

Inquiry: A Case Study of Charter Development

June, 1994
Jody Cohen

The Setting, the School

The comprehensive high school in which this charter is situated, called here Garrison High School, was one of three selected for "intensive restructuring" in the initial years of the foundation restructuring grant. Set in a poor, relatively run-down section of the city, the school is faced on three sides by rows of small, kept-up houses, on the fourth by an empty triangular lot. At a greater remove, the streets became less decorous and more dangerous. The neighborhood surrounding the high school is home to many African-Americans, some West Indians, and a few Asians, Latinos, and Caucasians. A majority of residents live below the poverty line.

According to district documents, at the turn of the decade students attending Garrison numbered between 1,600 and 1,850 at any given point in the school year. They were 99% African-American, and 1% Hispanic and Caucasian. Almost 90% of their families were receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Student attendance averaged 65%, with sophomores passing just over half their major subject courses, juniors passing about two thirds of these courses, and seniors passing about 85% of these courses. Almost a quarter of the student body enrolled in November 1990 had dropped out by June 1991. Of those tested in 1990, mean combined SAT scores totalled about 600, approximately 300 points below the national mean. Described by a longtime teacher as the "bottom of a hierarchy that siphons students off the top" (Fecho, 1992), the school was considered by many an undesirable if perhaps unavoidable destination for their children. [needs update from school profile]

The Inquiry Charter: Beginnings

In the Fall of 1988, three teachers at Garrison responded to a call by the recently funded restructuring agency, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, to envision smaller teaching and learning communities inside large urban high schools. These teachers, who shared a Writing Project background and an interest in active, student-centered, inquiry-based education, came together to form the nucleus of a charter they called Inquiry. They discovered that their vision of education was close to that articulated by the Coalition of Essential Schools, and became interested in joining this university-school partnership.

Two of the three wanted to try out the newly invented role of charter coordinator, a position that carried release time from teaching and would be further defined in practice. The third founder remained committed to her full teaching load. This early division of roles would have ramifications over time, as charter staff sought to work out criteria and processes for assuming responsibilities and making decisions.

These three teachers--two English and one Science teacher, two of them female and all three Caucasian--began to recruit other core subject teachers they thought would be sympathetic to their vision. During the spring they were joined by four teachers--two Caucasian men, an African-American man, and a Caucasian woman who was also the teachers' union rep. Most of these teachers had worked more than fifteen years in the school system, and many had been at Garrison for more than a decade. By their own description, they brought varying degrees of familiarity with the principles of teaching and learning articulated by Inquiry founders. All, however, felt enough interest to join. Another Caucasian woman was transferred into the school during the summer, in time to join charter staff for sessions at which they thrashed out Inquiry philosophy, began to restructure their school day, and invented the essential question that would guide their first year's work across disciplines.

Year I: "How does learning connect you with your world?"

In the 1990-91 school year, Inquiry housed approximately 235 students working with eight core subject teachers in a twenty-year-old annex across an indoor bridge from the large, pre-Depression school building. The charter billed itself as a teacher-driven, writing intensive, academically rigorous and project-oriented program committed to active, cooperative learning techniques, interdisciplinary curriculum, and a heterogeneous student body. By June 1991, student outcomes were already visible: Charter students had significantly higher attendance and pass rates in major subjects than non-charter students, and there was little student turnover.

Drawn from the student body at large and selected by themselves or their counselors, charter students were a heterogeneous mix of tenth to twelfth graders with some 9th grade repeaters, fourteen to twenty years old. An analysis of demographic characteristics including student age, attendance, repeater status, and special education status as they entered the 1990-91 school year indicates that students in Inquiry were somewhat heterogeneous along these lines in comparison with students in other

charters. However, a comparison with demographic characteristics of students in programs aimed at special populations such as teen parents and students not in charters indicates that charter students did not represent a true cross-section of students at Garrison. A somewhat smaller percentage of charter students were older, classified as repeaters, and labelled special education than non-charter students.

While the charter had requested a counselor to be attached to Inquiry, the counselors preferred not to become aligned with particular charters, in part because of work with students as yet unaligned. An Inquiry teacher noted the irony of a drive for teacher empowerment that could *disempower* counselors also discovering collective voice.

Inquiry teachers affiliated themselves with the Coalition of Essential Schools, based on a belief in "the constructive confrontation of able teachers and willing pupils - a joining that cannot be mass-produced" (Coalition, 1989, 1). They committed to the Coalition's Nine Principles as philosophical foundation. Most frequently vocalized were the notion that "teaching and learning should be personalized," the commitment to "helping adolescents learn to use their minds well," the "governing metaphor (of) student-as-worker," and the curricular maxim "less is more" (Coalition, 1989, 2).

As Coalition members, Inquiry teachers construct an "essential question" for each year that encompasses a range of curricular requirements and engenders inquiry across the disciplines. A look at their essential questions over time offers a lens on their evolving curricular framework. The essential question the first year asked, "**How does learning connect you with your world?**" The second year's question was, "**How do people, events, and conditions influence change?**" In the third year they asked, "**What is the relationship between inquiry and power?**" The fourth year's question was, "**What is community?**"

Teachers have played with the notion that life in the charter kicks up and reflects the content of each year's question, so that in Year Two both teachers and students promoted change inside Inquiry while Year Three was characterized by sometimes painful revelations about how power was operating inside the charter. This would imply that the essential question functions here as both a window and a mirror, to use Peggy McIntosh's metaphor, and suggested to me the notion of using the charter's essential questions to structure this look at their evolution as a teaching and learning community.

In its first year, Inquiry achieved a partial freedom relatively rare in the district to fashion its own structure. This happened because of both administrative support for charter integrity and boundaries and the charter founders' commitment to creating their students' rosters. Not only was the principal of Garrison deeply involved in the early restructuring efforts, but also a vice-principal was promoting the Coalition as a road to unifying the school around a pedagogical vision. With their support, Inquiry took up residence in a wing of the building with a small office, struggled with the roster office for control of their teachers' and students' schedules, and invented a period each week as planning time for teachers when Inquiry students would work with adults from outside the school.

Even with these supports in place, from the beginning of restructuring factionalization within the school sowed the seeds of ongoing dissension: While some faculty throughout the school were eager to change, others resisted not only Coalition philosophy but also changes in their room, their roster, their teaching and other responsibilities; there was disagreement over whether, how and when ninth graders, many of whom were overaged already, should be included in charters; and racial tensions complicated the overall level of mistrust. In the midst of such issues, Inquiry was quickly pegged by some as a favored "White charter" that was "creaming" the more academically able students.

In the first year Inquiry teachers block-rostered students who would stay together throughout the schoolday. They experimented with 90 minute "lab" periods once weekly to allow for more personalized, sustained, and collaborative work. As a result of the charter's commitment to the principle of "less is more" and the belief that all students were capable of "learn(ing) to use their minds" to tackle challenging work (Coalition, 1989, 2), as well as the perennial scarcity of resources, Inquiry students exercised little choice in their core subjects: All had to take chemistry and physics, for example, since no general science or math were offered, and scheduling constraints precluded their electing such courses as advanced drafting. Further, students were rostered heterogeneously in terms of grade level and prior achievement. As intention and consequence, Inquiry students constructed and came to share a knowledge base.

The first year's essential question, "**How does learning connect you with your world?**" was evident in the invitation to me as a researcher to work with Inquiry students investigating life in the charter. The question also drove classes where teachers asked students to investigate language at home and in school, to keep "relationship journals" as a way

into Othello, and to conduct town meetings on water pollution. In some classrooms, though the essential question was visibly posted, its role in teaching and learning was less evident. The transition to active, inquiry-based teaching and learning was far from automatic, and little support was forthcoming in what remained a highly bureaucratized system. How could a teacher for whom making students' experiences central to instruction represented a radical shift learn new approaches without risking mayhem or "lowering expectations"? This shift would mean letting go of teaching and testing strategies already mastered to enter unknown terrain. What about a teacher who solicited student experiences in talk but expected little in the way of reading and writing? Whose job would it be to support and hold accountable charter teachers when neither district nor union was as involved as charter colleagues in their daily teaching lives?

Year II: "How do people, events, and conditions influence change?"

In its second year, likened by a coordinator to "a baby taking those first wobbly steps," the Inquiry Charter initiated and experienced some drastic changes. On the one hand, the possibilities for developing the charter community seemed to hold increasing promise. On the other hand, changes in the charter in the context of a system busily resisting change carried some serious risks for charter teachers increasingly committed to realizing the promise. In the second year I negotiated entry as an ethnographer, continuing to work with students-as-researchers, spending time in a range of charter settings, and offering feedback to teachers.

This year represented the first time Inquiry teachers had formal input into placement of new staff. When three teachers were assigned to fill three math openings at Garrison, the department chair invited charter representatives to the interview. The chair, Inquiry representatives, and one of the prospective teachers all concurred on her placement in Inquiry.

As the second year approached, Inquiry staff talked with elective subject teachers about joining the charter. Often these were teachers already working with Inquiry students, exploring options in a charterizing school, and drawn to the kind of teaching and learning to which Inquiry was committed. The decision to expand the charter held possibilities as well as dangers for Inquiry as a growing community of learners. How would the charter continue to operate as a tight core when special area teachers had to be "shared" across charters and school? By increasing its numbers, the charter risked fragmentation within as well as resentment from others worried about special area teachers being "plucked off."

As a group of mostly Caucasian academic subject teachers working with African-American youngsters, original charter members sought out special area teachers as a way to expand the charter's interdisciplinary base to include such areas as art, dance, and Spanish in students' repertoire for learning and exhibiting knowledge. These teachers would also diversify charter staff, involving more African-American teachers in Inquiry planning and implementation. Their inclusion also represented an effort to interrupt a split in the school between programs perceived as academic and elitist and those tagged as hands-on and vocational.

Teachers who joined Inquiry at this time later described their approaches to teaching and learning as already "hands-on" and active, given both the nature of their areas (e.g. visual arts, dance, and ROTC with a focus on leadership skills) and their concern to find ways to connect with "their children." Several recalled seeking a program that fit their approaches to both content and students, and finding this in Inquiry. A home economics teacher brought an orientation that was both hands-on and vocational. With charter staff and students, she worked to synthesize "vocational" with "academic" curriculum.

When the charter expanded, staff ran into complex issues of "tier relations." Were elective teachers who entered later on a par with original core area teachers when it came to generating pedagogical knowledge, presenting to colleagues, and making decisions about charter curriculum and instruction? Newer teachers entered a charter with a strong and growing reputation in and beyond the district. Several described themselves as honored to be included but uncertain about their roles in the charter. The founders were already connected and conversant with "ed talk," the district, Coalition, conferences and publications. At least several of these "second round" teachers came from the community. While this provided a foundation for their own experimentation in the classroom, it was unclear how it might become a source of charter currency and so enhance their authority to shape and present the charter.

Charter expansion also brought structural issues. Elective subjects rostered inside the charter allowed core teachers a common prep, but what kinds of topics were now legitimate for their meetings? What were the implications for the relationship of charter to whole school: How were teachers of the arts or foreign language--in more than one charter because they were scarce human resources--to work in a charter? Whose meetings would they attend, and how would they bifurcate their vision? If *the one* language or computer or physics teacher in a large school were rostered

into a charter, what about students in other charters who needed those classes? *And why was there only the one?* Calling up the issue of insufficient resources might catalyze collective petition of the district, but it had also begun to trigger explosions in a school already rife with cross-charter tensions. While students claimed it was staff that stood divided, an assembly that devolved into a charter shouting match testified to an institution divided.

Meanwhile, the Inquiry Charter was generating and reflecting on changes that students and teachers described as personal, academic, and programmatic:

"If I were asked in 10th grade if I was going to college, I would have given a straight 'No.' I always felt that I wouldn't get past the 10th grade. Before Inquiry I was never one who tried to do or accomplish anything. I now know I have abilities. I now know I can use them well." (Chantelle, senior)

"I know a lot of students don 't want to do the work cause like on Friday you know you gotta do the work cause you gotta act in Monday's class. The first year nobody didn't want to act, now everybody into it, everybody want to act, everybody want to dance." (Howard, junior)

"Many students who used to act like they don't care have changed, so we'll just keep working on those who act like they don't care." (math teacher)

"Students who were here last year and are still here this year have changed Inquiry a lot, cause we wanted something different, In Inquiry students can give their opinions on how to run things. Inquiry is the students not the teachers." (Larry, senior)

Three charter-scale events speak to change efforts as generated respectively by Inquiry students, by a teacher, and by teachers collectively responding to a Collaborative-designed grant initiative. In each instance, the impulse toward change moved the community a "wobbly step" forward, and raised clarifying questions about the charter's evolving identity.

When a department head would not allow a substitute teacher to show a video of Farrakhan, Inquiry students petitioned for the deliberate and extensive inclusion of Black Studies in their Social Science curriculum and their charter. At a staff meeting, a student spokesman argued, "We need to know more about Blacks as a whole. Like with Martin Luther King, the history books focus on the 'I Have a Dream' speech but not how

Kennedy and them used him." The charter had legitimated students' lives as a source of knowledge, and now negotiated with students to help shape their activism as well as to work toward cultural inclusion.

The Social Science teacher, who had been bounced from school to school under the contractual seniority system, felt bound by her conservative department and state curricular mandates as well as by student demands. (In Year IV, with her department chair's retirement, she would say, "I feel accountable to *these* people [other Inquiry teachers] for my curriculum.) In class meetings, she agreed to do African history in February, then "follow the curriculum, bringing in as much as possible how this is applicable to the African-American community." Later a student articulated this concern: "This African stuff is good, but it's the same thing--questions on the board, read out of the book." This incident made the relationship of content to pedagogy an issue for student as well as teacher reflection. In the next year Black Studies was added as a fourth Social Studies course.

A critical mass of students with adult support were exerting pressure on the adult decision-making body of the community. The pressure was first manifested in terms of curriculum content and only later in terms of classroom roles and pedagogy. Although race and culture were at the center of the controversy, and divisions along racial lines were acknowledged as a school-wide tension, race was seldom raised among adults in the charter as a tension. Was this because it wasn't a high priority concern for enough staff, or because here as elsewhere in school and district it remained a volatile, unsafe subject that could uncap a pándora's box full of concerns about who was entitled to make decisions about and for students?

That spring an English teacher orchestrated across his classes an interdisciplinary project involving collaboration, research, and performance of Harlem Renaissance Day (for a fuller description, see Cohen, 1994). This engaged students in the kind of active inquiry work central to the charter's vision of teaching and learning. Although the teacher generated and essentially carried off the effort solo, with important support from colleagues, it offered a model and exerted a pressure for the cross-disciplinary, inquiry-based, active work some of the rest of the staff was struggling to conceptualize and implement on a smaller scale.

Finally, in the second year the Inquiry Charter responded to a Collaborative Request for Proposals, and received a grant to plan and implement an alternative assessment project. In concert with their

Coalition work, teachers planned a senior exhibition that would count toward a percentage of final grades across classes. After considerable debate on such issues as student choice versus shared intellectual ground for students and teachers, the roles of various disciplines, and format and criteria for presentation, Inquiry staff designed a project: Students working in mentor groups would read and keep journals on a common text, Paul Robeson's autobiography; write a position paper on an issue in the text; and present before a panel of teachers, outsiders, and Inquiry juniors their "position" and a creative rendering of some aspect of the text as well as their senior portfolios.

At the year's end teachers, parents, and outsiders involved as panelists met to critique the work. While many shared their elation at the collective accomplishment of this first exhibition, a number of teachers reflected on how students' performances made visible gaps in their instruction: "I expected students to be able to give a coherent argument, but they don't have to defend their stances like this in class." "Next year I'm gonna have my kids do more oral presentations." "I'm looking with my juniors and sophomore at the (exhibition) tapes, we're talking about strengths and weaknesses." The adults were using what they were learning from and with their students to inform the shared work of creating an intellectual community.

Year III: "What is the relationship between inquiry and power?"

In the third year, two special education teachers and two classes of special ed students were invited to join Inquiry. The two teachers kept their students for core subjects, continuing to teach them separately but working with them on the essential question and senior project. Special ed students would "mainstream" for electives, choosing from across Inquiry offerings. As the charter experimented with how to "include" special ed students, both possibilities and difficulties emerged. A young woman in special ed was enthralled with theatre, and was invited to join a regular English class working intensively with playwriting; however, she didn't produce the required writing. An elective teacher worried that special ed students in his classes were unable to do the work; was he to lower or alter standards, or fail them? While the special ed teachers might help, mightn't they also perceive "their" students as stigmatized and so take offense? Special ed teachers in turn sometimes felt they had to struggle for equal footing with regular ed teachers and students. A special ed teacher described their careful work to mainstream individuals as they were ready, and not in all classes at once. But unresolved questions remained.

Since the first year of restructuring, Garrison had experienced several shifts in administration, reconfiguring power throughout the building and undermining or rerouting the activity of community building. Changes in principal and vice-principals came at critical moments, and despite early indications Garrison neither achieved the 75% vote to become a SBM/SDM school (they fell 2% short) nor rallied around a philosophy or vision such as that of the Coalition. Rather, staff struggled through years of in-fighting across charters that saw themselves as competing for scarce resources including teachers and students. The building remained rife with racial tensions, and all suffered through periods of unrest and unsafety.

In the third year, an Inquiry coordinator suffered a serious injury as a consequence of a non-charter student's anger. Shortly thereafter, a charter teacher's car was stolen by a charter student. In both instances, students joined teachers in responding to these incidents, and shunned the guilty students. Nevertheless, both teachers and students experienced high anxiety in and around the building. While in this third year Inquiry faced sometimes daunting difficulties with regard to both building climate and charter staff dynamics, in the words of one teacher the year "got us over some important hurdles--we confronted stuff, and even though it didn't get totally worked out, we found directions."

The coordinator's injury provoked high anxiety, both about safety and about the void created by his absence. The role of coordinator had never been fully defined, and although the system provided a substitute for his classes, who could accomplish his myriad other tasks in the charter? Looking back on this time, a teacher compared his absence to her father's death, noting that everyone's roles were thrown into question with the absence of the "patriarch" figure. While the coordinators had pushed for other staff to take on more central roles, now this occurred of necessity. Later a teacher reflected, "This brought us together. We had to get the work done. Sometimes we had to meet away from school, we were committed to keeping it together, and the power spread out." This growth of the community was perhaps most evident in retrospect.

Students too responded to the crisis. Several helped in identifying the perpetrator, and one followed the case through the court system. A senior project group meeting with their mentor on Saturday insisted on visiting the coordinator, who was just out of the hospital. On the heels of the injury, a charter teacher's car was stolen. Staff gathered students together in the resource room to discuss the incident, and shortly thereafter the perpetrator was named and the car returned. In the midst of their

difficulties, charter staff and students seemed to be crossing traditional boundaries and discovering new modes of discipline and support.

In the third year I was not in Inquiry as an ethnographer until late winter, when the founders asked me to conduct teacher interviews on "where we are now." Critical issues on the table included a pending decision on a "campus of charters" proposal that would forge new relations between charters and their schools, the ongoing issue of the range of pedagogies at work across classes, and a follow-up on group dynamics concerns tabled at the summer planning retreat. As I talked with charter teachers, I was intrigued by how many of them raised issues of power, responsibility, and commitment as hot and often unacknowledged though long-brewing concerns that some feared might erode charter foundations. While such issues might look like "personality conflicts," their widespread persistence in charters suggests that they are symptomatic of inadequate resources and mixed messages in a process still very much *in process*.

As I gathered data toward an Inquiry retreat, issues and questions like these surfaced repeatedly: Who had power in the charter, and where did their power come from? What were the relationships among power, responsibility, and commitment? How did teachers' disciplines, pedagogies, and verbal skills affect their decision-making power in the charter? What were the roles of the two coordinators, the third founder, other core subject teachers, and special ed and special area teachers in the Inquiry community?

The fact that significant numbers of these teachers who had worked together over time to create their charter were now willing to bring such complex and difficult issues to the surface and to begin to deal with questions that wouldn't be resolved in a single retreat or even school year seems to me indicative of the breadth and depth their collective commitment had reached at that point. The following year, however, saw forced transfers of a special ed and a Chapter I teacher, both of whom had taken important risks to articulate and press the group inquiry into power. Although the special ed teacher's return was negotiated the next fall, he later pointed to this incident to illustrate continuing tensions with a system that didn't recognize the importance of teachers *choosing* their charters.

Year IV: "What is community?"

Although at many schools charters began with a cohort of 9th graders, at Garrison most 9th graders remained in a horizontal program, joining bona fide charters in the 10th grade. While this offered students an

opportunity make more informed choices, charters were not being used as an interventive strategy in the problematic 9th grade year. In 1993-94 the horizontal program was disbanded. Significant numbers of ninth graders joined all charters including Inquiry. This influx of new, younger students entering unacculturated to Inquiry even by reputation posed serious challenges for teachers and other students, and raised issues of curriculum, grouping, and choice, as well as questions about how to "bring in" young students so recently immersed in mores and expectations of middle school.

Students at all grade levels described Inquiry Charter as a drastically different kind of school setting. Because 9th graders had to take certain courses, e.g. World History, they were often grouped together, decreasing cross-grade grouping in the charter. Both teachers and students of these classes lost the benefit of having older students acculturated into Inquiry approaches and expectations--such as contributing to collaborative projects and drawing on students' experiences to co-construct knowledge--available to support 9th graders entering the culture "cold."

A 9th grader sitting in a class she was failing explained to me that in middle school she'd been a strong student because the work was presented clearly "so we don't have to ask a lot of questions." She had not yet understood that in this charter culture asking questions was seen as a critical learning tool. On the other hand, a 9th grader whose sister had graduated from Inquiry explained his entry into this culture: "Sometimes I just sit in class and listen, just to hear what the 11th and 12th graders say about something, maybe about the senior project. What I'll be talking about later on." In May a teacher reflected, "Some of the 9th graders have really hooked into what we're doing but a lot them stopped coming, especially to the classes where we demand the hardest work. Students with bad attendance, students who really hate school--they don't come enough to get hooked in."

Ninth graders talked about their confidence and competence in middle school eroding as they were expected to tackle tasks they described as "too hard" and "too many," and to sustain ninety minute class sessions without a break. By the end of a forty-five minute focus group, several agreed that the charter was "okay but we need to *do* more, we gotta *move*." Two ninth graders described a project that excited them: "You gotta go out in your community, you gotta find somebody, don't go up and ask them nothing, you gotta write about it. And then you come to school and act like he act!"

An experienced and a new teacher co-facilitated the new peer mentoring program. These teachers and their seniors worked to create community with and for 9th graders, to help them with the transition into high school and Inquiry. The seniors learned from their role as teachers: "This is teaching me how to listen, I didn't know that I didn't really listen to people before," and, "I used to be quiet, this is bringing me out, I'm talking in my classes too." Acknowledging a successful mentoring relationship, a new teacher asked a senior to find out why his mentee was cutting. Staff had pressed a senior who was strong academically but shakier socially to participate in the program; several later described her social growth through the rigors of connecting with peers as well as younger students.

On the other hand, peer mentoring did not meet as a course for 9th graders, and many of those most in trouble seldom showed up. A senior who wanted "tough girls" because she was a tough girl described her mentees' immersion in drugs, boys, and the streets; she seldom saw them. Several ninth graders also felt the gap but saw it this way: "(The seniors) asked you the same thing over and over again--'Do you ever drink, do you ever take drugs'--'No no no.' Then it's the same question next time." Next year peer mentoring would be team-taught and scheduled in as part of the curriculum for both 9th and 12th graders, giving participants a fuller opportunity to work through issues in this promising initiative. Juniors would also be introduced into the program.

In the fourth year a counselor joined charter staff by mutual consent. Teachers appreciated his physical presence in their hallways and classrooms, his "direct connection" with their students, and his perspective at meetings. The counselor also brought new avenues of connection with the school and outside world, serving as charter advocate in the roster office and providing a direct source of information about a myriad of resources relevant to charter students. His presence represented the progress occurring in the charter as simultaneously forces in the larger system sent mixed messages about the future of reform.

Continual shifts in district and building administration and unrest in this as in other buildings through the district have strained Inquiry's ability to sustain their teaching and learning community. A new acting principal entered a school rife with competition for scarce resources. Tensions in a school at once traditionally structured and in the midst of reform have resulted in what a coordinator describes as "steps backwards" for Inquiry teachers, who no longer share or even have planning time beyond the traditional "preps" and who must again teach some "single lane" classes

despite their vision of sustained, interactive learning labs. In this pinched system, time becomes critical currency within both charter and school, and any "extras" have been lost in the interests of the "equity" of scarcity. Further, while in the second year a teacher organized an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based project that involved everyone in the charter, and students have requested another such project, Inquiry teachers have been reluctant to plunge into such an ambitious effort given the uneven support and the air of unpredictability and danger that have swept both school and charter. Again a step back.

In an effort to revitalize the tight boundaries the charter had created for staff and students, and with input from students and approval from the administration, the charter implemented a "hallwalker" suspension policy that teachers described as "inelegant" but necessary. While historically the charter had approached "discipline" by seeking perspectives of students, parents, and staff on how to support "students as workers," now ironically they found suspension to be the only consequence with "enough bite in it" to begin to combat the "hall culture" that had infected the school. Students participating in a conference on charters appreciated the message that their teachers cared about them and continued to hold high expectations for them, but questioned suspension as a strategy that allowed some to stay home and watch television. After several months, teachers commented that the policy had helped "borderline" students back into class, while others were now leaving the building altogether.

Inquiry Charter is built in part on a belief that curriculum and instruction are not separate but interwoven. However, traditional schooling has treated the "what" and the "how" as separate. From the perspective of the fourth year, we might look back at an instance of how curriculum and instruction have been negotiated at Inquiry:

At issue since Inquiry's beginnings have been the position and status of math and science in an evolving "interdisciplinary" curriculum that for a variety of reasons--including teachers' familiarity with alternative pedagogies in their areas as well as the "state of the arts" at large--has tended to favor English and Social Studies. A science teacher continually seeking her own professional growth helped the charter hold onto a vision of interdisciplinarity before it was actualized.

Shifts in math teachers have been constant. A teacher whose certification is in Math despite a background in English has struggled with how to use Inquiry pedagogies in math, trying such strategies as math autobiographies and peer coaching, and sharing her ongoing frustration

with how to make a radical shift in her own teaching. Several significant steps were taken in Year IV: The math teacher serving on the "local concerns" committee monitored the development of the senior project, a critical site for making meaning of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. The project required that students working to invent or improve a community had to construct and justify a budget as well as create relevant tables and graphs--to display a community needs assessment, for example.

Further, as the national picture has shifted for math and science teachers, several Inquiry teachers have become involved with such approaches as Problem-Based Learning and Integrated Math. A new department head teaching Integrated Math in Inquiry spent several periods in an English teacher's Socratic Seminar to work with students on collaborative, creative problem-solving in math. Reflecting on these sessions, students pointed out that this wouldn't help them in math class, highlighting a moment of curricular contradiction in school reform. An experienced science teacher and a new math teacher joined their Physics and Statistics classes to enact a problem-based learning simulation. Students became City Council members researching such phenomena as electromagnetic fields to assess the dangers of a proposed "super bakery" in their town. Teams of students conducted research by continually assessing "what they knew" and "what they needed to know" in order to report back to Council. Teachers helped students clarify their questions and strategize for getting answers. In this effort curriculum and instruction were intertwined. At the end of the year, a teacher noted that now they knew more about "what they needed to know" to do this kind of teaching.

Over the past four years, Inquiry charter made use of me as an ethnographer in a range of ways: In the first two years I facilitated groups of students who acted as informants and co-researchers, generating knowledge about their charter. While in the first year students' findings were discussed primarily with charter founders, in the second year what students and I learned was shared periodically at staff meetings and more summatively and publicly in an essay about Inquiry (Cohen, 1994). Third year my role shifted, as I entered late to interview staff and co-facilitate a retreat designed to help staff address issues of community building. In the fourth year teachers named areas where inquiry might be helpful: What was happening for new teachers, and how could they be supported? What was going on in new programs like Socratic Seminar (taught by three teachers with different levels of familiarity with the genre) and peer mentoring, for teachers as well as students? How were 9th graders experiencing Inquiry, and how could the charter better "bring them in"?

This list of ways that Inquiry used an ethnographer might also be seen to map this charter's development. Gathering data from and with students about students' experience of the charter built a foundation on which staff could begin to address knotty questions about teaching, learning, and building a collegial community. An increasingly coherent community of teachers and learners with evolving curriculum and pedagogy then looked to track the new--teachers, students, projects. Further, in the fourth year Inquiry structured in internal committees as part of an effort to share leadership and monitor charter progress. Despite periodic frustrations with lack of follow-through, staff felt that committees offered a significant step forward, bringing a framework for sharing commitment and accountability.

At a meeting where charter staff reflected on this document, teachers talked about the challenges facing charters in the context of a system experiencing devastating budget cuts as well as shifts in key administrative positions with "no direct line downtown" for charters, and in a building stalled in the effort to move to site-based management/shared decision-making. In the face of such duress, Inquiry Charter struggled to become "deeper as a team, developing our own rituals and culture" and to realize the promise in the adults as well as the young adults of their community: