *What* is going on and to find out through research. It then leads us to ask what those data mean, to ask “So what?” And finally, it leads us to ask “Now what?” What are the implications? What do we want do about our findings? Asking “What, So What, Now What” takes the school team through steps of inquiry that begin with the identification of a problem or question that is puzzling people, to a discovery of answers to that query, to asking about the implications of the answers for action, and to initiating an action plan.

Finally, the Center’s PAR model is iterative. This principle means that actions or interventions generated to address a problem themselves raise questions about their impact and effectiveness that should generate a new round of inquiry. In this way, CSBGL schools have committed themselves to an ongoing process that evolves over years of effort.

THE MAJOR BENEFITS

We believe such a PAR stance has four major benefits. First and foremost, it develops within each school a culture of inquiry-based decision making. All of us have experienced the consequences of bad institutional decisions that were made on the bases of assumptions, intuitions, hunches, and strongly held beliefs absent any thoughtful definition of the problem or real evidence to support the decisions. Schools, and, ironically, university faculty for that matter, have cultures that are prone to using anecdotal evidence in place of hard data to make curricular, tracking, and student affairs decisions. For example, we discuss below beliefs among middle school teachers that “effort grades” motivated boys, despite strong evidence produced by their colleagues that they had absolutely no motivational effect. Similarly, how often have university department members heard claims that “anyone can tell a good exam essay when they read it” without ever examining the reliability of their judgments?

Second, if done well, PAR’s democratic organization has the practical benefit of engaging enough appropriate people that it builds political support for the project, something that when not done well leads to the kinds of good projects we all have come across marooned on the shoals of community indifference. Schools are diverse communities, with dominant and marginalized viewpoints among their constituents. Through our work, we have discovered over and over again that building coalitions within such organizational cultures, particularly by including perspectives that may have been more muted, can promote support at each stage of the action research process. Specifically, building political support requires having clear authorization from the school head for the process and the project(s), finding a team leader who commands wide community respect, and constituting a research group that reflects key constituencies, even when that means bringing someone into the fold who voices skepticism about key aspects of the projects (whether those be topical, methodological, or practical). It also means maintaining a democratic appreciation for resistance by framing it as reflecting other (often conservative or traditional) institutional values that need to be understood for effective action to follow from research-based evidence (Evans, 1996).

Third, planned and done well, PAR can generate renewed energy, enthusiasm, and passion among teachers, administrators, and students for making schools better (Cahill, 2007; Reichert, Kuriloff, & Stoudt, in press; Stoudt, 2006, 2007, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006). “Done well” here not only entails the commonly understood dimensions of good research and the political care required to build effective teams reflective of key constituencies. It involves freeing faculty team members from some of their mundane routines in order to conduct the research. (School leaders and teachers consistently report that the extra expenditure by the schools to free faculty is

compensated for by excitement and renewal generated as they create new knowledge [Giroux, 1997].) It also means syncopating this work within the regular rhythms of the school year. Time is the most precious commodity in schools, hedged in as they are by an archaic agricultural calendar and the enormous demands of high-pressured curricula responding to the demands of high-powered parents and children (Evans, 1996). Within this pressure cooker, teams are only free to work within narrow windows of usable time and a failure to respect that and plan for it can leave work unaccomplished, the CSBGL team frustrated, and school people burned out.

Fourth, and finally, well-done PAR adds to our broader scientific understanding. In CSBGL schools, this means contributing to the scholarship on gender and education; its intersections with race, class, and sexual orientation; and the impact of all these factors on the lives and well-being of children in schools. It also means contributing to the scientific understanding of PAR itself (Stoudt, 2008). Our aim is to publish in highly regarded scientific journals (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003; Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004; Stoudt, 2006, 2007), edited collections in particular fields (Reichert et al., in press), and also in professional outlets that enable us to reach large numbers of school professionals (Reichert & Kuriloff, 2005). We also are committed to working with teachers and students to publish work with them. Two such projects, one by a teacher team on students’ definitions of success and their implications for advising and curricular reform and one by a student team on standards of beauty and their impact on female students of color (and all their peers) are currently in preparation. Other work that is too sensitive to make public but important for member schools to share is available to member schools on the Center’s Web site (www.csbgl.org).

ROADBLOCKS AND CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE PAR

Our experience over 6 years and within 10² different schools has taught us that CSBGL’s approach to PAR and the benefits that can be derived from it involve overcoming or at least managing several different kinds of roadblocks. Table 1 summarizes the major ones we have encountered.

The Challenges of Democratic Work

As anyone who lives in one knows, democracy is not easy but wobbly, uncertain, and often trying. Inviting meaningful participation by all stakeholders in school communities complicates the problem of defining what to study and how to study it. Results created in communities of open inquiry not only evoke resistance but also invite it. For instance, in

Table 1
Roadblocks and Challenges to Research in Schools

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- Aligning researcher and school ideas and priorities democratically in selecting a relevant, actionable topic.
 - Designing research projects that avoid colluding in or challenging school characteristics that limit the identity options for students.
 - Responding to both teachers' positivistic and anecdotal biases.
 - Balancing the demands of doing the research efficiently and excellently against the necessity of time-constrained teams' having ownership of it.
 - Supporting school teams in navigating confidentiality and ethical concerns that arise when students participate in research.
 - Facing gender stereotypes in general and in particular overcoming strong impulses to compare boys and girls, instead of looking within groups to understand patterns of behavior and belief.
 - Handling resistance to research findings, especially when they challenge the school status quo.
 - Developing complicated and nuanced understandings of privilege that can also be threatening to the school community.
 - Managing school rhythms and planning research projects around busy times for faculty and administrators.
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our experience, publicly asking questions about cherished practices (e.g., seniors being able to get 1st-year students to run errands for them) or about hitherto unexamined assumptions (e.g., the importance of boys being able to voice quick, witty putdowns of other boys) has led to small groups of teachers strongly protesting their school team's work. And, study within institutions devoted to educating children under various kinds of time-constrained pressures create challenges for both doing the research well and sustaining action initiatives.

Ordinarily, university-based educational scholars have a line of research they determine and then search for schools that will allow them to do it. They conduct their studies, develop their inferences, and write about their results unfettered (and often uninformed) by the thoughts, feelings, or concerns of those they have studied (Carlone & Webb, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). PAR completely changes that paradigm. Although the Center's mission is gender focused and is committed to improving the possibilities for boys and girls within the intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, the actual topics we study are worked out collaboratively. This tends to raise two major kinds of issues. First, often we must overcome tensions over what is important to study. Second, because we are working in highly privileged settings, we sometimes find ourselves struggling against colluding with schools in their efforts to use the work for marketing purposes instead of for challenging accustomed modes of operation, which may disadvantage students who do not represent their "ideal" boy or girl.

Defining What to Study

When we started the Center, our expectations for engagement were not specific. If the school was interested in us, and we the school, we took it on. This often led to misunderstandings that resulted in misalignments between our objectives and the school leader's that made it difficult to apply PAR principles effectively. This in turn resulted in much later, harder negotiations. Now, when a new school wishes to join the Center, the executive director (Reichert) and research director (Kuriloff) spend a considerable period of time working with the school leader to understand our respective goals, to make sure he or she is in agreement with our principles and mission and then to help him or her define research objectives that both suit the leader's goals and objectives and align with ours.

The school leader's goals for joining the Center can vary greatly. For example, in one boys school, the leader was new and had a board mandate to get the lower and middle schools more connected to the high school located several miles away. He saw getting school-wide teams together to work on improving boys' education as a way of uniting the separate divisions. In another school, the leader was under a board mandate to have the all-girls school forge closer ties with a neighboring all-boys school. Clearly, this objective was directly related to gendered work, although in the earlier example, the leader was using gendered work to serve a different agenda. In neither case, however, were the actual research projects specified in advance.

Defining the specific research problems tends to occupy a major part of our entry process and has proven vital to our ongoing relationships with schools. In the case of several of our schools, we have decided with faculty teams to do what we term a "gender audit." This way of taking the pulse of the school involves both qualitative and quantitative methods. We meet with carefully selected groups of teachers and students and ask their beliefs about and experience of the school. We also survey both groups, using very detailed instruments taking in many domains of behavior, attitudes, and experiences relevant to their lives and the school's mission. When raw results come in, the research teams sit down to analyze the data with Center staff members. The results of these audits can be challenging for schools and have always been illuminating.

For example, one school interested in boys' character development discovered normative risk taking and peer hazing from student surveys and focus groups. After grappling with these findings to overcome some internal school resistance, Center staff and the school team were able to mobilize the team to deepen the school's approach to its character education programming. Audit results led another school for boys to study friendship patterns in their lower school, race relations in their middle school, and boys' opportunities for leadership in the upper school, questions neither the school

leader nor we had anticipated when we started. In a girls school, audit data led the team away from the school leader's question of how to connect the boys and girls schools more closely to focus on girls' daily experiences more broadly and how girls' identities develop in the context of the schools' coordinate relationship with its brother school more specifically. In this case, there was tension around the nature and scope of the research questions, with the Center researchers calling for a more inclusive set of questions that would allow more inductive and organic findings and the school-based researchers wanting to stay with a more narrow set of questions focused exclusively on coordination. The Center staff believed that the preliminary data pointed to relational issues within the student body that went beyond coordination. Through a series of meetings and e-mail correspondences, the Center and school-based researchers agreed to study larger issues of identity and relationships with a secondary emphasis on the role of coordination in those areas.

The negotiation of the research questions in these two cases were emotionally trying in some ways while also showing the importance of critical dialogue that is collaborative and data based. The process highlights how this sort of exchange helped the researchers develop a more critical understanding of the macro- and microrelational influences and issues in both the boys' and the girls' lives. It also highlights how important it is to form a research relationship in which both parties can explore their questions and concerns openly and honestly.

In each of these cases, the process of discovering research questions though tense was relatively seamless and democratically achieved. The challenge for the Center, the broader coalition, and science more generally is that, because of the schools' particular concerns, the audits in each school did not ask the same questions they asked in other schools as often as they might, thus preventing us from building up a consistent, cross-school database. Recently, we have been more successful in persuading schools to begin systematically gathering archival data about grades; test scores; academic, social, and sports awards; and the like. This only required us to develop a general template that school personnel can fill in while enabling us to examine the intersectional effects of race, class, and gender within schools as well as to make cross-school comparisons.

Sometimes, the questions that arise from a team, either after studying an audit or through the results of community discussions, are uninteresting to us; yet we feel obliged to help study them because of our commitment to democratic process. For example, in one boys school, lower school teachers wanted to map their existing character education program so they could find continuities and discontinuities across the elementary grades and fill in the gaps. This program reflected a very traditional "virtues model" in which the school teaches its five virtues—loyalty, integrity, honesty, courage, and

sportsmanship—by putting stripes representing them on boys' jerseys, finding places in the curriculum to teach them, and otherwise (trying to) foster them when moral situations arise at recess, in sports, or in the lunchroom. The mapping was done and the curriculum enhanced but we were not able to persuade the team to study the curriculum's impact or to think hard about how conventionally masculine those virtues are (e.g., they do not include kindness, gentleness, compassion, respect, or a host of other competing virtues).

Sometimes, too, a school's administration is deeply threatened by a proposal emerging from a team. For example, in one of our coed schools, the leader wanted us to study how the girls were doing (there had been much work to improve the lives of boys at the school). After focus groups, the team learned that, while the boys described their social relationships with girls as very cordial and brotherly, the girls almost universally described them as hostile, silencing, and sexually oppressive. When the team and our staff proposed doing a broader audit of the girls' experiences, school leaders precluded the team's asking questions about students' sexual experiences. Although this may have been a perfectly sensible political decision on the school's part, it stifled the democratically agreed-upon decision about what to study and crimped the team's scientific freedom. In response, the team is examining cross-gender social relationships and will still be able to discover much of what characterizes them, with the caveat that it will ignore a central way in which the girls have told us gender plays out negatively through sexuality. This issue brings us to the broader challenge we face trying to maintain a symbiotic rather than parasitic relationship with our schools.

The Risks of Collusion

School leaders have multiple reasons for wanting their schools to be members of CSBGL. They are genuinely curious and want to find answers to questions that they have developed through experience. For example, they may want to know why the attrition rate of 1st-year boys is higher than desired or what happens to students who perform poorly in lower grades or why girls dominate the honor roll. They may want to achieve board-mandated ends such as we have described—unifying two campuses or bringing a girls school and a boys school a into closer connection. They also may want to have their school known as a place that collaborates with a university to develop best practices through research. Parents who send their children to such schools often find this very appealing and some schools widely publicize both their affiliation and study results for marketing purposes.

But leaders are very proud of their schools and are their primary protectors. Data about delicate subjects can be perceived as threatening. We have already given the example of leaders who vetoed the study of girls' sexuality for fear of negative reactions from the broader school community.

Leaders also can be surprisingly open. For example, a study of race relations in one of our schools found a pervasive “culture of niceness” that silenced discussion of serious racial issues. The leader made it clear that his school should be identified because he believed it represented a fair description of the issues (Ottley, 2005, 2007).

Whatever their stance on delicate questions, leaders (and teachers) are usually deeply invested in their schools. They pride themselves on small class size, quality of instruction, capability of students, and college admissions lists. They appreciate that they serve very privileged institutions with a substantial majority of economically privileged students even as they work hard to make them more diverse. But often, schools’ historical purpose of reproducing privilege runs counter to helping students from poor, working-class, or minority backgrounds as well as helping girls feel fully welcomed. Schools originally designed to promote upper-class boys can normalize biased arrangements and make such problems opaque or even invisible. For example, in one school, the original boys’ dorms occupy the center of the campus, whereas the newer girls’ dorms are set more to its periphery. Although this geographic fact is not lost on girls and most faculty, it is viewed as normal and “the way things are” by boys and many powerful alumni.

A richer and more complicated example of the normalized impact of privilege can be seen in our work on bullying in one of our boys schools. Our research revealed that it was very widespread and ranged from teasing and verbal harassment to physical violence. In its milder forms, it was often condoned, sometimes supported, and sometimes even indulged in by teachers and administrators (Stoudt, 2006, 2008, 2009). This kind of teasing was characterized by explicitly racist, misogynistic, homophobic, classist, and anti-Semitic messages. For example, poorer boys were often derided by more affluent boys, who would taunt the poor or working-class students with claims that someday they would work for them. The students and teachers who conducted these studies discovered that some administrators, teachers, and students saw these verbal forms of bullying as ways of preparing boys for power by learning to establish dominance. More broadly, the systemic nature of the bullying reinforced and furthered the school’s reproduction of upper-class, hegemonic masculinity—a founding, though unacknowledged, principle of the school (Stoudt, 2008, 2009).

Studying these kinds of processes can subtly reinforce our schools’ and their students’ privilege by associating them with the central research function of a prestigious university. There are only a few ways this can be mitigated. The best solution is research that leads to basic changes in ways the school and its most privileged boys treat more marginal students. Although we have been able to help schools create some interventions, such as a peer-counseling program, that have demonstrated the ability to ameliorate the harshest aspects of the culture of the school, we have had more trouble

addressing structural issues. Schools have resisted efforts to work with teachers on their collusive practices and addressing the broader question of “whose school is it” seems daunting indeed—it would require schools to change in basic and profound ways.

Our work on bullying does illustrate a less dramatic but not unimportant way we can mitigate collusion. By creating a safe space for both teacher and student researchers to explore hitherto taboo topics, they have gained a meta-understanding of their own embeddedness within the hegemonic practices of the school. In such cases, PAR has provided a way to co-construct a more complicated understanding of school violence, intergroup relationships, and hegemonic gender practices. Although this more complex understanding ideally would inform institutional change, in our less-than-ideal cases, it has nonetheless affected profoundly the ways in which students, teachers, and CSBGL researchers understood the nature of these normalized cultural practices.

The Problem of Methods

Positivistic Bias

Several issues arise around methods that can become roadblocks to the successful practice of PAR in schools. First, teachers and administrators often have a bias toward positivistic approaches, which raise epistemological questions from the very outset. Not infrequently, they are skeptical of research that is nonexperimental and nonstatistical. Thus, in each school, we have had to work assiduously with research teams to help them understand qualitative approaches when the questions they are asking demand data about the lived experiences of the students. This leads inevitably to questions about sample sizes, the legitimacy of coding strategies, the nature of reliability and validity, and the complexion of persuasion.

Balancing Efficiency and Excellence With Teams Owning the Work

In turn, this raises a second roadblock. Respectfully entertaining such questions, together with actually conducting qualitative training, takes large amounts of time—schools’ most precious resource. Our university-based staff must balance our commitment to making sure the school teams are involved enough to ensure their ownership of the work against the time it takes to train them in coding and analysis. Practically, this involves making tactical decisions about how much to involve school teams in developing initial, grounded coding schemes from interviews or focus group transcripts and how much “precoding” Center staff should do to help them get started. Here, we are balancing the need to be efficient against our desire to have the school teams own the data analyses by creating the analytic tools. Center staff also must decide when a coding system developed in this conjoint fashion is adequate to proceed—again balancing our standards of excellence

against what school teams can accomplish within their time-constrained worlds. Finally, balancing similar concerns, it means we must decide how much of the actual coding and analysis we do versus how much to leave to the school team.

Anecdotal Bias

Ironically, a third roadblock also involves an epistemological question, but this time one that runs counter to teachers' positivistic assumptions. Often teachers simply will reject results that do not match their individual experience. Depending on the research question, Center staff may suggest mixed-methods designs or even straight quantitative approaches. Once we have worked with a team to answer a question using such methods, we sometimes encounter resistance to the findings when they do not align with teachers' deeply held, practice-based beliefs. Often, the resistance takes the form of challenges to our statistical methods. But, just as often and more revealingly, we encounter resistance to the straightforward hard numbers themselves. For example, in one of our middle schools, teachers gave out "effort grades" and then, based on them, the school created an "effort honor roll" each term. The teacher team did a careful analysis of the grading patterns and discovered that girls completely dominated the honor roll (by about 10-1). Further inquiry revealed that parents of girls—even with sons in the school simultaneously—complained when their girls did not make the roll, even while *never* complaining that their boys failed to make it. Indeed, no teacher could remember a boy's parent ever questioning his effort grades.

When the team presented its data to the faculty, it was astonished to discover that the teachers paid no attention to the huge disparities discovered but launched into an argument for the "motivational value" of effort grades, especially for boys. Teachers gave anecdote after anecdote to support their claims. It took the team, together with an intervention from the university-based faculty member, over an hour to help the teachers realize that the data failed to support these claims at all. Happily, by the next faculty meeting, teachers had come to accept the data. They realized that, to be motivational, each one of them had to help students understand what their effort grades meant by creating rubrics for them. They also decided to do away with the effort honor roll. Teams have faced similar resistance and had to go to similar persuasive lengths, over the quantity of bullying they discovered, the degree to which girls achieve at higher levels than boys, and the degree to which students of color are underrepresented in honors courses even when initial ability is held constant.

The Challenges and Advantages of Having Students as Research Partners

We have run into another set of methodological roadblocks associated with the commitment in PAR to include all voices

and stakeholders in schools in the process of discovering knowledge. In some ways, involving students as researchers has proven one of the most successful dimensions of our collaborative, democratic work. Sometimes, it is the most direct way to gain access to student voices. It also may be one of our most powerful interventions as well as one of our most powerful research tools. Teachers and students working together on questions of mutual concern foster capacity and learn things they could not learn by themselves. For example, students who were trained as part of their social psychology class in qualitative methods and research ethics were then in a unique position to map the territory of bullying in the school, as much of the bullying perforce happens outside teachers' and administrators' gaze (Stoudt, 2009). Similarly, in our study of standards of beauty, three female African American students who led the research (again through the vehicle of an independent study supervised by two very capable teachers) could get their fellow students to work with them to complete surveys and help to do interviewing much more effectively than faculty or we could have done. Most importantly, they were in a unique position to interpret results and to tell the very powerful story of the findings' meaning for students' lives.

Of course, having student researchers raises questions about the ethics of students studying one another. Teams must confront issues of confidentiality and, more broadly, questions about the appropriateness of having students examine delicate aspects of their peers' lives. Student researchers may risk being viewed as "rats" and they must overcome their peers' reluctance to confide in them. We have guided schools through these ethical dilemmas in three ways. First, we have helped them to realize that in basic ways these questions are the same for any insider group doing research (of course, outsider groups must confront the issues too, though their outsider status gives them a veneer of objectivity). Second, we have used the growing body of literature on PAR that addresses these questions to provide an intellectual backdrop for students' inclusion within our work (see, e.g., Cahill, 2007; Rios-Moore et al, 2004; Stoudt, 2007; Torre & Fine, 2006). We have called on this scholarship when schools have raised these issues. Those conversations have proven constructive and we have used them to deepen the broader discourse around our PAR approach in the schools. Finally, students' work has proven the most convincing argument for including them. Toward the end of every year, the school teams come together in a 2-day roundtable at which practitioners share their work. There is a universal consensus among participants that the presentations which have included students have been the most authentic and persuasive of any we have experienced. They were all sound pieces of research and the power of the student presenters' voices, coupled with the insights provided by the data they presented about their peers' experiences, were both convincing and moving. These

presentations have persuaded many of our schools to include students in their teams when their questions permit.

Roadblocks Involving Resistance

CSBGL and school teams both face other kinds of resistance beyond that of teachers and administrators simply arguing with the numbers. In particular, we have encountered resistance when we have tried to frame issues outside of faculties' closely held gender stereotypes and when our findings run counter to the underlying values of the school and challenge some politically powerful beliefs.

Gender Stereotypes

In the first case, whenever we address a gender question, we find ourselves facing people's deep impulse to compare girls and boys. For example, in a desire to look at possible gendered patterns of interactions among teachers and students in ninth grade at one of our schools, CSBGL staff had to work very hard to get the school team to examine within-gender differences as well as to nuance what apparent between-gender differences they did find. Instead of discovering that boys dominated open discussions as they had hypothesized, the team found that some girls and some boys made different choices to participate based on their desired outcomes. Thus, several of the girls told us they were motivated to answer early questions in order to avoid being asked harder ones later. Several boys jumped in when they believed their answers would impact the discussion. And there did seem to be gendered patterns depending on whether teachers called on students or allowed students to call out. Even here, however, it was easy to miss the large overlaps among boys and girls within the actual but small gender differences in responses to teaching style (Neilson, 2005). These examples point to the broader task of CSBGL staff, which is often to point out the complexity within research findings rather than allow teams to fall prey to simplistic gender difference characterizations, helping them to appreciate, for example, that similarities among boys and girls usually outweigh differences and that the intersectionalities of gender, race, and class are especially important axes of identity formation. Thus, the question we always encourage school teams to ask is, "which boys?" or "which girls?"

Findings Opposing School Values or Political Stability

A second type of resistance we encountered involves research that goes to the heart of the deep values of the school or to its political stability. We have already talked about how a team (which included faculty and students) studying bullying in one of our schools discovered its roots within the school's implicit commitment to educating for power (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Teachers and students freely explained, in

nuanced and thoughtful ways, how learning to manage the bullying and teasing "prepared them for life in law firms and corporate board rooms" (Stoudt, 2006, 2009). The team's anxiety about this finding was amplified, however, when it demonstrated how some teachers colluded in the bullying in order to both maintain control of their classes and explicitly to promote this kind of hegemonic gender identity. The team's plan for the next year of its work was to demonstrate how some of its members played this game, to show the good and bad ends it served, and then to explore this issue with the entire school faculty. Somehow, despite our prodding over 2 years, the team never managed to take this step. Instead, the team went back to studying students. In this case, we concluded that both a perceived threat to a bedrock value of the school and to the continued harmony among the faculty caused the team to avoid following its own plans (Stoudt, 2008).

Roadblocks Involving the Temporal Rhythm of Schools

Working in extremely busy schools poses challenges for any research effort. When the effort involves getting faculty, administrators, and sometimes students together for extended periods of work, it sometimes can seem insurmountable. To succeed, CSBGL teams work together with school teams to plan their yearly projects in advance, taking the rhythm of the school calendar into account. Although the rhythms vary somewhat from school to school, our experience has shown us that little can be accomplished in the first few weeks of school, during grading periods, during the week or two leading up to holidays, when teachers in upper schools are writing college recommendations, during the last month or so of school, and often during end-of-school meetings after the students are dismissed. Given the agricultural calendar, this means every slot that is open within the relatively available periods must be scheduled by the team before the beginning of the school year and then protected carefully. And, of course, such slots are competed for vigorously as people seek time to meet their students out of class, to coach, to go to school games, and to attend other kinds of school meetings. Working with student research teams poses similar problems, though we have found that creating independent studies or actual courses for them, in which the research is part of curriculum, actually makes it easier to meet regularly with them than with the adults in the school.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION: THE USEFULNESS OF A COMPACT

In many ways, depending on the problems being examined by the team, some of the roadblocks we have described arise in each setting and overcoming them actually becomes part of the PAR experience. Successfully dealing with these roadblocks,

for example, effectively helps foster capacity in the schools. Working to overcome roadblocks teaches school teams that how problems are framed is central to what can be observed and what can be learned. It helps members explore their assumptions about what it means to learn something through research and how that knowledge can be explained in ways that convince colleagues. It also teaches people how to surface hard problems that go to the core of the schools' values while challenging them to figure out ways to effect systemic change. Of course, simultaneously, this work teaches the Center's university-based scholars about the less obvious nature of schools and the problems of change, about the nature of resistance and ways to overcome it, and about how to work within the natural rhythms of an organization that represents one of the two or three primary socializing systems of society.

Although we have described some of the methods we have used to overcome roadblocks to effective PAR while discussing the obstacles, on a broader level, CSBGL has developed an overarching framework for managing them. Developed collaboratively with the schools, we call the framework our CSBGL Compact (see www.csbgl.org). The compact begins by establishing the core principles we have described above (rigorous research, school-led, Center-guided process, developing evidence-based cultures and communities of inquiry and making scientific contributions to our understandings of boys and girls at the intersection of race, class, and sexual identities). It then lays out expectations for the school research team, for administrative support, for the teacher researchers, for the nature of the projects, and for CSBGL's university-based scholars. Table 2 summarizes the central aspects of the Compact.

The Compact establishes mutual expectations at the outset. It states that we expect research teams to have a designated leader (Institutional Research Directors or their equivalent), fully authorized by the school leadership. Teams are expected to have regular meetings and to develop projects that can be completed in a school year. The projects should have action implications or be interventions growing out of previous research that the team will evaluate. Teams are expected to own and analyze the data with the help of CSBGL staff. They are expected to engage the broader school community in conversations about the research, findings, and implications. Further, they are expected to ensure institutional sustainability for interventions that work and to participate in cross-school conversations, presentations, and publications.

The Compact expects schools' key administrators not only to support their research directors but also to explain the Center and its PAR approach to their broader constituencies. Administrators should supply needed logistical support such as recording devices, transcription services, and the like. They are expected to help teams access school records, facilitate communication with parents, and work with other

Table 2

Central Dimensions of the CSBGL Compact

Core principles
PAR
Is fundamentally democratic and constituency based
Is rigorously empirical
Results in projects that are both reflective and interpretive
Demands projects that result in interventions and evaluations
Represents a process that is iterative and seeks sustainability
School expectations
Research director and team
Embrace PAR and maintain a critical stance
Chose projects with action implications
Analyze data with help of CSBGL staff
Evaluate research-based projects
Engage faculty about research, results, and implications
Insure sustainability of useful interventions
Disseminate results
Administrators
Fully authorize institutional research director
Educate constituencies about CSBGL and PAR
Provide logistical support
Insure access to data
Support teams by providing time and recognition
CSBGL expectations
CSBGL staff
Collaborate to define, plan, and execute research
Maintain regular contact with institutional research directors and teams
Provide technical support, statistical analyses, help with coding
Provide 4 hrs of research assistant support per week
Supervise research assistants
Insure regular consultations with Center Research Directors
Provide appropriate training to teams and institutional research directors
Help teams develop presentations and write reports

Note. CSBGL = Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives ; PAR = participatory action research.

Center schools to create comparable databases. Finally, they need to support teachers on teams by appreciating their work as a central duty and by providing appropriate recognition. Teachers on teams, in turn, are expected to be engaged in the process, maintain an open mind while assuming a critical stance toward the school and problems identified, and address the findings and literature in their work. In short, we expect administrators and teachers to embrace CSBGL's mission, the processes of PAR, and our commitment to addressing questions affecting students' welfare as it in turn is affected by gender and its intersections with race and class within the particularities of each school's culture.

Finally, the Compact lays out clear expectations for CSBGL's university-based staff. We are required to provide consultations with the school teams before the school year begins, to help assess their progress, to define their upcoming

projects, and to help them to create work plans for the upcoming year. We are expected to maintain regular contact with school research directors, to meet regularly with the team, and to cofacilitate the research. School teams will drive the work while CSBGL researchers will provide technical support and guidance. CSBGL research assistants are expected to have four contact hours per week with their teams while the senior staff supervises their work as well as provides needed support directly. Center staff meets monthly with the Center's research directors to go over projects, to troubleshoot, and to think in broader ways about the connections among the various projects being conducted by all the schools. Our staff also provides direct training to teachers and school research directors, does much of the number crunching, and helps school teams to organize and develop reports. We help teachers develop presentations for conferences and, when appropriate, coauthor papers with them. A summary of the Center's methodological paradigm, which lays out these expectations in terms of roles and responsibilities across the phases of projects, may be found at www.csbgl.org.

Because we have developed the Compact, which grew out of our experiences as we encountered roadblocks, research in the schools has become easier and more focused. Although our experience teaches us that many of the roadblocks we have described are inevitable outcomes of our emphasis on PAR, the Compact has taught us to overcome them in negotiations with schools as a central part of our capacity-building function. We have come to appreciate better that such negotiations are a crucial by-product of our commitment to conduct high-quality studies that lead to direct, evidence-based interventions; ones that actually become institutionalized in schools and make a difference in the lives of students. In this sense, we view working to overcome the obstacles as a meta-outcome of building collaborations between the university and the schools that sponsor us.

CONCLUSIONS

In Hinton and Fischer's proposal for research schools, the school forms a partnership with a research university and grounds its practice in science. In the school collaborative model, we have found that the support, cross-school dialogue and challenge, and an annual forum for presentations to fellow teacher-researchers, offer additional benefits—or glue—that reinforce the value of grounded educational practice well beyond what a partnership with a university alone could accomplish. The separation between university-based research and the practical day-to-day urgencies of school life is so great that it would be relatively easy, we believe, for schools to walk away from such a partnership when challenged by research findings—or, even more likely, simply to ignore the findings altogether. A discovery process grounded

in classroom questions, relationships, and action plans, one that is reinforced by a cross-school community of inquiry, creates connections that keeps schools engaged even when they are challenged by their own findings. Even though the model we have detailed gives rise to numerous roadblocks and challenges, working with schools to overcome them through ongoing negotiations and the Compact, while sharing common purposes both within a particular school and across schools, deepens the support and institutional traction the research results ultimately receive. We recommend this model as realizing the spirit of Dewey's laboratory school while accommodating the lived realities of teachers' and students' participation in school life.

NOTES

- 1 Chestnut Hill Academy, PA; Episcopal High School, VA; Greenwich Academy, CT; The Haverford School, PA; Lawrenceville School, NJ; The Shipley School, PA; Springside School, PA; University School, OH; Riverdale School, NY.
- 2 One of our founding schools withdrew after a few years of participation. Replacement schools have brought our numbers up to 9.

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