



Creating cultures for collaborative inquiry: new challenges for school leaders

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The professional development of teachers continues to be a key initiative in educational reform. Calls for change emphasize the need to stretch beyond the event-driven examples of the past in favour of job-embedded approaches. This paper examines the role of school leadership in creating and supporting such change, and draws upon the informal testimony of practitioners to highlight the challenges for development of collaborative cultures of inquiry. Two key questions addressed were: to what extent and how did teachers change their views of theory assisted practice as a result of engaging in collaborative inquiry and what aspects of the school leadership role need to change in order to be successful in promoting collaborative inquiry? We support the view that there is a continuum of levels of understanding about the relationship between theory and practice, and we suggest that one way for leaders to support collaborative inquiry may be for them to become participant learners who contribute to a collective understanding of collaborative inquiry. Forming strong, collaborative cultures where teachers, principals, and college faculty study and learn together could provide the scaffold to support more meaningful educational reform.

Introduction

The professional development of teachers continues to be a key initiative in educational reform, and there is general agreement that a redesign of the system is needed (Sparks and Hirsh 1997). Redesigning the system, however, requires more than rethinking ways to use time, disburse credit, allocate resources, or modify structural elements alone. It necessitates delving into the innermost core of professional development practice, challenging the fundamental elements that define it—function, purpose, values, and beliefs—and reworking policies and practices to support new ideals where improvement efforts are grounded ‘in changes in teachers’ norms, knowledge, and skills, as well as in change at the organizational level’ (Spencer 1996: 16).

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Some proposals have attempted to tinker with the system, but those with the most far-reaching potential for reconceptualizing and restructuring professional development are ones which do more than replace or improve parts since such structural changes alone have questionable impact on teacher practice and student learning (Elmore 1995, Randi and Corno 1996). More promising practices envision teachers as members of learning communities where theory and practice form the core around which professional learning and collaboration revolve. Calls for change emphasize the need to stretch beyond the event-driven examples of the past in favour of job-embedded approaches. Institutionalizing such reform, however, requires more than a 'nip and tuck' alteration of the training-based professional development models still prevalent today. This paper examines the role of school leadership in creating and supporting such change, and draws upon the informal testimony of practitioners to highlight the challenges for development of collaborative cultures of inquiry.

Restructuring agendas have supported teacher growth and change to some degree. Current conceptions of teacher in-service education are more comprehensive now than in the past and are built upon the expectation that teachers transfer new ideas from 'the workshop' and test them in the workplace. Staff development days, once devoted to isolated, disparate topics, are more likely to be thematically connected and organized around global initiatives such as problem-based learning, cultural diversity, or performance assessment. Peer coaching activities, for example, encourage teachers to examine their practice and utilize student work as an impetus for determining professional development needs. Through action research methodology, teachers learn to use tools for conducting systematic inquiry to capture the complex and fluid nature of their work (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, Zeichner 1996, Noffke 1997). Even personnel assessments have incorporated aspects of reflection and goal setting to include teachers as active participants and partners in the process of planning for and assessing their personal development and improvement (Battaglia 1997).

While some change is apparent and restructuring agendas have supported teacher growth and learning, a survey of the field indicates that movement has been fragmented and inadequate (Elmore 1995). Potentially effective strategies are far from mainstream and have not received adequate attention, indicating a serious lack of priority with both teacher educators and administrators (Smylie 1996). Unfortunately, much professional development continues to engage teachers in additive experiences which transmit information that others prioritize for them. While we do not debate the efficacy of workshops and courses as important ways for educators to increase their knowledge about current practice, we agree with those who assert that this alone should not define teacher learning nor form the perimeter where it ends. Instead, we advocate linking staff development to a reform that 'supports a learner-centered view of teaching and a career-long conception of teachers' learning' (Sparks and Hirsh 1997:3). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (in Sparks and Hirsh 1997) suggest the success of this agenda rests ultimately on teachers' capacity to learn new skills and

embrace new visions of practice and unlearn outdated practices and beliefs about students and instruction that have dominated their professional lives. This is more likely to occur when attention is directed towards practitioner-based research where collegial exchange and disciplined inquiry are part of teachers' work.

Ideally, school/university partnerships have been developed with the intent of promoting new models of professional development, particularly those that espouse either collaborative inquiry or practitioner oriented research as a means of connecting theory to practice. As a result, there is a rich literature base that provides extensive details on the different forms collaborative inquiry can take and how it impacts educational change (Goodlad 1988, Schwartz 1990, Lieberman 1995b, Fullan and Hargreaves 1996, Johnston and Kirschner 1996, Miller and O'Shea 1996). A common theme running through most of the studies is that the knowledge base generated from collaborative research must be perceived as one that is mutually developed, where theory not only informs practice, but is shaped and reconfigured as a result of practice. Wagner draws a clear distinction between clinical partnerships and co-learning agreements. In clinical partnerships, 'while the researcher remains outside the schools and practitioners inside, both researchers and practitioners are also engaged in *jointly defined work* that cuts across those two domains' (Wagner 1997: 15, original italics). In co-learning agreements, 'the division of labour between researchers and practitioners becomes much more ambiguous, as both researchers and practitioners are agents of inquiry *and* objects of inquiry' (Wagner 1997: 16, original italics). Kincheloe (1991: 26) explains this ambiguity by saying, 'The knower and the known are Siamese twins connected at the point of perception'.

Despite this often expressed belief that theory and practice are mutually interdependent, it has proven to be more of an ideal standard than the ones that subtly influence the 'reality' of many collaborative endeavours. A particular stumbling block centres on the competing definitions that university faculty and school based practitioners may hold about the concept of theory into practice, or 'theory assisted practice'. In the past, higher education faculty retained the view that they were primarily responsible for generating the theories and concomitant research that guided practice, which were made available to teachers through professional development workshops and publications. In contrast, many teachers viewed theory with deep suspicion and believed that their knowledge of practice was grounded in the contexts of daily teaching activities.¹ Even now, in cases where teachers assume a researcher's role and examine their practice from a more critical, nuanced perspective, often they do not see themselves (nor do many university based researchers) as agents capable of generating new knowledge or theories that can guide learning in contexts other than their own classrooms (Anderson and Herr 1999). As Kincheloe (1991:3) noted: 'The notion that teachers as well as research professors and other "experts" should engage in critically-grounded social inquiry rests on a democratic social theory which assumes that social research is not the province of a small elite minority'.

Johnston (1997) has described other barriers that impede genuine progress and challenge school/university collaborations such as teachers' struggles (particularly those of colour) to voice concerns not shared by higher education faculty, the imposition of research methods driven by grant requirements, and the persistent lack of authority and time that teachers face in many school districts. Before any authentic collaboration can take place between K-12 and higher education faculty, these differing perceptions must be reconciled. Otherwise, professional development that is predicated upon collaborative inquiry or action research as a means of enhancing teacher learning is likely to fail, as teachers abide with a sceptical 'this too shall pass' attitude.

To support new modes of teacher learning, traditional forms of leadership have begun to shift as well. Today, school leaders are pressed to restructure professional development so that it not only affects the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but creates modifications in the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work (Sparks and Hirsh 1997). Building a culture of collaborative inquiry that challenges existing perceptions and which seeks to draw teachers, faculty researchers, and school staff together in a learning community requires school leadership focused upon helping teachers transform instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Lieberman and Miller (1999) noted that while many principals are aware of the importance of becoming instructional leaders, too often they find themselves locked into the traditional roles of managers, supervisors, or disciplinarians. The importance of having this shift take place cannot be minimized if significant educational change is to be accomplished. Lieberman and Miller (1999: 40) state that what is required are principals who commit 'to leading for student accomplishment for organizational health, for professional learning, and for long-range and deep improvements', and explain that 'these leaders work seriously to support the transformation of schooling and teaching and understand the importance of helping to build a learning community that includes all teachers and students'.

Meeting this challenge, however, creates interesting dilemmas for those assuming the role of school leaders and it provided the spark for our joint thinking and subsequent work. We believe that as schools embrace new ideals and technologies and adopt new modes of practice, teachers will need to be pivotal players in reform agendas, not as its targets, but as its leaders. But what kind of leadership is necessary to accommodate new forms of professional development where the lines between researcher and practitioner, leader and learner are blurred? How might school leaders support and also engage in collaborative inquiry as authentic members of the school learning community? What policies need to be altered or added to implement a model of collaborative inquiry, and how might educational leadership programmes prepare future leaders to renegotiate their roles to enter into this new culture?

These issues framed the scope of this paper as we developed a set of key questions we felt needed to be addressed in reflecting on our own work together. We also sought out the comments of several different school

leaders who had been involved in mutual projects initiated by the school district or the university. Two key questions we addressed in this article were:

- To what extent and how did teachers change their views of theory assisted practice as a result of engaging in collaborative inquiry?
- What aspects of the school leadership role need to change in order to be successful in promoting collaborative inquiry?

Data sources

To respond to the above questions, we drew upon our experiences of having worked together over the past five years in various kinds of collaborative activities within a school/university partnership. The first author is a professor of educational psychology and former director of the teacher education programme at a major state university. Over the past 10 years, she has been actively involved in working with school leaders to create an action research model that brought preservice interns together with veteran teachers to conduct collaborative inquiry into mutually negotiated problems and concerns within a school (Emihovich 1992, 1998, Emihovich and Braen 1997). The second author has been a staff developer for a small urban school district where she has initiated and directed a five-year pilot project to study the efficacy of using action research to build collaborative cultures of inquiry. She has also served as a consultant to other school districts in New York State and engaged in research to examine organizational issues related to the nature and establishment of collegial support structures and processes of continual educational improvement (Battaglia 1995, 1997). Our work together initiated as a result of a request by the school district to the university to provide technical assistance in working on a Goals 2000 grant project to implement a new model of professional development that included an action research component.

In addition to drawing upon the informal testimony of dozens of schools leaders with whom we both worked, we also formally interviewed six school leaders.² The questions used in the interview process are given in Table 1. All of the participants were very supportive of the concept of collaborative inquiry and had implemented various forms of it in the schools in which they worked, which encompassed both urban and suburban sites and a mixture of grade levels. Four of participants were women (one elementary school principal, one middle school principal, one elementary teacher, and one high school teacher) and two were men (one district staff developer and one high school teacher).

Perceptions of the theory/practice relationship

The data we have collected over the years are so rich and comprehensive that only a sampling can be provided to illustrate responses to our two

Table 1. Guided questions for collaborative inquiry interview.

What does the term, ‘theory assisted practice’ (or ‘theory into practice’) mean to you? What about the term ‘collaborative inquiry’? How did you learn about these terms?

Do either of these terms have any impact on how you handle your daily practice? Why or why not?

Do these terms inform the way your school/district conducts staff development for teachers?

If a district wanted to implement a model of collaborative inquiry to help teachers rethink their practice, what kinds of policies would need to be put in place?

Do you feel your teachers (colleagues) engage in examining their practice from a theory based perspective or by using collaborative inquiry? How do they reflect on their practice?

In what ways could a principal help teachers become more reflective about their practice?

How might a teacher education programme help prepare preservice teachers to be more reflective? In what ways could university faculty help in-service teachers? How could they become effective members of a school’s professional staff development team?

To facilitate collaborative inquiry within their schools, what kinds of skills and background knowledge would principals need?

questions. One issue that quickly surfaced was our participants’ differential understanding of key terms such as ‘theory assisted practice’ and ‘collaborative inquiry’. The responses we collected suggested that there was common agreement that theory should, and does, affect practice at the school level, but the linkage was perceived differently depending upon each participant’s level of involvement with collaborative inquiry. At a suburban middle school where the principal had just begun to work with faculty from the university, she gave this response:

What it means to me is that if there’s a new theory out about education . . . that you bring those ideas back, and that you help the teachers develop ways to accomplish what the theory is . . . it means a lot of further research for me as principal and then working with the teachers making them aware of what the new theory is, how that impacts them as teachers, what do they need to do, do they agree or disagree with it.

Another middle school administrator noted that teachers’ views about theory begin to shift as they become more experienced with their own practice:

I think teachers’ views about theory change as they mature in their positions. In the beginning, they feel that theory is the most important aspect—probably because it is all they have. As they accumulate experiences of their own, I believe many teachers begin to feel that research and theory are suspect, maybe because their experiences do not match.

An elementary teacher who had been very actively involved in an urban school district’s pilot programme to teach teachers to conduct action research (where preservice teacher education students served as research assistants and participant observers) viewed the theory/practice relationship in a more complex way:

It has always bothered me that many of my colleagues can’t be bothered with theory. In fact, at workshops and training classes, they often complain that they only want to hear about practical ideas and insist that the discussion doesn’t become ‘too theoretical’. That’s why I became

involved in the collegial circles of learning. Theory was at the centre of all our conversation, whether it was our theory derived from everyday practice, or theory we were using to support and explain our practice.

Overall, our experiences over the past five years lead us to believe there is a continuum of levels of understanding about the relationship between theory and practice. We see the first level as the most basic, where practitioners remain deeply sceptical about the practical value of theory and seek out professional development experiences based on a 'what works' philosophy. This view, reflected in the teacher's comments above about her colleagues, is particularly strong in districts where there is bureaucratic control of teacher learning through training oriented models, which do little to alter teachers' perceptions regarding the connection, usefulness, or development of theory. In the same vein, instructional leaders who champion these kinds of training programmes are themselves impatient with any discussion of theory as being too 'esoteric' to the district's concerns and too time-consuming for preparing teachers to meet new state standards for student achievement. We find this 'efficiency' view is likely to be held more frequently among school personnel who have not developed a strong collaborative partnership with a local university or college where there is mutual interest in redefining problems of practice.

A second level of understanding is recognizing the importance of theory but within a more narrow instrumental context in a linear, cause-effect way. Citing Gardner as their source, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999: 255) refer to this conception as the 'knowledge *for* practice relationship', which is based on the premise that 'teaching has a "distinctive knowledge base"' that, 'when mastered, will provide teachers with a unique fund of knowledge'. For example, a district might implement a new mathematics curriculum based on theories of how children construct their understanding of mathematics. In this view, exemplified by many instructional leaders in local school districts, the theory or research is 'out there' and it is the role of leadership to locate it, make their faculty aware of it, and encourage them to use it in their practice. Their notion supports Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999: 257) contention that the image of teaching is 'understood primarily as a process of applying received knowledge to a practical situation. Teachers implement, translate, use, adapt, and/or put into practice what they have learned of the knowledge base'. This viewpoint contradicts the belief of many educational critics (Sarason 1990, Sparks and Loucks-Horsley 1990, Little 1993, Lieberman 1995a, Smylie 1995), who underscore teacher learning as key to developing and maintaining the overall quality of schools, yet criticize the notion that 'teacher learning can occur only through training, only in workshops and conferences, or only with the help of outside consultants' (Smylie 1996: 10). Instead, they cite job-embedded approaches to professional development (e.g., study groups, peer coaching partnerships, case study teams, collaborative networks, action research groups, curriculum development committees, and other joint problem solving endeavours) as ways in which teachers can work together to promote inquiry and collaboration. Another approach is one advocated by Anderson *et al.* (1994), who suggest ways teachers can engage in practitioner research.³

A third level of understanding is where both teachers and instructional leaders use theory to explain how they develop or guide practice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999: 262) refer to this concept as ‘knowledge *in* practice’, where the ‘emphasis is on knowledge *in* action: what very competent teachers know as it is expressed or embedded in the artistry of practice, in teachers’ reflections on practice, *in* teachers’ practical inquiries, and/or *in* teachers’ narrative accounts of practice’. This view is predicated upon fresh forms of collegial learning where teacher participation reflects evident changes in teachers’ regard for theory and understanding of its connection to practice. An elementary teacher who took part in a new model of professional learning commented:

When I was part of an action research group, it totally changed the way I looked at and responded to theory. I realized that right there in my classroom . . . when I observed and analyzed the actions I was taking to improve what I did with my students . . . I was formulating theories about what worked, what didn’t, and why that was the case. It was on the basis of these newly-formed, ‘self-initiated’ theories, that I changed my methods of teaching. What made it even better for me was when I came to our group to share and explain my new understanding to my colleagues. That’s when I really took my learning to a higher level.

Participating in collaborative inquiry also validated teachers’ sense of themselves as professionals, as described by a high school history teacher:

For the first time in a long time (in a learning situation) I felt ‘smart’ . . . I felt like being part of a collaborative action research group helped me realize I know more than I think I know. When we don’t talk about practice and theory on a regular basis, how are you to know this?

As for the principals with whom we worked, we found that they recognized the value of this kind of activity for teachers, even if they were not always clear about the meaning of specific terminology. As one principal noted:

I’m not sure what you mean by the term ‘theory assisted practice’, but I can say from my experiences that I believe that teachers are willing to ‘mess around’ with new ideas if they make sense to them and if the data show they are working.

The fourth level rests on a belief that not only do teachers generate theory through their practice as well as implement it, but that the knowledge they generate is subject to question, as well as knowledge received from other sources. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999: 273) refer to this conception as ‘knowledge *of* practice’, where ‘through inquiry, teachers across the professional life span—from the very new to the very experienced—make problematic their own knowledge and practice as well as the knowledge and practice of others, and thus stand in a different relation to knowledge’. We argue that if instructional leaders are to be successful in promoting this conception of teacher learning in their schools, they need to be intimately involved in questioning and reflecting upon their own leadership practices.

In fact, we found that teachers want and expect school leaders to do more than merely support their efforts in reconceptualizing practice. They shared an expectation that school leaders become authentic learners and

integral players in the learning environments they endeavour to create. As one teacher stated:

What made our action research group work was that our principal was right there learning with us. At first, it was intimidating because, well, she was the principal and people were not immediately comfortable with that. Since this was not the typical ‘sit and get’ workshop, we were bringing very personal and particular problems to the group and learning how to use the action research process to study them. There needed to be a lot of trust. But, she put her own problems right out there openly, too. That’s when it became believable.

This is the level at which we are directing our current efforts by encouraging instructional leaders to implement staff development programmes that provide teachers with ‘opportunities to explore and question their own and others’ interpretations, ideologies, and practices’, where the goal is ‘understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental change in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999: 279). As Anderson and Herr (1999: 14) have noted, ‘one of the strengths of practitioner research is its link with reconceptualizing the work of school practitioners as intimately linked to on-going inquiry, and the restructuring of schools as a collective process of inquiry-oriented professional and organizational learning’.

Shared contributions among those who engage in collaborative inquiry is, evidently, an important and necessary component of a collegial learning community. Innovations and questions generated from colleagues can provide springboards for instigating school-wide inquiry aimed at altering the broader situation itself. Beyond the general sharing of craft expertise, however, educators indicate that few opportunities exist for disseminating and exchanging teacher-generated professional knowledge. Traditionally, many educators expect such products to come from outside the school setting, not from teachers themselves. Lack of administrative support, uncooperative or disinterested colleagues, and time constraints at the workplace are problems that surface when school leaders and teachers discuss the viability of creating collaborative school cultures.

Below are a sampling of comments from several school principals that underscore these concerns:

I think the best thing I can do for my teachers is to find creative ways for them to spend time together. This is not easy to do within the confines of the regular school day. They need time, other than lunch, to collaborate.

Collaboration needs to be built into the school day, but leaders also need to model it. Leaders need to celebrate collaborative efforts. Often teachers feel like they are part of some odd cult when they initiated any form of inquiry-based, self-directed learning. Leadership needs to really support those who are willing to take the risk. It’s just not part of our culture.

These kinds of cultures don’t develop overnight. They take time, and you have to make the time for them. They must be a priority in your building or organization. This is not easy because you are always working with limited resources and there are a multitude of competing agendas. It’s easy to get it up and started and then let it die from benign neglect.

Collaborative inquiry as an add-on or extracurricular activity is problematic. A prerequisite for doing such work would be the *time* to do it. Discretionary time and built-in flexibility at the workplace may encourage colleagues to meet and work together on long-term problems of interest.

The problems these principals identified are not new; in fact, a literature search would uncover dozens of references to support their contentions concerning the lack of time, the inability of leaders to practice what they preach, the inadequacy of district support, and the scarcity of resources for collaborative activities. We do not pretend to have the answers to these problems, but we do suggest that one way to begin the process is to develop a completely different conception of professional learning. In this version, all the partners in a collaborative endeavour will need to acquire new forms of learning—the teachers, the principals, and higher education faculty. In the next section, we describe what the components of that learning would be and how professional educators need to be transformed themselves to ensure that it happens.

Rethinking roles in professional learning

A common thread running through much of our data, as well as our professional experiences in both schools and higher education, is a prevalent disposition we describe as ‘not the job we signed up for’. In the case of teachers, many feel their role is to be an autonomous agent of learning, not an active inquirer who creates and shares knowledge with colleagues (and even students). For most principals we have encountered, they see building and programme management as their primary roles, not the creation of environments to transform teacher learning. Many higher education faculty are socialized by their colleagues to believe that their role is to generate knowledge within the confines of their office, not to spend valuable time in the field helping K-12 colleagues. This gap between what college faculty espouse for teachers and their own practice has not gone unnoticed by the field. As one of our teacher participants noted:

People need to learn how to create these kinds of cultures, not how to merely enter them. University faculty need to take at least six months off and shadow current teachers as well as students in school districts. They need to get a sense of the daily life and do as much of their course work in the field and less of it from a lectern, classroom, or book.

One way for leaders to support collaborative inquiry may be for them to become participant learners; inquiring, studying, reading, writing, analysing, questioning, and contributing to the collective understanding. Significant change needs to occur administratively as the physical and psychological setting of ‘school’ shifts metaphorically from *formal organization* to *learning community* (Little 1993). We endorse professional development models where school leaders are *first* to learn about and conduct collaborative inquiry so they can discover for themselves how to transition from *lead-manager* to *community-researcher* behaviour. Moreover, we are convinced the better way to engender leadership in these circumstances is to be an authentic learner, a point underscored by Bredeson (1995). Teachers’ testimonials repeatedly acknowledged their respect and value for this attribute. As one teacher said, ‘I don’t want to be led by someone who is/has not been doing [this] him/herself’.

However, the development of a critical community of equal voices is an exhausting enterprise which demands stamina on the part of the community leader and a strong conviction that qualities such as empowerment, collegiality, diversity, and risk-taking are worth more than certainty, stability and efficiency (Battaglia 1997). As school leaders, it is often difficult to resist the temptation to deliver information, direct action, solve problems, and offer advice to teachers rather than exert patience and provide opportunities for these qualities to evolve naturally over time.

This raises the question of what policies and practices need to be implemented at the school level in order to facilitate the use of theory assisted practice. Several problematic issues still remain that school leaders will need to consider if they are to be successful in promoting collaborative inquiry in their schools. One problem is the nature of the collaboration process, whether it is done with outside university faculty or among teachers within a school. A common lament from many principals is that veteran teachers are reluctant to share ideas about practice since the 'Lone Ranger' model still dominates the thinking of many teachers who were not prepared under the new teaching models. At the university level, education faculty face a similar charge, where shared discussions about teaching rarely occur, and where the cultural ethos encourages a focus on 'my work' and not on 'our work' that may be done in collaboration with others (Petrie 1998). Resistance of faculty to engage in collaborative work at both K-12 and higher education levels is predicated on the strong adherence to norms of professional autonomy and privacy (Pounder 1998). A shift in faculty thinking from 'my work' to 'our work' will come about only through candid and frank discussions of shared values, and commitment to improving schools and children's learning (Petrie 1998).

Conclusion

There are no simple solutions to the dilemmas of creating collaborative learning environments. Historically, schools were never intended to function this way, so they must realign themselves with these new purposes and practices and maintain their faith in the ultimate virtue of the transformation. Fullan (1994: 242) commented that 'Schools as learning organizations are basically non-intellectual in the sense that the way they are organized, structurally and normatively, is not amenable to experimentation, critical reflection, continuous learning, assessment, or rethinking'. The complex web of school culture contains norms, values, beliefs, assumptions, and implicit expectations that weave together to shape the context in which teachers teach and students learn. While there may not be tested strategies to replicate, we have offered some suggestions of where to begin the work. Forming strong, collaborative cultures where teachers, principals, and college faculty study and learn together could provide the scaffold to support reform in more meaningful ways as opposed to just implementing the almost dizzying array of models that promise to be the next educational panacea. What is not lacking is the creativity or the knowledge to begin this work, and, in truth, much of it has been initiated

already. What may be lacking, however, is the energy, discipline, and patience to study what is involved in the transformation and the courage to test our capacity for commitment to sustain such change.

Perhaps the most difficult hurdle is that this collaborative work is not done smoothly and neatly, nor can it be mandated into action. It is fragile work that is often crushed by the weight of other seemingly critical agendas, and unless supported, risks disintegrating all together (Battaglia 1997). It is also very emotional work, where the various partners should expect to remain committed for a considerable period of time, if a successful culture of collaborative inquiry is to be created and maintained. Hargreaves (1998: 232) commented that 'More educational leaders must learn to manage emotionally as well as rationally, to give higher priority to *reculturing* their schools and their relationships in them, and not just restructuring them'. But, as Huberman (1993: 37) wryly noted in his comparison of culture to marriage: 'Cultures do not arise by a kind of spontaneous emotional combustion. They have to be created and sustained. Like good marriages, they have to be worked at'. It remains to be seen if the story of partnerships for collaborative inquiry in the 21st century is one marked by the celebration of silver or golden anniversaries, or by acrimonious divorces that leave all parties unsatisfied—with no one to take custody of lasting educational reform.

Notes

- 1 This belief was evident among the teachers at a laboratory school in a southern, public state university with whom the first author worked to develop a model of teacher as researcher. Two of the teachers later wrote about how this model helped them rethink the role of theory in their practice (Hook 1992, Leonard 1992).
- 2 We use the term 'school leaders' to refer to teachers as well as principals who take a leadership role within their school to promote more critical reflections on practice.
- 3 The authors are careful to distinguish 'practitioner research' from 'action research', because they feel that the first term more accurately situates the work of practitioners at the centre of what needs to be studied in schools.

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