"That Dog Won't Hunt!": Exemplary School Change Efforts Within the Kentucky Reform

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This research presents case studies of four exemplary schools as they worked to meet the demands of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) as well as the system designed to assess results—the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS). We argue that the teachers' responses to large-scale reform efforts exist in a larger web of connection and are dependent on their collaborative and consistently positive stance toward learning as well as their principal's leadership. Thus, human capital, the knowledge and willingness to learn on the part of individuals, is inextricably linked to social capital, the relationships of trust and willingness to risk among school personnel. The way in which the four schools successfully met the challenge of KERA and KIRIS was unique to each site. Still, there were critical commonalties among the teachers: their regard for history and

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heritage; the efficacy of their cooperative leadership; their careful reflec-tion on the reform itself, which ultimately allowed them to teach well beyond the KIRIS test (particularly in writing); and, most important, their dedication to students.

> In a certain part of the country called Appalachia you will find dogs named Prince or King living in little towns with names like Coal City and Sally's Backbone. These dogs run free, being country dogs, and their legs are full of muscles from running rabbits up mountains or from following boys who push old bikes against the hill roads they call hollows. These are mostly good dogs and can be trusted. (Rylant, 1991, p.1)

On one of our initial trips to Kentucky, we sat in the office of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and discussed our research plans with the administrators who oversee Kentucky's educational reform. In our first in-terview, we learned an instructive lesson about untrustworthy dogs. We had been explaining our interests in simultaneously conducting a widespread survey of Kentucky teachers of writing and mathematics with case studies of exemplary teachers who were working in the accountability grades (fourth and seventh grades for writing, fifth and eighth grades for mathematics).[1] Moreover, we were looking for teachers who were not "stars"—unique to their communities—but hardworking teachers who were well supported by their school contexts.[2]

One administrator was especially pleased with our focus on exemplary sites and suggested that it would be smart to study "sites that are doing things that can be done in other areas." Although he was not implying immediate transferability, there was a sense of an "existence proof." He explained, "If you can find a school that has a lot of challenges and see what they've done, then... people say if *they* did it, I can do it, and I'm willing to look for my own solutions." He continued:

> If you want a Kentucky-ism that you can use, a principal I was talking with said that there's a school that's 18 miles down the road from his school that has 80% of the kids on free and reduced...lunch, and they have made progress and they are at a higher absolute rank. So what he says to his teachers is, "Don't bring up to me about how our kids are disadvantaged. *That dog won't hunt!*" That's the Kentucky-ism. And part of that phrasing from the principal is a characteristic that people in the department talk more about, and this is a "no excuses" approach. That is, you don't say why things can't be done; you say, "What is it that we need to do?" And what the principal was saying was, "If you can show me a place that has done it, I will go talk with them about *how* they did it." ....It gets us past this belief barrier that we've had for so many years that our kids can't do it. (A96F)

With this lesson in mind, we set out to find schools with good hunting attitudes, schools that could be trusted to ask, "What is it that we need to do?" and then set out to do it. We found two in an urban area and two in the Appalachian coal towns where good dogs chase rabbits up the hollows.

Background on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)

Before we describe a conceptual frame to indicate how schools shift within educational reform efforts, we need to present some background on Kentucky. Indeed, pushing past the "belief barrier...that our kids can't do it" was particularly critical because this state, perhaps more than any other, set out to prove that "all students can learn at high levels" (White, 1999, p. 20). The reform initiated by the state was both complicated and courageous. One Kentucky school superintendent wrote:

> Only Kentucky had been bold enough to...design an education system that included all of the piecemeal reform efforts in existence in other parts of the country—and then some. Preschool education, site-based management, ungraded primary schools, performance-based teaching and testing, technology integration, rewards and sanctions for schools—all these initiatives...were part of the state's ambitious overhaul. (Simpson, 1991, p. 29)

The motivation behind all this change was an unprecedented Kentucky Supreme Court decision (*Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc., 1989*) that declared the state's public school system unconstitutional. The "justices gave remarkable weight to student outcomes.... The court concluded that a school system in which a significant number of children receive an inadequate education or ultimately fail is inherently inequitable and unconstitutional" (Foster, 1991, p. 34).

As a result, the legislature created a new school system through KERA. The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 brought about substantive changes in finance, governance, and curriculum. In terms of finance, KERA was guided by three concepts: "the system must be 'adequate,' it must 'substantially uniform,' and it must provide 'equal educational opportunity' to all Kentucky children" (Adams & White, 1997, p. 168). In terms of governance, school-based decision making became the norm. In fact, 5 years after KERA began, the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform described school governance as:

> A two way street. A new, decentralized system is in place, one that relies on and incorporates initiatives, partnerships, and communication between school administrators (from the top down) and those active at the "point of instruction," i.e., teachers, parents, and community members (from the bottom up). (Boston, 1995, p. 18)

Still, in this triumvirate of reform, nothing has been more important than curriculum. KERA insisted on accountability, instituting KIRIS to make sure

teachers got the job done.[3] The influence of this testing system was pervasive: "Ask almost any teacher in Kentucky about KERA, and invariably the response will be about KIRIS. While KERA has resulted in many progressive changes... KIRIS, the assessment and accountability component of KERA, has commanded everyone's attention" (Jones & Whitford, 1997, p. 276). Part of the reason for the attention has been the high-stakes nature of the KIRIS results. Schools that performed well were given rewards (including cash bonuses for teachers). Those that performed poorly were sanctioned, which resulted in a state-mandated improvement plan and/or assistance by one of the state's distinguished educators (DE).[4]

The rewards and sanctions were less important than what KIRIS was actually testing—the impact of innovative curricular changes. In writing, students in the 4th, 7th, and 12th grades were responsible for three assessments: (a) a writing portfolio that contained students' original writing in a variety of genres; (b) open-response items in which students read short passages and answered questions through written response; and (c) on-demand writing in which students had 90 min to craft their response to a specific prompt (Wolf & McIver, 1999). Students crafted their portfolios over the year, whereas open-response and on-demand writing were done during a week of spring testing. The curriculum implied by these assessments emphasized that students should think like writers, writing in varied genres for multiple audiences and purposes. Students were to use the writing process to develop their pieces, whether the piece was a short-term, on-demand test item or a long-term portfolio entry. Finally, students were asked to be reflective writers, that is, to be cognizant of their writing processes and to be willing to evaluate their products with a critical eye.

In mathematics, KIRIS testing occurred in Grades 5, 8, and 12. It was designed to assess students' mathematical literacy (i.e., their understanding of concepts and procedures), as well as their ability to use this understanding to solve problems in other disciplines and in real life. KIRIS testing consisted of three types of assessments: (a) open-response items in which students demonstrated their ability to apply skills and show understanding of concepts; (b) multiple-choice items that tested both computational and problem-solving skills; and (c) mathematics portfolios in which students demonstrated their problem solving and communication in several mathematical core content areas. Although mathematics portfolios were included in the accountability index through the 1995-1996 testing cycle, "a panel of measurement specialists appointed to investigate the technical quality of KIRIS found that the scoring of portfolios was insufficiently reliable to support their use for accountability" (Borko & Elliott, 1999, p. 395). Although the panel recommended continuation, they were pulled from the accountability index for research and development, and ultimately eliminated. However, this unsuccessful attempt to have children construct mathematics portfolios demonstrated the state's willingness to work toward a creative curriculum.

The writing and mathematics curricula are only two examples of the kinds of practices KIRIS both inspired and demanded, which align with

McDonnell's (1994) portrayal of "assessment policy as persuasion and regulation" (p. 394). McDonnell found that state policymakers:

> ...intend for the assessment system and the policies linked to its use to shape not just student outcomes, but also what and how students are taught. A state legislator described that intent by saying, "If we have a test of this importance, it will drive the curriculum. I see assessment as accomplishing both accountability and curricular reform." (p. 406)

In a statewide survey, conducted in parallel to the exemplary site case studies, Kentucky teachers validated the legislator's prediction: "They agreed that the KIRIS assessments and the curriculum materials provided by the state were the most potent influences on instruction in mathematics and writing" (Stecher, Barron, Kaganoff, & Goodwin, 1998, p. 75).

When a test as powerful as KIRIS sets the goal and the pace of curricular reform, with politicians exerting pressure on professionals about what and how to teach, it is helpful to consider the reform in light of McDonnell's (1994) strategies for consensus among professionals and policymakers. First, McDonnell said it is critical for all parties to cast a skeptical eye on the ability of any test—no matter how innovative—to provide data objective enough to ensure that rewards and sanctions are merited. In Kentucky, the shifts in testing requirements (e.g., elimination of the mathematics portfolio) and questions about KIRIS scoring show that professionals did not see the test as infallible. On the contrary, the history of KIRIS exemplifies the struggle to build and administer a set of standardized assessments that were both creative and psychometrically sound.

According to McDonnell, the second strategy to bring diverse views of testing together is to link new assessments with "capacity-building instruments":

> Because many new forms of assessment require that teachers play a key role in their design, administration, scoring, and use, these assessments will not work as intended unless adequate training is provided. The need for major new investments in professional development is even greater for those assessment policies that are expected to change curriculum and instructional practices. (p. 414)

In Kentucky, attention to professional development was high. From the services supplied by the regional centers to the extensive materials (e.g., videotapes, sample prompts) offered by the state, and even to the DEs sent to struggling schools, Kentucky worked to build the capacity of its professionals to meet the goals of the new curriculum (Borko, Elliott, & Uchiyama, 1999). Boston (1996) described the shift in professional development in the following way:

> In pre-reform Kentucky, professional development was the neglected step-child of public education. It encompassed just four days of in-

> service education a year; statewide funding for keeping teachers pro-
> fessionally up-to-date was limited prior to 1990 .... Today, Kentucky
> professional development effort has changed from a centralized,
> state-dominated function to a decentralized model in which local
> needs dictate what happens. With KERA, funding has moved quickly
> from an initial $1 per student (1990-91) to $23 per student (1995-96).
> Overall spending on professional development has increased dra-
> matically, from $1.1 million in 1990-91 to $11.6 million in 1994-95.
> (pp. 11–12)

McDonnell's (1994) third strategy for consensus is the potential for new
assessments to inspire deliberation. Innovative yet imperfect assessments
encourage people to talk, weigh the merits and errors, and consider the
strategies and tips. In Kentucky, KIRIS was on the tip of everyone's tongue.
Through discussion, convictions remained steadfast or opinions were
swayed. Regardless of the answers, the questions were the same: "What do
our children need to know?" and "How best can we communicate that
knowledge?" (Boston, 1995, pp. 10–13)

In this summary of Kentucky's educational reform, we have outlined the
areas for systemic change: finance, governance, and curriculum. The cur-
ricular implications of KIRIS are critical. The assessment regulates and per-
suades professionals toward curricular reform, in an attempt to change the
very nature of teaching and learning in Kentucky. It also rewards those who
succeed and sanctions those who fail. In short, it is a powerful tail to wag the
dog.

If we consider yet another adage concerning old dogs and new tricks,
we know that it will take more than new assessments to change schooling.
For that, we need to look beyond Kentucky, to the research that reflects the
conditions under which reform is not simply rejected or grudgingly ac-
cepted, but thoughtfully considered, through a clear-eyed view of the
strengths and limitations of testing, through capacity-building opportunities,
and through reflective deliberation on what is best for children. Schools that
consistently consider children first demonstrate that change is often initiated
by outside factors (tests, professional development, and test-inspired talk).
However, substantive change is sustained and even strengthened by the
local capacity of school individuals who are resolutely committed to teach-
ing, to learning, and above all, to children. We discuss the importance of
professionals' local capacity in the conceptual framework that follows.

Conceptual Framework

In their study of school districts involved in change, Spillane and Thompson
(1997) leaned on Coleman (1988) to suggest that "local capacity" is
based on (a) physical capital (financial resources), (b) human capital
(commitment to reform and disposition to learn by teachers and admini-
strators), and (c) social capital (relationships internal and external to the

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district). Coleman (1990, cited in Ball & Cohen, 1995) described this triad in terms of accessibility:

> Physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form; human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations* among persons. (p. 7, emphasis in the original)

Although human and social capital are considered less and less tangible, they are not tangential. Instead, they are essential elements in understanding what makes a school exemplary in the face of strong state reform movements.

Looking at the human relationships both within and outside of a school (social capital) is gaining increasing credence in the research literature, as is studying professionals' willingness to learn (human capital). For example, Muncey and McQuillan (1996) concluded that principals were not only "central to the school change process; they were often *the* central person" (p. 270). They cautioned:

> The principal's role was often less directive than traditional conceptions of this position would suggest [for it] involved a balancing act, one that required knowing when to be directive and assertive and when to back off and allow faculty to direct change efforts. (p. 270)

The principal was less a "top-down" administrator than a "leader of leaders...who uses power to achieve ends rather than to control people" (Lieberman & Miller, 1990, p. 762). Those ends must be student-oriented goals (Sarason, 1993). As Schmoker (1996) suggested: "Schools improve when purpose and effort unite. One key is leadership that recognizes its most vital function: to keep everyone's eyes on the prize of improved student learning" (p. 103).

Keeping eyes on the prize implies a vision of student learning that school faculty can share, and shared vision is created in an atmosphere of trust. At times, this occurs with a principal's longevity: "Principals who remained in their position for an extended tenure were more likely to...generate trust, to adjust school-based initiatives, and to garner the level of grassroots support necessary for change to endure and be refined" (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996, pp. 271–272). This vision implies that school leaders have their eyes wide open to reform realities. Although they are advocates for change, their advocacy is not a simple salute to higher powers; instead, it is a reflective appraisal of the reform's pros and cons with a bottom-line view of what will be best for teachers and students. This reflection is a heavy burden to carry, for implementation is dependent on:

> The content of the reform, the faculty's willingness and capacity for change, the strength of the school as an organization, support and

> training, and leadership. To examine restructuring in light of the first four dimensions is to see that it places an exceptional burden on the fifth. (Evans, 1993, p. 20)

Other research has focused on teachers' attitudes toward learning because "Teachers who see themselves as learners work continuously to develop new understandings and improve their practice" (Peterson, McCarthey, & Elmore, 1996, p. 148). Furthermore, teacher learners do not see themselves in isolation, but in relationship with other teachers; they seek out colleagues within and beyond their buildings to study and plan curriculum. They talk informally in the halls and more formally in grade-level and schoolwide meetings to share ideas. Their relationship is *real*, rather than "contrived collegiality, where collaboration is mandated, imposed, and regulated by managerial decree" (Hargreaves, 1997a, p. 1305). Instead of closing their doors to do their own thing, teacher learners open their minds to new possibilities, substantiating Schmoker's (1996) claim that teachers will "perform more effectively—even exponentially—if they collaborate" (p. 7).

Other researchers focus on students, believing that teachers who work together work best when they are moving toward the education of children. Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) argued: "Although taking responsibility for student learning may be thought of as an obligation inherent to the profession of teaching, until lately the notion has received little research attention" (p. 764). They indicated positive results when teachers take "collective responsibility for student learning" (p. 764). Yet, a focus on student learning is dependent on teacher learning. If teachers are not learners, how will they communicate a love of learning? If they are not reform advocates, how will they convince students to take new assessments seriously? Lieberman and Miller (1990) argued:

> Neither an exclusive focus on students nor an exclusive focus on teachers leads to comprehensive change in the schools. The two must go hand-in-hand, and keeping both goals alive and well has emerged as a crucial element in successful school restructuring. School-based management and new decision-making structures are not ends in themselves; they are means to achieving more effective environments for learning and teaching. Changes in instructional practices do not take hold in schools that infantilize teachers and push them into patterns of defensiveness and conservatism. Schools that attend to one side of the student/teacher equation without acknowledging the other are schools in which change is more often illusory than real, more often espoused than practiced. (p. 761)

Part of the reason why the *structures* of schooling will not bring about *restructuring*, much less *reculturing*, of schools is that so much hinges on the relationships within the institution (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1995). Rather than feeling "infantilized" and pushed into "patterns of defensiveness," reforms should create opportunities for all to engage in collaborative work.

"Cultures of collaboration among teachers" are particularly important. According to Hargreaves (1997a) they:

> . . .seem to produce greater willingness to take risks, to learn from mistakes, and to share successful strategies with colleagues that lead to teachers having positive senses of their own efficacy, beliefs that their children can learn, and improved outcomes in that learning as a result. (p. 1306)

Yet, teachers' relationships exist in a larger web of connection and are dependent on the principal's leadership, the district's support, and children's and parents' willingness to take on the challenge of reform efforts. Thus, human capital, the knowledge and willingness to learn on the part of individuals, is inextricably linked to social capital, the relationships of trust and willingness to risk among school networks. In the face of "ambitious reform," Spillane and Thompson (1997) argued that "human and social capital are interdependent: They develop in tandem" (p. 196).

Methods

We examined two questions that focus on the interdependent nature of human and social capital: (a) What are the effects of recent Kentucky assessment reform on school structures, professional relationships, classroom practices, and teachers' and students' understandings of assessment? and (b) What factors explain the patterns of success within and across exemplary sites? We discuss site selection and describe the methods of data collection and analysis.

Site Selection

Hatch (1998) suggested that "stories about successful and sustained school improvement are rare, but the tales of unrealized expectations and failure in reform efforts are legion" (p. 4). Although we did not read this quote until long after we designed the study, we have heeded a similar call since our work began. Rather than join the "legion" of scholars writing woeful tales, we looked for places where the stories of human and social interactions were successful. This does not mean that the sites were perfect. We purposefully sought exemplary schools—with the word *exemplary* defined by Kentucky educators as places where "good things were happening" within the reform movement.

When talking with these educators, we cautioned that we were not searching for what we called "no wonder" schools, that is, schools with populations from high socioeconomic communities or magnet schools for the gifted. We did not want our selections to invite comments like, "Well *no wonder* they can do it. Look at their population and resources. That teacher won the educator of the year award. No wonder!" Instead, we wanted

schools with diverse populations of children, where we would have to look deeper than surface explanations for *why* good things were happening.

We selected the schools through an exemplary sampling procedure (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). In the fall of 1996, we began with advice from KDE administrators and then turned to regional service center directors, cluster leaders (lead teachers in curriculum), and principals, looking for names of schools that repeatedly came up as successful sites. Once we had a list of possibilities, team members made site visits to observe and informally interview teachers and their principals about their schools. We then narrowed the numbers to six final selections, which included three elementary schools and three middle schools, with one each in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Kentucky. In this article, we focus on the urban and rural sites.

Two of the sites were in rural areas in eastern Kentucky. The figures for free and reduced lunch—80% at Bluejay Elementary and 70% at Eagleview Middle—reflect the high poverty level in the area.[5] At Bluejay, the community unemployment rate was 80%. The school district was the largest county employer. Our urban sites—Eastend Elementary and the Mt. Vernon Middle—were more economically diverse; one fourth of children received free/reduced lunch. The urban sites were more racially and ethnically diverse, whereas the rural sites were nearly 100% European American.

Data Collection

After site selection, we made three 2-day visits to each site: in the spring of 1997, in the fall of 1997, and in the spring of 1998. During each visit, we observed accountability grade writing and mathematics teachers. We conducted formal interviews with teachers and principals about their programs and their views of the Kentucky reform. We collected artifacts of practice, including sketches of bulletin boards, classroom diagrams, teachers' lesson plans, and examples of students' daily work. The teachers helped us to select four to six children in each class as target students. In our spring visits, we used photocopies of the children's writing and mathematics portfolios to interview them on how they were learning these content areas in light of the state's reform.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, we fully fleshed out our observational fieldnotes and then condensed them into cover sheets that followed specific categories derived from our research questions and modified to reflect patterns that emerged from the data. We transcribed all audiotaped interviews and coded them using the NUD*IST computer program. The codes highlighted practices that were connected to, as well as were more distanced from, the Kentucky reform. Many points in the interviews were double and triple coded. For example, a principal's comment on the school's vision might center on the

leadership of the teachers or a teacher's remark on professional development offered by KDE might reflect attitudes toward KIRIS testing or beliefs about pedagogy.

Once we coded the data, we ran NUD*IST reports of coding categories and used these reports to develop "cases" of the schools. Each of the coauthors was responsible for an individual case. In the Results section, words in quotations indicate direct speech from participants. Words in brackets are our own and serve to add clarification. Quotes are marked by a letter to signal the participant's role (P = Principal, T = Teacher, S = Student, and A = Administrator from the district, region, or state), the year of the quote, and a final letter to signal the data collection cycle (F = Fall and S = Spring). For example, an interview or observation of a teacher taken in the fall of 1997 would be marked T97F.

In building our cases, we tried to find a representative theme for each school, signified by a hypothetical "school motto" that was also used to describe the principal's role (Table 1). For example, the Bluejay staff talked about their elementary school as a "university." They focused on constant learning through formal professional development and through their own curiosity. The principal, Ms. Chief, characterized herself as a "teacher helper" who worked to "help teachers to keep growing so that they can keep helping kids."

At Eagleview, the steadfast theme was "Pride and Respect." The administrators, teachers, and students all used this phrase; some characterized it as the "two watchwords" of the school. Mr. Push, the principal in the second year of our study, closed the announcements every morning with the following phrase: "Have a great day at the best middle school in Kentucky!" He saw himself as a coach who made decisions based on what he saw in his team of teachers. Indeed, he was a former baseball coach and often used sports metaphors to characterize his role.

Turning to the urban sites, Eastend Elementary's consistent theme was "TEAM!" The focus was not on sports, but on collaboration. The principal, Ms. Conner, saw herself as "part of the team." She was also willing to "set the tone from the very first day that we will do what's best for children." Our middle school, Mt. Vernon, characterized itself as a "Fortune 500 company." Everyone took pride in their district and state leadership; Mr. George, the principal, was the CEO. Indeed, he was a Jack-of-all-trades who used a number of terms for his role: "instructional leader," "facilitator," "protector" of his teachers, and a "salesman" for the reform. He had been in the military and found himself "frustrated" at times with the slow pace of change, but he was willing to wear any number of hats to make sure his school was out in front.

Once the individual cases were written, our team once again examined the data to develop an understanding of the consistent themes across sites and wrote our interpretive commentary. Although rare in research reports, an integral part of this article is the use of Appalachian literature to open each of the Results sections. Although only two of the sites were

Table 1
Descriptors of Four Exemplary School Sites

School name	Socioeconomic status	School motto	Principal's role
Rural Kentucky			
Bluejay Elementary	High poverty in a "rural, remote area" 80% qualify for free and reduced lunch	"Here at Bluejay University . . . we really take advantage of any professional development that's offered."	Ms. Chief as a "teacher helper" who "can help teachers to keep growing so that they can keep helping kids."
Eagleview Middle School	High poverty to middle class 70% qualify for free and reduced lunch	"Pride and Respect" "Have a great day at the best middle school in Kentucky!"	Mr. Push as Coach: "You make a decision based on what you see out there."
Urban Kentucky			
Eastend Elementary	Federal housing to half million dollar homes 30% qualify for free and reduced lunch	"TEAM!" "It's that team approach, that we're in this together . . ."	Ms. Conner as "part of the team" willing to "set the tone from the very first day that we will do what's best for children."
Mt. Vernon Middle School	60% are upper-middle class 24% qualify for free and reduced lunch	"If we are going to be a Fortune 500 comapny, you don't wait. You jump on it."	Mr. George as CEO: "I'm an instructional leader," "a facilitator," a "protector," and a "salesman."

located in Appalachia, we believe that the essence of this writing extends far beyond the hollows. Moreover, we wanted to capture the very human and social nature of the sites we visited and the people we met. As Brunner (1994) explained: "Academic texts define problems and state solutions while literature works to illuminate possibilities" (p. 7). Thus, Appalachian literature will help us deliver the details of people and places in a conscious attempt to highlight the consistent features across the sites.

Results

Most people have little experience with transforming big ideas into workable practices without losing the essence of the ideas. Working

> through such complicated issues as establishing democracy in the
> workplace, developing colleagueship, and expanding responsibilities
> for teachers and students is complex. And there are no road maps.
> (Lieberman & Miller, 1990, p. 764)

Moving an idea as big as KERA into workable practice has not been easy for
the schools, and none has a distinct road map for the miles they have
traveled. However, there were five common markers, features of their hu-
man and social topography that stood in relief and may serve as signposts for
others: (a) a strong sense of history and heritage; (b) cooperative rather than
singular leadership; (c) reflective alignment with the Kentucky reform; (d)
the talent of teachers to teach *to* and *beyond* the test (demonstrated in this
article by their focus on writing); and (e) an emphasis that all curricular,
instructional, and assessment decisions will be based on their school chil-
dren. Indeed, the first four features are enfolded in the overarching school
motto for all four sites: "It's all for the kids."

History and Heritage

> The owners of these dogs...have probably lived in Appalachia all of
> their lives.... The owners of these dogs grew up more used to trees
> than sky and inside them had this feeling of mystery about the rest of
> the world they couldn't see because mountains came up so close to
> them and blocked their view like a person standing in a doorway.
> They weren't sure about going beyond these mountains, going until
> the land becomes flat or ocean, and so they stayed.... Those who do
> go off, who find some way to become doctors or teachers, nearly
> always come back to the part of Appalachia where they grew up.
> (Rylant, 1991, pp. 1–5)

To introduce the feature of history and heritage, we believed it essential to
begin with this passage for it symbolizes the attachment some Kentuckians
feel for the land of their birth. To understand the human and social capital
of the individual schools, it is critical to comprehend their attachment to
context, especially those in the rural sites. At Bluejay and Eagleview, the
administrators and teachers were from the area, often raised in the eastern
Kentucky counties where they now taught.

One of the target writing teachers, Ms. Jazz, went to grade school at
Bluejay as a child, and her mother was an elementary school teacher there.
When Ms. Jazz first began to teach at Bluejay, she taught in her mother's old
classroom, now she teaches "in the room right above it." Families of teachers
were common in the school; and the principal made it a practice to hire
people from the local county. As Ms. Chief explained: "It's a family unit, not
just in this building but in the community also because everyone knows
everyone. And we're all different families who know each other. And our
families have been here for years and years and years" (P97S).

Although Ms. Chief had been born in the county, she had left at the age of 10 and not returned until her 20s. Part of her motivation for returning was because the county was "the most close knit place I've seen as far as family ties." She spent 8 years as a Bluejay teacher before becoming the school's administrator. Alhough she had undergone the rigorous process of becoming a DE, she chose to forego the opportunities it afforded to stay at home.

One of the central reasons Ms. Chief and her staff chose to stay was their commitment to the children of the county. They were proud of their students' accomplishments, especially in light of the stereotypes that have so pervasively portrayed their area of the country. Ms. Jazz explained:

> A lot of people... find out you're from eastern Kentucky and they ask.... Sometimes they ask some really hurtful [questions] of students. "Do you have bathrooms?" It's stereotyping. And I feel that especially for our students, that's why we put our best foot forward because I don't want them to feel like sometimes I've been made to feel—lesser because you come from eastern Kentucky. And I guess that's why I put my whole self into it. I want them to know as much as they can when they leave me. (T97S)

Being a county insider was also true of many faculty at our eastern Kentucky middle school. As the principal told us, "A lot of the teachers are Eagleview County graduates." Yet, Eagleview Middle was only 3 years old. In the first year of our study, Mr. Push was assistant principal. The principal, Mr. Driver, was a fellow baseball coach and close friend who explained how the school began:

> We asked for teachers around the county who wanted to come...[and] I went out and interviewed... and the only ones that I wanted to come in here got to come. That makes for a very hard working group of people that want to work together. (P97S)

Mr. Push so wanted the job of assistant principal that he left an elementary principalship to assist Mr. Driver. Interpreting the board's decision to allow this shift as a sign that they "want[ed] to see us succeed," the response of both administrators was enthusiastic: "Mr. Driver and I have always worked together with...sports and other things. We were sort of tickled to death with it!" (P97S).

Although the teachers were hand picked, the students were not, yet the emphasis on hard work was also stressed by the students we interviewed. For example, one student told us that the reason they worked so hard was: "We have great pride in this school and respect, and we want to do everything we can to help it. This is our county and we have to present it well." Because we were speaking with a seventh-grade boy who could certainly have had other issues on his mind, we pressed him to explain why it was so important to him to have pride in and respect for his school. His reply was certain: "Well, it's our home, and we want to just show what a good place it is" (S97S).

For the teachers, pride in home was often the consequence of battling the insidious stereotypes of eastern Kentucky. Many spoke to us with anger about media portrayals that depicted Appalachia in terms of backwoods poverty, coal mining catastrophes, and the cardboard characters of television programs like "The Beverly Hillbillies." As Appalachian author, Cynthia Rylant (1991), explained: "Those who don't live in Appalachia and don't understand it sometimes make the mistake of calling these people 'hillbillies.' It isn't a good word for them. They probably would prefer 'Appalachians.' Like anyone else, they're sensitive about words" (p. 7). Mr. Bass, an Eagleview seventh-grade writing teacher, concurred. He explained that there were times when people questioned their high KIRIS scores because they came from eastern Kentucky:

> But once again, we're rural. We're eastern Kentucky, so we must be cheating. And you know and I know we're not, but I'm saying that's the label. You know, we're all barefoot and pregnant out here. We don't know anything.... And I think, boy, in a weird sort of way, I think that's what keeps our fires lit as well. It's like, by George, I'm going to show you that we're from Eagleview County. We're not rich. We're from eastern Kentucky, but we can still compete with you. Community pride! (T97F)

Our urban sites were not as closely linked to their city in terms of *place*, nor did they have to contend with harmful stereotypes to keep their fires lit. Yet, they were dedicated to their *school* communities, and there was very little faculty turnover. The principal of Eastend Elementary had been there for 20 years, and her husband was principal there before her. Despite this longevity, Ms. Conner had a particular view when it came to hiring:

> It's almost my rule of thumb to take people right out of college, fresh new people...[because] we want to train them. It's more difficult to bring somebody in here who has already developed habits of what they think teaching is and then try to retrain them. (P97S)

Thus, Ms. Conner and her faculty developed their own heritage by enculturating new people into the school, a move that reminds us that the development of human capital—a willingness to learn—can be nurtured by the social context. As Peterson et al. (1996) suggested, "Successful relations occur among school structure, teaching practice, and student learning in schools where, because of recruitment and socialization, teachers share a common point of view about their purpose and principles of good practice" (p. 149).

The enculturation of new teachers meant commitment and a great deal of work. Eastend teachers felt responsible not just for their classes of children, but for the whole school: "There's an attitude here that all of the students are my responsibility to teach, not 'Well, those are your kids and these are my kids, and I don't want them here.' ...It's more 'We have 615

children to teach'" (P97S). Ms. Conner admitted that it would be "difficult to stay here and work in this program without total commitment." Over the years, a few teachers who found the team's responsibility too demanding left. Ms. Conner explained:

> I had a teacher one time who said, "This is a very difficult program to work in. It's very demanding." And I said, "Yes, that's true." And she said, "Well, it's really too much work for me." But she said, "This is where I want my children to go to school." And I think that says it all. (P97S)

Community members were also drawn to Mt. Vernon Middle; this was a school with a unique history. Founded in 1834, it was now housed in an impressive brick building modeled in the 1930s after George Washington's home. Its more recent history was equally impressive—it was one of the top KIRIS scorers in the state. Indeed, although the history of the building was intriguing, the predominately mainstream population of parents wanted the heritage of academic success for their children. As its principal and teachers were quick to point out, the school had a nonselective enrollment policy. This helped to balance the predominately upper-middle class student population with 24% of its students on free and reduced lunch. As Mr. George, the principal, explained, "I do not choose my population. I am a *public* school."

Mount Vernon's commitment to all students was reflected in their Mission Statement, which was prominently displayed throughout the school—on Mr. George's office door, in the materials visitors received, and in the student planner:

> The faculty, staff, students, and community of Mt. Vernon Middle School are committed to academic excellence and the cultivation of individual strengths and talents in a supportive environment where individual differences and respect for the rights of others guide school and community behavior.

Mt. Vernon's allegiance to academic excellence was also evident in their image as a Fortune 500 company. Mr. George's talk was full of business references, statistics, and comments about "marketing strategies." He explained:

> If we are going to be a Fortune 500 company...you don't wait. You jump on it.... I'll be making a lot of decisions based on assessment.... That's what assessments should do...give you feedback on the directions and your programs and then you make adjustments accordingly. (P97F)

Mr. George asked teachers to analyze their KIRIS scores like stock brokers at the ending bell:

> In mathematics, 25% of my 8th grade students were on a distinguished level.... That is considered a world class standard—the high-

> est level, 25%. Those same kids though on the reading test... zero
> [distinguished]. So that shows that we weren't doing things right in
> reading. So my math scores have continued to go up even though
> some of my other departments have either flatlined or even made
> slight declines. [It's] sort of like the stock market, up and down.
> (P97S)

Even though there were ups and downs in students' scores, there was little fluctuation in faculty turnover, for Mt. Vernon Middle was a sound investment for a teacher's career. As Mr. George explained, "This is a real desirable area in Kentucky to teach so teachers hang on to their positions."

Over the years, however, there had been more turnover at the administrative levels. The expectations of parents in the community were "extremely high":

> Parents...really want their children to learn well and expect that we
> are in the know or in the position that we can compete on a national
> level.... I am probably the sixth principal here. The five before me
> have been taken out.... I have weathered it because I have sought to
> make reforms like this. I actually introduced a lot of the reforms to the
> parents. (P97S)

Thus, to make history and create a heritage of academic success, Mr. George believed that a critical part of his role as principal was to attend to "what the community expects and take care of the children."

Although each of the case study school's history was unique, each established a heritage of success through community pride, dedication to students, communication with parents, and hard work. "Weathering" the storm of demanding reform necessitates a level of leadership that is both courageous and cooperative. It is to this aspect that we turn to in the next section.

Cooperative Leadership

In presenting one of the central characters in her Newbery award-winning novel, *Missing May*, Cynthia Rylant (1992) described May in the following way:

> May was the best person I ever knew.... She understood people and
> she let them be whatever way they needed to be. She had faith in
> every single person she ever met, and this never failed her, for no-
> body ever disappointed May. Seems people knew she saw the very
> best of them, and they'd turn that side to her to give her a better look.
> (pp. 15–16)

Inspiring people to turn to their better sides is a singular achievement, especially when teachers are pressed to adopt new curriculum, instruction,

and high-stakes assessment. In this process, principals shoulder what Evans (1993) called an "exceptional burden" (p. 20). They need to see the best in their teachers and encourage all to move toward reform without sacrificing who they need to be. The principals often accomplished this through cooperative leadership.

In the urban elementary school, Ms. Conner "set the tone" for the teamwork in her building. The school was divided into six complexes, each of which contained four teachers for 100 multigrade students. Decisions were made within complexes as well as through a strong site-based decision-making (SBDM) council. Ms. Conner characterized her teachers as doing an "excellent job of identifying problem areas and then correcting them" (P97F). Ms. Roby, a fourth/fifth-grade teacher, explained how the staff met the curricular challenges that the state demanded, "Our SBDM committees look at each new thing as it comes out and decide who's going to deal with that, and we go on" (T97F).

When aspects of curriculum were under state debate, Eastend teachers persisted in executing what they believed were valuable goals. For example, the mathematics portfolios were withdrawn from the accountability index, but the teachers responsible for this aspect of the curriculum continued to ask their students to complete them. When the Kentucky testing system was in flux (see Footnote 2), there was statewide debate over the goals and number of pieces to be included in the writing portfolios. One ominous, yet erroneous, rumor flooding the state was that the writing portfolios would also be eliminated, but Eastend teachers remained committed. This is surprising, considering the amount of work these portfolios require. In many schools, the elimination of the mathematics portfolio and the threat against the writing portfolio caused teachers to either discontinue them or hold them in abeyance. Eastend teachers persevered. They believed that these reform-based practices, although complex and time-consuming, made sense for the education of children.

> I think we have people here who really believe in it and support it, and we have a leader who really believes that it's important. I think all of us have seen a difference in our children and their ability to write and the quality of instruction, and so I don't think that [eliminating them] would happen. But I think if you had a school where there wasn't a committed group of teachers, and good leadership among the teachers themselves, you know... [it would be a different story] (Ms. Mitchell, Professional Staff Assistant, P98S).

The emphasis on remaining committed to purpose in the face of changing political winds seemed to be a key outcome of Eastend's distributed leadership.

In setting her sights on shared leadership, the principal, Ms. Conner, carefully constructed teaching teams for the six complexes that contained both leaders and what she called "backbone type people...[whose] personality is such that they can work with about anybody." When new teachers

were added to an existing complex, the entire team took responsibility for bringing them into the school culture. The staff was eager to listen to new teachers as well. Ms. Conner suggested that during faculty hiring, they looked for "people who are very intelligent.... It's important that we try to get the cream of the crop, and typically your better educated, more intelligent person is going to have high standards for children." The end result was a team of dedicated teachers who were quick on the uptake of school reform. As Ms. Conner explained:

> There is very strong leadership, and the leadership isn't just my lead-ership. It's coming from staff. So I think change is a little easier here. And I've been told that if it takes five years to make the change happen, Eastend can probably do it in two. And that's true. So true. (P97S)

The capacity to shift quickly came from Ms. Conner's willingness to "roll up her sleeves" and work *with* her staff. The same was true at the rural elementary school. Bluejay teachers pointed to Ms. Chief's fluid ability to model new practices in their classrooms as well as to lead the front office. In fact, Ms. Chief summarized her role "as a teacher helper. Anything that I can do instruction wise and to improve student performance, that's my job" (P97S). She encouraged teachers to "holler at me, send someone after me, and let me come in and see" the "wonderful" events in classrooms.

Ms. Chief's frequent classroom visits could have been seen as intimi-dating; instead, they were welcome. She was known as a master teacher, but was even more renowned for sharing her expertise. This set the standard for her teachers, who exchanged ideas without hesitation. When interviewing two fourth-grade teachers, Ms. Jazz and Ms. Rebel, we were struck by the quality of their interaction. They took turns pointing out each other's attrib-utes, and were so in sync they finished each other's sentences. Ms. Rebel explained that a quality of Bluejay teachers was their willingness to ask:

> [They] don't hesitate to ask if they feel like they need some kind of special training or if they feel like they don't understand a concept fully. They don't hesitate to say, "Well I need this to be modeled for me." Sometimes teachers may hesitate to ask, feeling like, "Well, maybe this is something I should already know" or "I don't sound professional if I ask this question." But here, the whole aura at this school is open. They'll ask if they need something. I don't hesitate to ask. If I don't understand how to do something, I don't hesitate one bit to come over here and ask Ms. Jazz for advice on what I should do. (T97F)

One reason the staff could ask for help was the level of *trust* they had established, an element often cited in research:

> If staff members are to commit themselves to innovation and risk its anxieties and losses, they must find the new goal both desirable and

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> feasible.... Teachers are most likely to accept change when it is es-
> poused by someone they trust. (Evans, 1993, p. 20)

Trust works both ways because "principals are dependent on teachers' sup-
port and trust if reform efforts are to endure" (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996,
p. 272).

At Bluejay, trust came not only in professional exchanges, but in per-
sonal and sometimes humorous give and take. Teachers told us how they
liked to "joke" and generally "cut up." They believed that a new teacher had
finally arrived when s/he was willing to participate in some of Bluejay's
famous "practical jokes." Ms. Chief summarized the combination of work
and play:

> We've always been a very close faculty. We laugh together and we
> cry together and we feel like we are very close.... We go on a retreat
> each year...and it's one of the best things we do to get our faculty off
> to a good start. We...laugh and we cut up. But during the profes-
> sional development during the day, we work. And we can get up and
> go to lunch, and I'll look around and we've got half of them still
> sitting there or wanting to work through lunch. How lucky can we
> get? And when the end of the session comes about, they're still work-
> ing. And then while they're visiting with each other during the eve-
> nings, guess what they're talking about? Work. "I want to do this and
> this and this this year. What did you do? Can I borrow that?" I'm a
> strong believer in positive school climate. If you don't have that first,
> you probably won't get other things. (P97S)

Many teachers characterized the faculty as a "family." As the fifth-grade
teacher, Ms. Fit, explained: "It's amazing because you feel you really do have
a family.... And I would not work anywhere else. I think I would probably
have to just go to Wal-Mart or somewhere if I had to" (T97F).

In the research, images of family in school can be depicted in dispar-
aging ways. Hargreaves (1997a) suggested, "It is more than a little ironic that
many principals refer to their... staffs as 'families'.... There is little ambiguity
about who is the parent and who are the children here!" (p. 1308). Ms. Chief
was not seen as maternalistic; instead, she was a professional colleague. Ms.
Jazz described Bluejay's effort in addressing Kentucky's reform: "It has to be
a group effort. It can't be just one person in a building.... Everybody needs
to get sold on the idea" (T97S).

Selling ideas to people and drawing them into complex reform are
easier with a trusted leader at the fore. At Eagleview, this was particularly
true. Unlike the other principals, Mr. Push did not do model lessons or lead
professional development, but he actively participated in professional op-
portunities: "My teachers have to know that I'm interested in it. If it's impor-
tant enough for me to be there, it's important enough for them to be there"
(P97F). More important, when Mr. Push rolled up his sleeves, it was highly
strategic. He knew his team members' talents and how to position them for
success. When he shifted Ms. Crabtree, an eighth-grade writing teacher, to

the seventh-grade accountability position, she did not want to go, but Mr. Push convinced her:

> I brought her in...and told her I thought it was the best thing for the school. And she felt that she had the expertise. Ms. Crabtree's been involved more with writing process than anybody I've ever been around....You know you are sitting there with a pitcher. You got a 20-game winner. And you got one that's *going* to be a good pitcher, but they don't have the experience. That 20-game winner is going to go out on the mound. (P97F)

Mr. Push worked through a combination of caring and charisma. His self-selected pseudonym is symbolic of his willingness to nudge his teachers into the positions he wanted them to play.

Even when his decisions were questioned, his motivation was not. For example, Mr. Bass, a seventh-grade writing teacher, believed the portfolio responsibilities should be distributed among more teachers so no teacher would be responsible for 110 portfolios, an extraordinary weight for any teacher. However, Mr. Push opted to leave the 330 portfolios in the hands of his three seventh-grade teachers. Mr. Bass was characteristically honest as he imagined the thinking behind this decision:

> You know, "Mr. Bass's doing okay. Ms. Crabtree's doing okay. Ms. Getmore's done this for years. Just let them keep doing it." If that's the case, I don't appreciate that. But you know, once again, it goes back to the bottom line, and the bottom line is whatever this school needs to do to be the best, that's what we're going to do. (T97F)

Meeting the bottom line meant extensive planning. At Eagleview, each grade-level team met daily. Mr. Push believed that this time was "key" because his teachers liked to make "a lot of their own decisions. They don't like for me to tell them everything to do. They're professionals" (P97S).

Indeed, far from an unprofessional chat session, each team met to plan, discuss teaching strategies, and brainstorm how to meet the needs of individual students. In our observations, we saw one team's lead teacher take notes, often stopping to summarize the discussion and reiterate which teacher had volunteered for what. Discussions of students were marked with respect. The team's Title I teacher (who worked *in* the classrooms) contributed ideas and the family resource counselor came in occasionally to provide background on students. The daily meetings were a time when ideas were shared and decisions were made. As Mr. Bass explained, "I'm of the opinion that some of the greatest teachers in the state are in this county, and they're doing a lot of neat things. I think our system allows us to share those ideas with each other" (T97F).

The teachers were also of the opinion that they had some of the greatest students in the state. They wanted their students to share in the responsibilities of making Eagleview "the best middle school in Kentucky." As a

result, Mr. Push was out in the halls, talking and joking with students or giving them serious advice on a recent project, and his knowledge of students was extensive. He knew about their home lives and dilemmas. When a student had holes in his shoes, Mr. Push made sure he got a new pair. When a student needed her glasses fixed, he noticed and made the trip to a local optometrist for a donation. If he saw a student walking home, he offered a lift. Indeed, he had visited many of the children's homes. He had close-up knowledge of the poverty in the area, but poverty was not his overriding focus. He saw the *students*, not just the *statistics*:

> We have a very [economically] diverse population, but if you look at our free and reduced lunch, we're about 70% overall.... That tells a lot about the incomes of the students, but I think you have to realize that *that is not what makes it.* I talked to you the other day about how we've got four kids who are going to be getting full scholarships to the University of Kentucky as 8th graders and they are kids [that] have never had anybody in their family be involved in college. Those are the things I think really make a difference for me. Motivate those kids. That's how we're going to change society. (P97S)

His emphasis on changing society came with a strong academic focus. He knew where students stood because each quarter he personally reviewed the 650 report cards and then stopped students in the halls with comments:

> The kids like for you to tell them that they did a good job or they need to work to get this grade up. They really like to know that you know and that you get after them when they're not doing right. At least somebody cares enough that they're getting after them.

Caring also included meeting with students to discuss future plans: "My biggest strength is bringing kids into my office one-on-one and talking to them. You ask them, 'What do you want to be?' And at least you want them to think, 'Someday I want to do something'" (P98S).

Knowing what they wanted to be was more common for the urban students in Mt. Vernon Middle. In an atmosphere of high parental expectations, the faculty was under more pressure to do well. Perhaps this pressure drove Mr. George's focus on percentages, marketing strategies, and his role as the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Thus, in the sense of cooperative leadership, Mt. Vernon was unique because the shared vision of the school was often Mr. George's vision. He set the goals and designed ways to achieve them. For example, at KIRIS testing time, he brought in motivational speakers like Tubby Smith, a University of Kentucky coach, or invited the University of Kentucky cheerleaders to give a pep rally for the kids. Mr. George carefully selected candidates to lead his staff's professional development. When he could not find what he wanted, he did it himself. He ran a school-wide professional development workshop for an hour every week. He packed these sessions with critical topics such as using the four-column method for KIRIS open-response questions.

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Mr. George's teachers appreciated his leadership style. He was open to their ideas as well as their complaints. Mr. Perry, an eighth-grade teacher, explained:

> Mr. George's the kind of person [who] gives open invitations to the faculty. "If you want to come in, shut the door and tell me what you don't like. You can walk in that office, rant, rave, curse, carry on. You know. But let's get it out in the open." ....So everything you've heard me say, Mr. George has already heard. (T97S)

Mr. George's willingness to listen is borne out in research:

> It is an axiom of organizational change that the larger the innovation, the greater the need for communication.... Authentic leaders are strongly biased toward clear communication. Many are eloquent, but all convey their goals through their very consistency. And they are eager, respectful listeners. (Evans, 1993, p. 22)

Mr. George could also be quite vocal about his faculty. He did not shy away from criticizing teachers who avoided staff development, and his highest compliments went to teachers eager to continue their learning. He described the teachers we worked with:

> Ms. Dawson is outstanding. I don't think you'll find a better language arts teacher in the country.... She is really knowledgeable about teaching and learning. Shows a lot of initiative...spends a lot of extra time in the academic area. Mr. Perry is very bright, very personable. He goes to all of the meetings.... He likes to be in the know at the state level, and he'll take the initiative to be on state committees. [His] being a regional coordinator has helped us a great deal.... So those two teachers are outstanding.... They continue their education on their own. They find ways to improve their learning. (P97S)

Although Mr. George believed that these two teachers stood out, he also believed that his entire faculty was motivated to do well:

> Teachers that are burnt out are teachers that see that what they're trying to do is not being accomplished, and I don't have a burn out here. I have teachers that are in control of a program.... That makes them feel good that they really have input and that they own the school too. I think that brings about a lot of motivation. (P98S)

Motivation might have been difficult considering the school's history with KIRIS. Mt. Vernon was one of the state's highest-scoring schools. However, in our first year there, scores were in decline because they had not risen sufficiently. This is a statewide irony for high-scoring schools: If scores are already high, how do you maintain the rate of gain every year?[6] For Mt. Vernon teachers, the realization that their hard work was being criticized

instead of acclaimed was daunting. Mr. George described their reaction when their scores flatlined. Initially, the teachers blamed KIRIS, and then they moved into "denial." Ultimately, they accepted responsibility. Mr. George explained, "And that is a long way to come. When a teacher can say, "Okay. Okay. These children did not learn. I had some responsibility in that" (P97S).

Taking responsibility is more likely when teachers are given the opportunity to exercise their professional expertise. As McDonnell (1994) suggested, "...the application of professional knowledge to individual clients' needs requires judgment, so it cannot be reduced to rules or prescriptions for practice" (p. 410). Mr. George also believed that there were no easy answers:

> Let's say you have 70% of your kids that are doing well, but you're not reaching 30%. How do you bring those 30% in as well? Your school isn't doing well if it's excluding 30% of your kids. Now, how do you bring them up? A lot of schools have approached it, "Well, the teachers will work harder." But the teachers are really working about as hard as they can work, and they're not going to be able to all of a sudden double their workload.... So, you have to replace what they've traditionally been doing to help them work smarter. (P98S)

For Mr. George and the other principals, working smarter meant giving teachers opportunities to reflect on where their professional judgment about teaching and learning aligned with that of the state reform, and where they still needed to grow, an issue that we turn to in the next section.

Reflective Alignment With Kentucky Reform

> The men and women and children who live in Appalachia have no sourness about them and though they are shy toward outsiders, they will wave to you if you drive by in your car whether they know your face or not.... Most of them are thinkers, because these mountains inspire that. (Rylant, 1991, p. 21)

Another feature of the exemplary schools was their reflective alignment with the reform. Although each school's faculty members had thought long and hard about their dilemmas with different aspects, they believed in the reform. Part of this belief system stemmed from the fact that some of the reform-based changes were things they were already doing. Ms. Chief said that Bluejay was the "first school in this part of the state to have an ungraded primary" (P97S), whereas Eastend's ungraded program had been in effect for over 30 years. Both Bluejay and Eastend had inclusion programs for their special needs children long before the state recommended it.

More important, however, was a willingness to change in reform-based ways. For example, "Bluejay University" was a place for "reflective thinkers," and the teachers worked to model their thinking processes for their children. Of all the students we interviewed, the Bluejay children asked

us the most questions about our questions. They would stop us in midpro-
tocol and ask for clarification. At the end of their answers, they would look
at us quite seriously and ask, "Did I answer all the parts of your question? Is
there anything else you want to know?" The teachers believed that the
children's questions came from their recent training in a strategy called the
four-column method. This method helped children analyze KIRIS open-
response questions in any content area and highlighted the importance of
answering all parts of the question. When we commented on the children's
thoughtfulness, Ms. Jazz responded: "I hope so!... Actually it's problem solv-
ing. Everything we do—writing, math, science—everything we do involves
problem solving" (T97F).

One of the biggest problems to solve was how to address such a com-
plex reform because traditional methods were now superseded by concep-
tual approaches. Children still learned basic skills in mathematics, but they
were now learning to provide more than one potential answer and to justify
the answer they chose. Children still learned grammar in writing, but they
were now mastering multiple genres and learning to express their ideas for
different audiences and purposes. For children to learn these things, their
teachers had to be willing to keep learning about the latest reform-based
methods. Ms. Chief described two hypothetical teachers:

> Teacher A goes out and learns all she can, and she keeps learning and
> she keeps growing and she uses the knowledge and puts it to use
> with her students and her classroom. But Teacher B teaches in the
> same mode, the same way, year after year after year. And you've got
> Teacher A continuously changing and adding on and growing and
> growing. And both those classrooms are going to be two completely
> different environments in my opinion. And classroom Teacher A, like
> all the teachers here at Bluejay Elementary, that's where I would want
> my child to be. (P97S)

The willingness to grow and change was also reflected in the leadership
roles of faculty both inside and outside of school. They did not just attend
professional development seminars, they led them. At Bluejay, Ms. Chief was
both a DE and the writing coordinator for her region, training clusters of
fourth-grade writing teachers from 11 counties. At Eagleview, Ms. Crabtree
was involved in writing reform at almost every level and Mr. Taylor was
similarly involved in mathematics and also qualified as a DE.

Our urban faculties assumed leadership roles as well. At Mt. Vernon, Mr.
Perry was a regional coordinator in mathematics. At Eastend, Ms. Nicholl was
a mathematics cluster leader, whereas Ms. Roby was both the regional co-
ordinator in mathematics and a cluster leader in writing. Their leadership
roles were critical in aligning their school goals with the state goals. They
were in the position to influence the direction of the reform itself as well as
access important information faster than the average teacher. As Ms. Roby
explained:

> A lot of the training travels down quite an avenue before it gets to the individual classroom teacher, so our concern has been to jump in there and get as high up on that as we can to get the information first and help our building. (T97S)

The state's emphasis on assessment aligned particularly well with Eastend Elementary's philosophy. Although some schools in the state were startled by the new emphasis on assessment, many of Eastend's decisions were evaluation based. Each summer, faculty members examined a new content area and carefully considered how their curriculum could be enhanced to align with KIRIS assessment. As Ms. Conner, the principal, explained:

> We've been very strong into assessment and that has driven our entire program.... After we've decided what it is children need to learn, then that determines what we're going to teach. So we've done a lot of work on how to assess students and what instruments to use. (P97S)

However, the alignment that the exemplary schools share with the reform does not mean that they followed the state's suggestions lockstep. Ms. Conner added, "We've taken [from KERA and KIRIS] what we believe works with our philosophy, and we've incorporated it. Then the things that we felt were in conflict or weren't exactly right, we've adjusted, or maybe totally dropped them, and made it work for us."

Making adjustments was a characteristic of Eagleview Middle as well. For example, Eagleview's writing teachers initially found the KDE writing workshops to be enlightening. After they had been teaching reform-based writing for a few years, they wanted to do more professional development inhouse. Because they had worked extensively on their writing instruction, they sometimes found state workshops to be "old news." Mr. Bass expressed concerns about a KDE writing workshop: "They were doing a good job with what they gave us. The only problem was it was information that had been around for a while" (T97F). As a result, he and his colleagues came up with their own plan for 6 hours of professional development, using the time collaboratively to develop notebooks of ideas on each of the three kinds of state-assessed writing.

In addition to designing their own professional development workshops, the teachers at Eagleview were willing to criticize the negative patterns in the state assessment. For example, Mr. Taylor questioned an unintended consequence of the state's emphasis on multiple representations, an emphasis common in reform-based mathematics. He explained that when portfolios were first introduced by the state, the state gave better scores to students who included numerous representations for their solutions. In his view, many teachers had consequently taken the practice to the extreme. As a result, students included useless representations of problems simply for the sake of writing more for the scorer:

> I think you want to see multiple representations, but as a justification
> for getting their answer. And it has not been used for that. Because
> [the state] says you can get a good score if you have multiple repre-
> sentations, teachers taught their students, "Include three ways to
> show [your solution]" regardless of whether it's beneficial or not. So,
> in the portfolio pieces kids learned multiple representation, but for
> the wrong reasons. (T97F)

Mr. Taylor believed that providing more than one solution should not be "a
step" in receiving a good score. Instead, students should be taught the
appropriate uses for multiple representations, such as showing a solution
with an example and then moving into the more abstract general solution for
the problem. Indeed, he believed that one of the difficulties with the math-
ematics portfolio was that in many teachers' classrooms there was more of an
emphasis on *writing* than on *mathematics.*

In addition to creating its own materials and criticizing pedagogical
choices, the Eagleview faculty was committed to distributing the weight of
the state assessments. This demonstrates that reflective alignment with re-
form was not simply the responsibility of accountability grade teachers.
Although Mr. Push was unwilling to shift the seventh-grade writing portfolio
away from teachers who were most able to handle the task, he was instru-
mental in creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility. This was exem-
plified in his "executive decision" to create "core days"—days on which all
Eagleview staff members shifted their teaching schedules to work for ex-
tended periods of time on core subjects. Teachers in nonaccountability
grades moved to accountability classrooms and worked with students while
teaming with the accountability teacher. Even teachers who taught elective
courses shifted to accountability subjects on these specially-designated days.

Mr. Taylor explained that on core days, he determined the areas in
which his students needed the most help and set the schedule. On a core day
we observed, students worked on mathematical open-response questions
and three additional teachers came to work with his students. In addition to
core days, faculty participated in scoring the completed writing portfolios.
Mr. Bass explained, "We'll have 20 some teachers who will be trained offi-
cially to score [writing] portfolios…which at scoring time takes a big load off"
(T97F).

This kind of collaborative work implies reflection on how to meet KIRIS
requirements. It also reiterates McDonnell's (1994) view that new assess-
ments inspire deliberation. Open spaces for talk was a feature of all of the
schools, such as teacher-to-teacher conversations at Bluejay, computer-
network curriculum discussions at Eastend, or shared planning time at Eagle-
view. These conversations often emerged from trust. Spillane and Thompson
(1997) found, "trust created an environment in which local educators were
comfortable discussing their understandings of and reservations about new
instructional approaches, conversations that were essential for reconstruc-
tive learning" (p. 195).

Mt. Vernon Middle was especially strategic in its emphasis on reconstructive learning through conversation. In keeping with the Fortune 500 company theme, Mr. George looked closely at the school's KIRIS scores each year and sought advice from experts about how to improve the content areas that still needed work. He then made those areas the focus of staff conversations:

> What the administration has to do is provide a lot of conversation in the area. You do that by talking, and you talk about *instructional* areas, not the ball game tomorrow or buildings and grounds. You focus on what it is you want to improve. If our big push is in writing, then at every opportunity you talk about writing, and you talk about it all day. When the teachers see [it's] important to you, then it will become important to them. (P97F)

Mr. George's call for more talk about writing was not a suggestion that his teachers simply "teach to the test." Instead, he was proposing a long-term conversation about how children learn to express themselves in writing as well as learn to revise their writing to communicate in more effective ways. These kinds of conversations were true of all four schools. In fact, in thinking about how the schools reflectively changed their instruction to meet the reform, there is perhaps no better case than how writing was taught—an area that we will explore in the next section.

Teaching To and Beyond the Test in Writing

In an essay entitled, "Writing in the Smokehouse," Appalachian writer Lisa Koger (1998) describes the differences between the "basics" of learning to write and learning to write from the heart:

> I think it's hard for me to talk about writing simply because the more I write, the more difficult and inexplicable writing is. Which is not to say that, through reading and spending an unhealthy amount of time on university campuses, I haven't acquired a certain familiarity with the elements of fiction (character, plot, point of view...) and gained a passable understanding of how those elements work together in a short story or novel. Any diligent dog can be taught such tricks.... So why write about writing at all? I am only one voice, one opinion, but I'd like to think that by agreeing to write this essay, I'm not only sharing a part of my life but taking a stand on issues that are important to me. (p. 156)

Much has been made of the phrase "teaching to the test." In writing, that would mean just what this quote diminishes—"a certain familiarity with the elements of fiction" which only leads to a "passable understanding." The Kentucky teachers went well beyond teaching for "diligent dogs" and into substantive reflection of how children learn to share their lives and take important stands. Although we could talk about accomplishments in other

subjects—such as mathematics, the other content area we studied—we will concentrate on a subject that Kentucky considers one of its strengths: writing. Indeed, the teaching of writing provides us with clear examples of how exemplary teachers reflect on the reform and teach to as well as beyond the test.

Before we proceed to the individual sites, it is necessary to take a step back and think about Kentucky's writing reform in general. In a time when most states are utilizing one-time-only, on-demand prompts to test children's writing skills, the Kentucky reform places emphasis on helping children grow as writers in more substantive ways. KIRIS testing, which also includes on-demand prompts and open-response items, is most courageous in its portfolio requirement. Children in an accountability grade must prepare a portfolio of original writing, which includes: (a) a table of contents; (b) personal expressive writing (personal narratives); (c) literary writing (stories, poems); (d) transactive writing ("real-world" writing in letters, editorials); and (e) a letter to the reviewer in which they analyze their growth as writers.

Portfolio preparation takes an entire year. It requires instruction in the writing process, in the particular features of multiple genres, and in creating multiple opportunities for peer and teacher conferencing as well as for self-evaluation. A student's final portfolio represents hours, days, and months of writing, revision, conferencing, reading, and writing some more. Prior to the Kentucky reform in writing, teachers in the four schools did not help children prepare portfolios. They taught writing more as a grammatical skill than as an opportunity for self-expression. However, the portfolio stipulations and the subsequent professional development they received encouraged them to rethink their instruction. As Mr. Bass explained, "Because of KERA, I changed my style of teaching to a more workshop-oriented approach" (T98S).

What did this approach look like in the classrooms of exemplary writing teachers? In the eastern Kentucky sites, the emphasis on voice was strong. At Eagleview, Mr. Bass learned to share his own experience as well as his own writing with his students, and he urged them to connect their reading and writing to their own lives. In one lesson we observed, he explored types of personal narrative. He reviewed the features of this genre and then used poetry to help his students understand how writing is often inspired by personal experience. All four of the poems he shared were carefully chosen to show how character can be revealed through a description of hands and fingers. He began with a poem about baby fingers ("How beautiful new fingers are, And how complete."). He then read a poem about the appearance of people's hands when they have different careers, and then one about old people's fingers. He confided that he had attempted to write his own poem on the topic: "A few years ago I came across these poems, and I tried to write a poem called 'Teacher's Fingers.' But I didn't like it. I still don't like it, and I'm probably going to have to go back and revise it again" (T97S).

Mr. Bass's disclosure revealed his emphasis on writing, an emphasis that research suggests is common with exemplary teachers of writing who dis-

cuss their own writing efforts, stress the need for revision, and emphasize connections between literature and writing (McIver & Wolf, 1999; Wolf & Davinroy, 1998). In addition, as he read the fourth poem, he urged the students to "pay attention to the imagery and the descriptive writing." This final poem was a lesson in itself; it was written by a teacher at the Eagleview County High School—a woman who had taught Mr. Bass when he was in high school and who would eventually teach many of his seventh-grade students. In introducing the poem, Mr. Bass said:

> This one's my favorite, and I hope that all of you have the opportunity to have this teacher–Ms. Roberts. She helped me get started, and she helped me in college. Now I've taught with her and done workshops with her.

The poem was entitled, "My Own Middle Aged Fingers" and one verse read:

> Cramped, yet working, though scarred and rough
> Tinged with pink and white from chalk
> Identifying mistakes, corrections by the millions
> The right, always in love with the pencil
> My instrument of individuality. (T97S)

Ms. Robert's poem was longer than the first three poems, and while reading Mr. Bass stopped often to ask questions. After this verse, he asked: "How do we know that she is a teacher?" His students volunteered the phrase "pink and white from chalk." Mr. Bass's use of this poem, combined with his comments on his own poetry writing, points to the availability of real writers in the community. Although the poem was not a published piece, Mr. Bass used it to show his students that writing was not an alien endeavor that only came from professional writers in some far away place. Instead, writing was a vibrant part of community life.

At the end of the lengthy discussion of all four poems, Mr. Bass gave the assignment: "I want you to look back on your 7th grade year. I want you to think about an incident during this year that made you realize that you were growing up." Following the pattern established in the poetry he shared, the students could choose from an incident in their lives that demonstrated their relationship with an infant, a career-minded grown up, or an older person, or they could simply write about an experience from the current year. Although Mr. Bass offered much assignment choice, all four suggestions focused on the topic of change, and the required genre was a personal narrative.

This long vignette of Mr. Bass and his writing class exemplifies the kind of writing instruction provided by all the teachers. They were concerned with the test and worked hard to prepare their students for its requirements. However, in their effort to meet the state standards, they did not neglect the absolute art of teaching writing. Like Ms. Roberts's poetic explanation, they too were "in love with the pencil," but they used it less to make "corrections

by the millions," than to demonstrate their own fascination with writing. Although writing a personal narrative was a KIRIS portfolio requirement, the teachers taught the genre not as one more hoop to jump through, but as a unique opportunity for written expression. The teachers' emphasis on content is similarly accentuated in the research literature. In studying those who take "responsibility for instructional reform," Spillane and Thompson (1997) found that "commitment typically involved helping *students* experience and learn *a particular subject* in more exciting ways" (p. 191).

Across the exemplary sites, the writing teachers' engagement with their content was illustrated in a number of ways. At Bluejay, for example, the teachers talked often about how to improve their practice. The two fourth-grade teachers with whom we worked, Ms. Jazz and Ms. Rebel, said they held almost daily conversations on their practice: "We talk and we share back and forth. Maybe that's it—just sharing and *doing*. 'Cause if you don't do it, you won't ever get it" (T97F).

In addition, their attitude toward *doing* writing—taking risks with a variety of lesson formats and studying the features of particular genres— went well beyond their own conversations, for they looked to outside experts for help. During one visit, we observed the region's writing coordinator as she conducted demonstration lessons. Ms. Chief had arranged this day of professional development based on the expressed needs of her teachers, and she encouraged nonaccountability grade teachers to observe these lessons as well. One of the coordinator's lessons was on the features of personal narrative, with an emphasis on the need for authors to demonstrate "feeling" as well as the "lessons learned." The demonstration was a lively one. The coordinator was an experienced teacher, and the children eagerly participated in discussing the genre's characteristics. When the lesson was over, Ms. Rebel directed the children to write their commentary on the day's events. One child wrote: "I think personal narratives are great because you have to put in action and feelings."

Although the children concentrated on feelings, Ms. Jazz was more intrigued by the idea of closing the narrative with a "focus on the effect of the event" and the "lessons learned." She had been teaching personal narrative "for years and writing them as well" and had never heard of this concept. After rumination, she could see that closing the genre with comments on the significance of the story was often the case. The writing coordinator's job was to enhance teachers' understandings of reform-based writing instruction. She believed that for "a personal narrative *to be* a personal narrative it had to focus on the *effect*." Ms. Jazz thought for a while and then said, "Maybe what your lesson did was give me words to put on top of something I've already been doing. I've really learned something here. Thank you!" Later in the day, Ms. Jazz was still considering the concept and told us, "That's just like what I was saying last night. You can't really say that you've internalized a concept until you have the words for it" (T97F).

Finding words for the art of writing was integral to the instruction at Eastend Elementary as well. In a writers' workshop lesson we observed in a

fourth/fifth-grade combination class, the teachers asked their children to look over their portfolio contents and choose a personal narrative to rework. Ms. Nicholl suggested that they "fire up" their piece to demonstrate "how they've grown as a writer" (T97S). She asked what things they would expect to see in fine writing, and some children suggested "foreshadowing," whereas others offered that they wanted to "catch the reader's attention." Ms. Nicholl explained that the "things you're bringing up are things that change and add to the work. They make a piece *way up there*." Ms. Roby commented that "capitalization and punctuation won't make work more exciting." Her remark shows understanding that revision involves the reworking of content, whereas editing focuses on convention and should come later in the writing process. The children added: "help the reader follow the story," "good details," "know your purpose," and "correct grammar." The order of their ideas with "correct grammar" last confirms their understanding that editing does not enhance the story, but makes it more readable. Although there was an emphasis on grammar and spelling in the daily oral language exercises and in the English textbook work the students did, it did not hamper their ability to distinguish between this and what would make an engaging story.

After the children had chosen the pieces they wished to rework, the teachers helped prepare them for peer conferencing. They reminded the children that the peer reviewer should listen to the story twice before commenting. However, in modeling this, Ms. Nicholl suggested that they show a "nonexample first," to demonstrate how it should not be done. Ms. Roby began reading her story but before she finished the first sentence, Ms. Nicholl interrupted to ask where she was going. Ms. Roby pretended mock surprise at the abrupt interruption, and then both teachers used this negative example to reiterate the importance of listening to the piece twice before making comments. Ms. Nicholl explained that in response to a personal narrative, the children should first "listen to figure out what they're talking about. As I'm listening, I'm looking for feelings and to be entertained."

Ms. Roby read her story twice, and then opened up the class discussion. One child suggested that the story should "have more feelings," and both teachers broke into song: "Feelings, oh, oh, feelings." Many children giggled, and a child sitting next to us said, "They're always doing stuff like that" (T97S). However, the "stuff" that these teachers did went beyond incorporating humor. They used high-level, technical vocabulary, they encouraged their children to think about revision before editing, they modeled a negative example to demonstrate the need for careful listening, and they brought their children's ideas into the discussion. In short, they positioned their children to think like writers. While preparing their children for the completion of their KIRIS portfolios and encouraging them to make each piece the best it could be, the teachers' focus was less on the test than on the talk that surrounds what good writers typically do to improve their work. Still, the KIRIS test, especially its portfolio requirement, guided them toward this vision of reform-based writing. When we asked Ms. Roby how she had changed her writing instruction to match the KIRIS portfolio, she replied:

"We've formatted our teaching style around it. And we've gone through years of training as it's gone along.... So we've worked really hard on that because we believe in it" (T97S). She also valued the KIRIS emphasis on "high standards" and how children learned at a very early age to "communicate their thoughts and ideas," rather than simply "fill in the blank."

Communication was a central part of the writing work at Mt. Vernon Middle as well. Ms. Dawson also asked her seventh-graders to reflect on how to improve their portfolio pieces. The students were preparing to write the state-required "letter to the reviewer" in which they analyze their writing for the adult who will score their work. As Ms. Dawson explained, the "purpose of the letter is to talk about the pieces you chose, your growth, and how you've developed in your writing" (T97S). In helping them prepare for their letters, she asked:

Ms. Dawson: What influenced your writing this year? What helped you grow?

Student 1: All the reading that we've done....

Ms. Dawson: Do you think the reading is reflected in your writing?

Student 2: Yeah. And the fact that we have lots of writing—that we do portfolios.

Ms. Dawson: Is there anything we did on a regular basis that helped?

Student 3: Sometimes the author would use really rich language.

Ms. Dawson: So looking at the authors and the way they write?

Chorus: Yes!

In drafting their reviewer letters, the students revealed their willingness to ponder their pieces. One student said he discovered that one story in his portfolio was "so confusing, [he] practically had to do a whole new story." Another described her genre preferences: "I have trouble with personal narratives, but I like short stories and poems because I like to make things up." Still another commented on his penchant for writing "purpose pieces." When we asked him to elaborate he replied, "When I grow up, I want to be a lawyer so I want to be persuasive and write purpose pieces—like an article or an editorial. So it might improve what level of lawyer I'll be" (S97S).

Research (Graves, 1994) tells us that reflecting on writing improves the level of writing, whether that writing has pragmatic purposes (like ambitions to become a lawyer) or creative purposes (like "making things up" in a story). The students we met in the exemplary sites were well aware of the pressures of KIRIS as they developed their portfolios and learned how to respond to open-response items and on-demand prompts. The older students in particular said that they wanted to get "high scores" and measured their progress with the KIRIS vocabulary that permeated the curriculum. For example, a girl in Ms. Dawson's class reflected on the grades she had received on her portfolio stories over the year: " On my first one I got like a 'proficient,' but on the last one I did, Ms. Dawson gave me a 'distinguished' so that really is a big jump" (S97S).

The students' comments on scores were superseded by insights on their craft as writers. When we asked how they believed teachers and peers would

characterize them as writers, they responded with enthusiasm. They compared their current writing with their writing from earlier grades, and they discussed their ability to add detail and "grab the reader's attention." Yet, their enthusiasm did not prevent them from being self-critical. As they looked over their portfolio with us, they pointed out places where they could improve, choose a better vocabulary word, or add a transition to help their reader along. In short, they felt valued as writers. It is to these feelings of value that we turn to in our last section.

"It's All for the Kids!"

> The children love all the seasons. They go down by the creek or into the woods or up the dirt roads with their good dogs and they feel more important than anything else in these Appalachian mountains. (Rylant, 1991, p. 19)

Feeling important in the world is a place where teachers and principals want all their children to be, but achieving this depends on capable adults dedicated to making sound decisions for children in their schools. Throughout the Results section, we emphasized the ways in which the exemplary sites placed the value of students first. We add a brief section to highlight the fifth and ultimately most important feature—the education of *all* students. In fact, if we had to decide on a banner motto that could stretch across our four sites it would be: "It's all for the kids!"

Prior to KERA, especially the flush of money for books, supplies, and professional development that Kentucky offered with their reform (Borko et al., 1999), times were tight for schools, particularly for those in eastern Kentucky. As Ms. Chief explained:

> You could have heard an echo in any of the classrooms because of the small amount of materials as opposed to now. [Today] every classroom's got materials. They've got learning resources. Our library's well stocked, and each year we keep building. And the technology throughout the building—computers! It's just unbelievable opposed to what it would have looked like if you had walked in here eight years ago. So, it's been a big help to children and that's what's important. (P98S)

Although the focus on children was strong at Bluejay, the job was harder in pre-reform years. As a writing coordinator told us as we were selecting sites, "exemplary" would be "different for every region," but we had to know that in eastern Kentucky we would be "dealing with the mountains and mountain people. Traditionally, we've been low on the totem pole." With so few resources, he believed that many schools concentrated on the "15% of the kids that are going to college, and left the other 85% by the wayside. But [with KERA] you can no longer ignore these kids" (A96F).[7]

Even in schools where a large percentage of children headed for college, the onset of KERA shifted the emphasis from teaching the privileged few to our teaching all. This critical reform-based concept was embraced by all four of exemplary schools. For example, the CEO/principal of Mt. Vernon told us how much he believed that all students can succeed. In fact, he saw it as his and his teachers' responsibility to help all students learn. He contrasted the bell-shaped curve, which he saw as "garbage," to the metaphor of a surgeon:

> Whenever you tell me that 25% of your kids are going to fail, that is the most awful thing I've ever heard.... You cannot call yourself a good educator and lose 25%. If you go to your surgeon and he says 25% of his patients died, you don't want to go back.... I expect you to use the same intensity as that show on TV, *ER*. When they get a patient in that *ER* room, they don't care how much money they have. They don't care what ethnic background they have. They blitz them. And they use every strategy. They consult with each other. They do every possible thing to save that patient, and that is your job here as teachers. If you lose one of them, ...then part of you goes with it. (P97S)

Mr. George's attitude about the centrality of children was much repeated in our interviews. At Eastend, every decision was based on its impact on children's education, and decisions were often made by teams of teachers rather than individuals. Ms. Conner explained:

> I think there's a very positive atmosphere of wanting to do what's best for children, and therefore I think my people go to great lengths to do that. We're so team oriented, everybody is involved in that here. I think it's difficult to stay here and work in this program without that total commitment. And I probably, in fairness, need to say that there's a lot of peer pressure to do what's best for children. When you're on a team and if you have one person on that team who is not making good decisions in terms of what's best for children, the other team members will pick right up on it and will do what it takes to get that problem solved.... You know, everybody's got to do their job and pull their own weight in order for the team to be successful. (P97S)

In Ms. Conner's explanation, teamwork was characterized as both effective and demanding. Decisions about children were not simply the purview of individual teachers; instead, there was "peer pressure to do what's best for children." When decisions did not line up with Eastend's focus on children, other teachers would step in to "do what it takes to get that problem solved."

Doing what it takes often took on a personal dimension. This was especially true at Eastend. Ms. Conner told us that faculty members routinely "elected to have their children and in some cases, relatives, attend Eastend." She and her husband had their own four children attend the school, even though they did not live in the district. She explained:

> Many of us see this school and the staff as contributing factors for the success of our own children. We understand, first hand, the importance of a true commitment to doing what is best for each child in order to ensure a successful school experience for every child. We are also willing to work hard to build a successful program because we are building for our own families. That type of ownership for the success of the program cannot be fabricated.

At Eastend, the teachers' ownership for all children's success permeated their philosophy of teaching. As Ms. Nicholl said of the classroom that she and Ms. Roby shared, "I would have loved to have been in this classroom." Ms. Roby concurred, "I would have too. I always want to make a situation that the 4th grade child that's still in me would enjoy coming to every day" (T98S).

The personal dimension of teaching was also true at Eagleview Middle. Mr. Driver (who was principal when our study began) exhorted his teachers with the same yearly advice:

> I tell our teachers and I say it every year. I say, "When you teach, you teach just like it's your child. Your own child sitting on that front row every class period." And I said, "Now that's how you should teach. Don't cheat any kid. You know you want your child to have the best education they can possibly have, so you teach just like he's sitting on the front row every time you teach a class." (P97S)

The Bluejay staff used similar images to imply how they should think about their school's children—not as distant and unrelated, but as their own, as kinfolk, who deserved every opportunity.

Whether born and bred in the county where they taught, or city folks who liked where they worked and stayed, our principals and teachers seemed uniformly inspired to do the hard work because of their children. Whether the principals described themselves as a "teacher helper," "a team player," or a "coach," their help and the plays they called were all for the kids. Even our self-described CEO viewed the business angle of the bell curve as "garbage," and though he cited numbers, his statistics were all about heart.

Discussion

In one of our interviews with Mr. Bass at Eagleview, we talked about what it was like to teach within the Kentucky reform. We mentioned the "Kentucky-ism" with which we began this article—"That dog won't hunt." We explained that an administrator at KDE had used it to demonstrate that in these times of reform, schools could no longer make excuses for not meeting the needs of all students. Mr. Bass had not heard the expression, but he told us that Kentucky-isms about dogs were legion. Indeed, he believed that an appropriate expression for the demands of KERA and KIRIS on schools and teachers would be, "If you can't run with the big dogs, stay on the porch" (T98S).

He continued, "Now that's true. You know, I feel like I'm very fortunate in that I came through a system that allowed me several opportunities to become very familiar with the intricacies of portfolio development." The opportunities Mr. Bass experienced were social ones—fellow teachers willing to share their ideas and administrators willing to support professional development so he could learn to "run with the big dogs." These social events enabled him to expand his own human capacity to take on the new reform, although the costs in terms of work and commitment were admittedly high. Certainly, even at exemplary schools like Eagleview, the pressure was on accountability grade teachers to help students score well on the state's assessments.[8] In our research, we had seen and heard about some of these pressures firsthand, and we wondered what motivated schools and teachers to keep going, to keep trying to raise their scores, to always try to make things better for kids. Mr. Bass replied:

> You know, one of my favorite authors, Lewis Grizzard [1986], had a book called *Elvis is Dead and I Don't Feel So Good Myself*—a collection of brief essays, vignettes, and stories. Basically the point he was making was "Unless you're the lead dog, the view never changes." And I think that's so accurate. It means if you're always chasing it from the back, you're always looking right at somebody's rear end. But if you're in front, you can see what's coming. And I think as a school— I think we realized what was coming. (T97F)

Realizing what was coming and having the wherewithal to act on it could be two completely different things. Mr. Bass felt motivated by the "opportunities" he had to learn about the new reform in supportive ways. As Hargreaves (1997a) explained:

> While there are characteristics of the occupation as a whole that shape the life, work, and culture of teaching...*where* you are a teacher and *how* the work of teaching is organized in that place will significantly influence the kind of teacher you will become. (p. 1306, emphasis in the original)

Over the past decade, the where and how of Kentucky teachers have drawn much attention, yet the picture painted by policymakers and researchers has often been bleak (Jones & Whitford, 1997). This is particularly true because Kentucky represents a place where multiple reform efforts have converged into "one comprehensive set of mandates, ...Kentucky's Educational Reform Act" (Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, & Hill, 1998, p. 408). This kind of convergence calls for:

> Careful case-study research [that] can capture in some detail how professionals attend to (or ignore) reforms, interpret the meaning of reform activity, engage in reform-related work, and adopt (or reject) reform ideas as part of their practice. As part of this research, investigators must look systematically at the ways in which the different

> workplace conditions shape and are shaped by the impact of multiple
> reform initiatives. Such descriptions of contextual change and re-
> sponse to converging reforms have yet to be constructed. Lacking
> such descriptions, reformers are proceeding on the blind faith that
> their collective efforts can feasibly and usefully be incorporated into
> professional practice. (p. 415)

This article represents at least a part of our team's response to calls for
case-study research, particularly our agreement with Knapp et al.'s emphasis
on the need for detailed cases. It is in the details that social and human
capital are revealed. Furthermore, our selection of sites represents a particu-
lar view. Rather than focus on how schools attempted to meet the demands
of complex reform and failed, we set out to find successful schools.

It should be obvious that the path chosen by the four schools to suc-
cessfully meet the challenge of KERA was unique to each site still, there were
critical commonalties: their regard for history and heritage; the efficacy of
their cooperative leadership; their careful reflection on the reform itself,
which allowed them to teach to and well beyond the KIRIS test (as exem-
plified by writing); and, most importantly, their dedication to students. Yet,
these commonalties exist because of *relationships*—connections to place
and people—that are held together and supported by *trust* and *talk*.

The role of relationships in the four sites cannot be overemphasized.
The exemplary school descriptions suggest that willingness to meet the
needs of a new reform is often based on human relationships among prin-
cipals, teachers, and students. These relationships, in turn, influence the
desire to go out into the community to get what is needed to propel learning
forward. The schools characterized themselves as Fortune 500 companies
and universities where ongoing learning was key. However, the business
side of things was less critical than the emphasis on family. As Hargreaves
(1997b) explained:

> Openness, informality, care, attentiveness, lateral working relation-
> ships, reciprocal collaboration, candid and vibrant dialogue, and a
> willingness to face uncertainty together are the basic ingredients of
> effective school-community collaboration, not merely the emotional
> icing that adorns it. (p. 22)

Fullan (1997) agreed, "Along with moving to site-based management, re-
thinking staff development, assessment systems, and the like, the best way
to deal with change may be 'to improve relationships'" (p. 226).

In the four sites, close relationships existed because the participants
shared a vision of curriculum and a commitment to children. The social links
they established with each other, both personal and professional, inspired
individual teachers and principals to keep on learning, to challenge them-
selves to keep growing. As Spillane and Thompson (1997) suggested:

> [Places] that are rich in human capital (particularly the leaders' knowl-
> edge, skills, and dispositions) and social capital (vital connections to

> trustworthy sources of knowledge… and norms of collegiality and
> trust…) will get still richer in the human capital that ultimately matters
> most—the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers need to
> teach challenging subject matter effectively to a broad array of stu-
> dents. (p. 199)

Trust and talk create and confirm human and social capital. Part of the
trust in the schools was built by leaders whose longevity in their buildings
was critical. Research tells us that when this is not the case, the results can
be quite different: "Macmillan (1996) found that where it is the policy to
rotate principals through different schools, enduring staff cultures often suc-
cessfully resist the change efforts of leaders who are merely passing through"
(cited in Hargreaves, 1997a, p. 1309). However, trust is not just built over
time, but through a long-term commitment to a singular vision. Evans (1993),
for example, highlighted "the primacy of *authenticity* in leadership" and
explained:

> Authentic leaders link what they think, what they seek, and what they
> do…. Principals whose personal values and aspirations for their
> schools are consistent, coherent, and reflected in daily behavior are
> credible and inspire trust—they are leaders worth following into the
> uncertainties of change. (p. 21, emphasis in the original)

Leaders worth following are also leaders who listen; they leave their doors
and minds open to the comments, complaints, and convictions of their
faculty. They work to distribute the leadership rather than guard it for them-
selves. As Louis et al. (1996) suggested, "providing scheduled time for col-
laborative planning and giving teachers the responsibility to make key
decisions about school policy make strong contributions to professional
community" (p. 785). Setting aside the time and assigning responsibilities
could backfire if principals did not place a strong emphasis on substantive
talk. The way in which teachers speak with one another and with their
students can make a critical difference in the success of a reform. In the
creation of human and social capital, talk is key, a stand that is borne out
again and again in the research literature. For example, Lieberman and Miller
(1990) advocated "discussion about approaches to teaching and learning" (p.
763), Hargreaves (1997b) called it "candid and vibrant dialogue" (p. 22), and
Spillane (1999) termed it "rich deliberations" (p. 170). McDonnell (1994) also
stressed "deliberation" and cited Lord Lindsay who wrote about the "potency
of discussion. A good discussion can draw out wisdom which is attainable in
no other way" (p. 415).

To be sure, all principals, teachers, and students talk, but our partici-
pants maintained a discussion that focused on the wisdom of practice. In a
quote that bears repeating from Mr. George:

> What the administration has to do is provide a lot of conversation in
> the area. You do that by talking, and you talk about *instructional*

> areas, not the ball game tomorrow or buildings and grounds. You
> focus in on what it is that you want to improve. (P97F)

Our participants wanted to improve the quality of their curriculum, instruction, and assessment. They talked to, with, and about each other, and their tones were consistently tinged with "pride and respect." When they disagreed, they were open in their commentary, but their individual views were often sublimated to the larger good. As Mr. Bass told us when he disagreed with Mr. Push's unwillingness to distribute writing portfolio responsibilities among more teachers: "But once again, it goes back to the bottom line, and the bottom line is whatever this school needs to do to be the best, that's what we're going to do" (T97F).

There is another bottom line that we need to address before we close this piece. Mr. Bass characterized Eagleview Middle as doing "whatever [it] needs to do to be the best." Bluejay, Eastend, and Mt. Vernon were similarly inspired. Yet, policymakers as well as practitioners might question whether the schools' inspiration and inclination toward change were the result of KERA and its accountability demands (KIRIS), or whether they would have arrived at the same place on their own. In other words, were the changes that we described in these four schools "caused" by the reform? The answer, as is true of many complex questions, is both yes and no.

Let us begin with the answer, "no." Long before the onset of KERA, these schools already had a history and heritage of shared experiences. With the exception of Eagleview (which was only 3 years old at the beginning of our study), all the schools had time on their side. The principals had been there for years, and they as well as their faculty members had well-established links to the community. Even though Eagleview was relatively new, faculty members were long-time county insiders who had made a conscious choice to move to a reform-based site. In addition to longevity, the principals shared a vision of distributed leadership. When KERA mandated site-based decision making, the principals were already sharing decisions with faculty whom they described as "professionals" who were "intelligent," "outstanding," and "the cream of the crop."

Certainly, the human capital among faculty was notable; the teachers with whom we worked were leaders in their schools. When the reform appeared, they assumed leadership positions in their districts as well as in the state as cluster leaders, writing and mathematics regional coordinators, and DEs. As Ms. Roby explained, they wanted to "jump in there and get as high up on that [leadership ladder] as we can, to get the information first and help our building." The social capital was equally in place. They had already established trusting links to communicate with one another, through both work and play. These social links had allowed them to create innovative change within their institutions that predated KERA, such as the ungraded primary and inclusion programs at both Bluejay and Eastend and the accelerated mathematics program at Mt. Vernon.

The answer to the question of whether KERA/KIRIS caused change in these four sites is also "yes." The reasons are tied to financial as well as social capital. In this article, we have only touched on the huge shift in school finances that accompanied KERA. Change in support for professional development "increased dramatically, from $1.1 million in 1990-91 to $11.6 million in 1994-95" (Boston, 1996, p. 12). The resources Kentucky provided were clearly consequential for all four sites. For example, at several schools, summer stipends were provided for teachers to work on curriculum alignment. The importance of financial considerations was particularly true in eastern Kentucky, however. As Ms. Chief poignantly pointed out, "You could have heard an echo in any of the classrooms because of the small amount of materials as opposed to now."

Even more importantly, the financial capital expended helped to extend the schools' social capital. Teachers told us that, prior to the reform, they talked often about curriculum. However, the discussions at district, regional, and state reform meetings helped them enter into deeper and wider conversations—deeper because they talked about more substantive curriculum issues and wider because they were able to talk with teachers and curricular leaders from across the state. The conversations over writing are again illustrative. When we asked an eastern Kentucky writing coordinator how KERA had changed writing instruction, he replied: "I'm in writing and people ask me, 'Is it better?' And I say, 'Well, I don't know. We didn't have writing before.' I'm not kidding! We just taught grammar! I think the writing's just opened worlds for kids" (A96F).

Opening worlds for children meant introducing them to process writing and showing them that the purpose of writing is to make meaning. Grammar and spelling conventions are a means to an end, not the end point itself, and in constructing meaning, clear and creative communication always holds sway. In addition, such meaning-making can be altered and shaped for a variety of audiences and purposes and can take on a number of different forms. Yet, these essential understandings would be lost, or at least much diminished, if all the teachers had to do was prepare students for a once-a-year, on-demand prompt. Although this was a part of the state's assessment, the larger component was to help students compose several original and genre-varied portfolio pieces. The KIRIS writing portfolio, one of the most courageous pieces of assessment at the national level, made these understandings come alive.

The lessons shared by the writing teachers helped to illustrate this point. Mr. Bass discussed personal narrative and poetry to show that writing was not only personal expression, but a vital part of community life. Ms. Roby and Ms. Nicholl encouraged their children to revise their writing to make it "way up there," as well as to listen well to their peers' writing in order to offer the best criticism. Ms. Dawson's children learned to reflect on their writing, not only for their "letter to the reviewer" but to enhance their own critical self-reflection. Ms. Jazz, who had been teaching personal narratives for years, learned a completely new concept about the importance of "lessons

learned" in closing this particular genre. In reflecting on the lessons she had learned from the day of professional development with the regional writing coordinator, Ms. Jazz said: "You can't really say that you've internalized a concept until you have the words for it."

Giving words to teachers and children so they could internalize critical concepts was the driving force in the Kentucky reform. It is true that the schools were poised to listen well to the new vocabulary and enact the reform-based practices the words defined. However, teachers took these words and practices to heart through substantive discussion that occurred formally on core days and in weekly professional development sessions as well as more informally in daily team meetings and hall conversations. These extended deliberations strengthened the positive and trusting relationships that had already existed among participants, as they rolled up their sleeves to do the work of the reform. When we asked Ms. Chief what motivated her and her Bluejay University teachers to do the best they could do she replied:

> Because this is our home. These are all our kids. We love this school. We have a school spirit here that cannot be equal to any other, anywhere else, I'm sure.... We're not perfect... But we try all the time, each and every day to keep growing and keep learning. And in the face of any type of obstacle, we've always stuck together. We've laughed together. We've cried together. But the bottom line is we love these kids, we love this school, and there is NOTHING we won't do to make it a success. (P98S)

The "nothing" they, as well as their colleagues in the other exemplary sites, would not do included extensive and collaborative planning, shared leadership and vision, and dedication to high-level curriculum, instruction, and assessment to help all their students be the best that they could be. In a deceptively simple statement in her book about Appalachia, Rylant (1991) commented: "The owners of these good dogs work pretty hard" (p. 3). Yes. The participants in our study worked hard as well. But they worked the hardest on the relationships that connected them, the trust that sustained them, and the talk that supported them and propelled them forward, both personally and professionally, and, above all, for their children.

Notes

report do not reflect the positions or policies of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education.

[2]The authors express their heartfelt gratitude to the exemplary teachers and principals in Kentucky with whom they worked. Although their real names are submerged in pseudonyms, their lively voices resound through this guise of writing to bring their classroom and school life off the page and into the minds of our readers.

[3]Responding to concerns raised by educators, parents, and testing experts, the 1998 General Assembly passed House Bill 53, which effectively dismantled KIRIS and replaced it with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). However, during the years of this study (1996–1998), KIRIS was the accountability system in place.

[4]Kelley (1998) described the distinguished educator as "an exceptional educator from the state of Kentucky, hired and trained by the state to provide technical assistance to schools to help them meet accountability goals. Distinguished educators are on leave from their regular teaching or administrative assignments and are appointed for 1 year" (p. 307).

[5]The school site names as well as the names of all of the principals and teachers are pseudonyms selected by the participants themselves. In addition, all participants have read this article and approved its content as accurate representations of their sites.

[6]Jones and Whitford (1997) explained Kentucky's demand for continual improvement: "Setting the formula for establishing school threshold scores—the score each school must meet or exceed every two years to be rewarded and avoid sanctions—was an especially thorny problem. Based on the premise that 'all students can learn at high levels,' state education leaders decided that, in 20 years, schools must register a score of at least 'proficient,' defined numerically as 100 out of 140 possible points. By that time, the argument went, all students would have experienced a KERA-based school system from beginning to end. This reasoning then led to the creation of the following method for determining a school's threshold score. Since there are 10 two-year cycles in a 20-year span, in each cycle schools must gain one-tenth of the difference between their first baseline score and the target of 100. Thus, if a school originally scored 30 in 1992, its baseline would be 30, and its target for 1994 would be 37 (i.e., 10% of the remaining 70 points to get to 100). Each school is expected to reach or exceed its target during each two-year cycle. To say that teachers and school administrators feel that this is an arbitrary expectation is an enormous understatement. The assumption of a constant rate of growth, cycle after cycle, toward total 'proficiency' in 20 years has not been well received, to say the least" (p. 279). This is particularly true for schools that began with a high threshold score.

[7]The writing coordinator's view of his region's position was confirmed in Kelley's (1998) research: "In rural eastern Kentucky, principals and teachers in some schools indicated that the design of the program enabled them to compete for the first time ever on a level playing field with some of the best schools in Kentucky. The additional resources KERA provided and the focus of the program on student improvement...enabled these schools to be motivated to work toward an achievable goal" (p. 315).

[8] This comment is borne out in the research of Kelley and Protsik (1997) who studied six award-winning Kentucky schools: "In five of the six schools we visited, teachers and principals expressed how the burden of the assessment fell to the assessment grade-level teachers." As one of the researchers' informants explained, "we try to share the responsibility of the assessment, but when those test scores come in, teachers say 'How did the fourth-grade teachers do?'" (p. 498).

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