

Guided Democratic Inquiry: A Case Study in the Redesign of Local Policy

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Annotation: An accountability policy on student retention is re-designed through a local inquiry process based on democratic values. An embedded university faculty researcher, in collaboration with the superintendent, guides the collaborative action research. An external university faculty researcher examines multiple stakeholder decision making throughout the re-design process. The Guided Democratic Inquiry process allows stakeholder perspectives to be understood while promoting new learning that is applied to redesign the policy.

Abstract: This study within a study took place in a small rural district and sought to discover if an inquiry process based on democratic values and collaborative action research could result in the powerful organizational learning required to redesign and improve an externally driven accountability policy on student retention. A local professor constructed and guided the inquiry process in collaboration with the superintendent. An external researcher investigated the influences in multiple stakeholder decision making throughout the policy redesign process. The year-long effort reveals that Guided Democratic Inquiry promoted new individual and organizational learning that was successfully applied to the redesign of the policy on student retention, mediated competing powerful influences in multiple stakeholder decision making and supported the district to develop more effective practices with regard to student retention.

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Introduction

Like many other close knit, small rural communities, the Salmon Run Union School District (this and all other names used in this paper are pseudonyms) in Northern California enjoys the leadership of a school board committed to the education and welfare of children. As the standards movement intensified in the past several years, Salmon Run leaders and teachers saw stricter adherence to state standards as an opportunity to improve student performance. More control would be gained over both teaching and student learning through the application of state curriculum guidelines. To give teeth to compliance with state standards, the board and the superintendent in 1999 adopted a stringent retention policy that five years later resulted in 25% – 30% of the district's students being retained. Although many teachers conscientiously implemented the policy, some had doubts and found ways around it. In 2003, a different superintendent, in his third year, came to question the retention policy's impact on student achievement. In the fall of 2004, he initiated a process to investigate the effectiveness of the board's policy.

This study is a close examination of the board policy re-design process in the Salmon Run Union School District (SRUSD) from the dual perspectives of a participant observer and a non-participant observer. Superintendent Norm Parella, in partnership with one of the authors, established collaborative inquiry to engage district leaders—teachers, administrators, and board members—in what the superintendent calls a data-driven decision making process. The result is a modification of the district's retention policy that reflects a commitment to involving multiple stakeholders as peers in strategic

decision making, making student achievement a high priority for the district, and meeting accountability requirements as articulated by the state.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to understand how a specific inquiry method addresses the challenges of aligning local policy with state accountability requirements and supporting enhancement of student achievement. At the same time, the study analyzes how multiple stakeholders influence decision making that takes place within and as a result of open inquiry. By achieving these dual aims, this study demonstrates whether or not a collaborative process situated within democratic values yields desired outcomes in a high-stakes accountability context and to illuminate the dynamics of such a process.

Significance

Accountability pressures seem to lead to hierarchical, bureaucratic responses from education leaders (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Elmore, 2004; Mintrop, 2004; O’Day, 2004). By studying the effects of a collaborative method of responding to accountability needs, this article enhances both the policy literature related to compliance with federal and state mandates and the leadership literature that informs decision making and leadership style issues. Simultaneously using a multiple stakeholder lens to analyze what happens within collaborative inquiry gives us the unique opportunity to explore the dynamics of a process that yields specific decision outcomes.

The study-within-a-study nature of this article presents an unusual picture of inquiry and decision making regarding student retention and promotion—an issue of central importance to students, families, teachers, and leaders. The result is a practical

application for education leaders striving to engage in collaborative decision making with integrity while fulfilling the basic need to be accountable to local, state, and federal officials.

Research Questions

To guide our exploration of collaborative decision making involving multiple stakeholders, we ask the following research questions:

1. Is it possible for a school district to redesign board policy that addresses state-imposed accountability using democratic processes?
2. What are the characteristics of democratic decision processes focused on local policy re-design?
3. How do multiple stakeholders influence democratic processes?

Conceptual Framework

To explore and understand the local policy re-design process that occurred in SRUSD requires a multidimensional frame. Key concepts include the tension between accountability and democracy, the need for new knowledge, practitioners as researchers, and multiple stakeholder decision making. We discuss each of these concepts in detail below and demonstrate how they fit together in Salmon Run after providing a brief contextual overview.

Research Context

In advance of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and closely related to the standards-based reform and accountability movement that spawned it, the State of California passed legislation intended to reduce or eliminate social promotion (California

Education Code 48070-48070.5, 1999). The SRUSD school board, at the urging of the superintendent at the time, adopted a strict retention policy. Board and community members were proud of this policy because it demonstrated their commitment to high standards. The superintendent further bolstered support for this strict retention policy by raising the prospect of personal legal liability for teachers and general liability for the district if students were permitted to graduate from eighth grade without having met state standards.

Five years later, with Superintendent Parella in place, concerns about the strict retention policy were common. Creative insubordination (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) was apparent through the variation in primary teachers' retention rates. Even some board members were having second thoughts as they confronted difficult cases in which retention appeared to be an inappropriate response to learning difficulties.

In light of growing doubts about the effectiveness of the retention policy, Superintendent Parella took an unusual step in the history of this district. He sought outside help from one of the authors, a faculty member at the local state university. Discussions over the nature of the problem ensued and a collegial partnership was formed to address the issue of policy study and possible redesign. Parella and his university partner decided to create the Policy Review Committee (PRC), made up of teachers and administrators from all three school sites, two board members, and the superintendent. Thus, Superintendent Parella committed himself to a decision making process that had the potential to be democratic in nature and that involved multiple stakeholders with multiple objectives.

Accountability and Democracy

Educational accountability is a persistent and politically attractive set of solutions to perceived problems within American public education (Elmore, 2004; Mintrop, 2004). Accountability goals are worthy—improve student learning, close gaps among various student populations, produce individuals who can think critically, and assist both individuals and the nation to be more competitive economically (Carr & Artman, 2002; Elmore, 2004; Millman, 1997; Mintrop, 2004; Odden, 1995)—yet results are mixed (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; O’Day, 2004). The darker side of accountability stresses an external locus of control over learners (Frymier, 1996) and psychometric imperialism over the ever-narrowing curriculum (Madaus, 1999).

Democracy, in contrast, represents the foundation of the social, ethical and civic purposes of education in the U.S. (Dewey, 1916). Democracy in education supports growth of the individual and community towards responsibility and an internal locus of control (Frymier, 1996), rests on inquiry, and aligns with one of the most enduring purposes of public education in the U.S. articulated by Jefferson—preparation of citizens (Heslep, 1969). In addition, democracy plays a critical role in decision-making about local curriculum (Campbell, 2004). The acronym IDEALS succinctly expresses the important characteristics of democratic decision making: inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, leadership and service. (O’Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000).

Substantial dialectical tension exists between accountability and democracy. However, we hypothesize that the constructive goals of accountability can be reached more effectively and with greater commitment under democratic conditions. The SRUSD case tests this hypothesis.

Acquiring New Knowledge: Practitioners as Researchers

Although the accountability movement's goal of improving student achievement is indisputably worthy, how to achieve the goal is not clear. The most difficult part of the improvement puzzle may be motivating students and teachers to address accountability standards without losing quality, authentic instruction and diversity in the educational program (Linn & Baker, 2004). If it is true that schools do not currently know how to fix the problems that mandated testing seems to surface, then schools and districts must create new knowledge if they are to succeed. Simply handing educators research results to improve teaching is likely to have little effect because people are more likely to accept and use research findings if they helped design the research (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945) and carry it out (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004); and innovations rarely take hold unless potential users know and trust those who propose them (Rogers, 2003).

In an effort to help SRUSD acquire the new knowledge necessary to adjust local policy in a manner that meets student achievement and state accountability requirements, one of the authors constructed what we have come to call Guided Democratic Inquiry (GDI). This process rests on the values that guide O'Hair et al.'s (2000) vision of education for democracy and incorporates Argyris' (1992) three fundamental steps for organizational learning: (a) identifying espoused theories (what people say they want) (b) testing espoused theories against evidence from the literature and from action research to determine alignment with theories-in-use (what people actually do), and (c) re-designing policy in a manner that helps to align theories-in-use more closely with espoused theories.

Multiple Stakeholder Decision Making

Setting up the Guided Democratic Inquiry process in and of itself does not dictate an equal playing field for all participants. Each of the multiple stakeholders comes to the process of re-designing the retention policy with different levels and sources of power, legitimacy, and urgency and various objectives arranged in particular hierarchies (Winn & Keller, 1999; 2001). All of the stakeholders are arranged in a web of influence with Superintendent Parella at the center as the ultimate decision maker because he is required to submit a recommendation to the school board regarding the retention policy. How he would finally make the strategic decision of what recommendation to make to the board would be played out based on what stakeholders want and how influential they are during deliberations (Brazer & Keller, 2006).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative methods to answer the three research questions regarding the feasibility of democratic process for redesign of local policy, the characteristics of such a process, and the influence of multiple stakeholders on democratic activity. Together, we employ two different perspectives to collect and analyze data. One author served as the designer-facilitator for SRUSD's deliberative process regarding the retention and promotion policy. He was a participant observer and assisted action research groups to gather evidence through both surveys of school community members and standardized test data analysis. The second author came to the district as an outside observer interested in studying multiple stakeholder decision making. He attended a few of the facilitated meetings, engaged committee members in interviews, and collected quantitative data from surveys of the PRC and district-wide

employees. Quantitative data are not used in this article. Despite having a somewhat different research agenda, the second author provides qualitative data from a non-participant observer perspective that is relevant to this study. The result is a study-within-a study in which the first author examines results from his facilitation efforts and the second author views the process from a wider-angle perspective to determine the influence of multiple stakeholders within GDI.

Data Collection

A total of ten meetings were convened with one author in place as facilitator. After each meeting, he made journal entries about how the district was progressing toward a decision regarding the retention and promotion policy and what appeared to be happening with regard to creating and sustaining GDI. The second author was present on two separate occasions to conduct interviews and observe PRC meetings. Both authors interviewed nine of the twelve members of the PRC, including the superintendent, one of the two board members on the committee, the two principals on the committee and five teachers.

Data Analysis

Journal entries, observations, and interviews were all coded according to components of this study's conceptual framework, concepts from a multiple stakeholder model of educational decision making (Brazer & Keller, 2006), and ideas that emerged from reading field notes and interview transcripts. Coded qualitative data were then sorted to create categories of actions and results that emerged from sources. We took this sorted material and searched for themes that make connections among the categories of

what happens in GDI consistent with the conceptual framework (Maxwell, 2005).

Analysis was also conducted throughout the policy redesign process based upon a reflective, minor perspective (Kvale, 1996). Interesting nuggets or surprises emerged from the participant observer's expectations and the committee members' responses to the literature they read and data they collected. As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), we created multiple drafts of a tentative case study in order to come to a clearer understanding of what we had witnessed in Salmon Run.

Findings

The superintendent and consulting professor worked as a team to develop a committee and a process that would resolve the dialectic between accountability and democracy. The central idea was to respond to accountability demands in a manner that is in the best interest of SRUSD's students. A core belief of both the GDI facilitators, superintendent and professor, is that new knowledge would be created through democratic, collaborative inquiry.

Stepping into such a process required board members, administrators, and teachers interacting in new ways with each other and with the superintendent, particularly given the strict hierarchy of district administration prior to Superintendent Parella's arrival. The former administration, from a principal's perspective, simply wasn't "...interested in hearing what other people had to say, the decision was already made, their mind was made up."

In stark contrast, Parella sought out "...the best thinking of the committee." A teacher participant on the advisory committee framed the change even more dramatically as, "...not only are we talking about policy here, but we're talking about a change in the

way we as a whole district...work together in a way that many, many teachers...would [n]ever have thought would happen.”

The PRC was established to represent all of the school district’s teachers, principals, board members, and the superintendent. Parents are notably absent from the PRC, a fact grounded in the passivity and lack of education of the parent community. A value set down from the beginning is that Superintendent Parella would treat this group, practically speaking, as the decision making body for the retention policy. Parella explained, “...the intent is to tap into and to hear, and then draw everyone towards a consensus ...trying to converge on a best answer rather than let a ...person of greater influence prevail.” The PRC would determine the answers to two questions: (a) Does the retention policy require modification? and (b) If the policy needs to be modified, then how should it be modified?

Guided Democratic Inquiry in SRUSD surfaced espoused theories among group members through an open process of listing beliefs and concerns (Hall & Hord, 1987) about student retention for all to see. Inviting PRC members to discuss retention opened the floodgates to authentic dialogue including formerly undiscussable issues (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Crucial at the outset was the sincere invitation by the superintendent to join as equals in the adventure of a journey of research and discovery with answers unknown to any member involved. The superintendent scrupulously maintained a neutral, non-influential stance during PRC discussions and provided support in many forms, from clerical to released time.

Establishment of the PRC and agreement about a process provide background to answering our first research question regarding the feasibility of using a democratic

process to modify local policy. Both the representation on the PRC and Superintendent Parella's treatment of the group are critical issues. Internal stakeholders are well represented and the superintendent was remarkably disciplined in allowing PRC members to work out the issues for themselves without imposing his will, or even his opinion, on the group. Parella's own description of the way he wanted to be perceived by the PRC placed him as

...an ex-officio member, a recorder, a facilitator in terms of the leg work, not the actual process.... I consciously tried to stay out of the dialogue through most of the committee activity to ensure that everybody really felt that they had as much power as everybody else on the committee.

The clearest evidence that the PRC engaged in democratic processes comes from members' perceptions of how Parella treated the group and how they interacted with one another. Parella succeeded in conveying to the group that he had an open mind regarding the direction the retention policy should take and that he genuinely wanted the group to learn about the issues and come to their own conclusions. One teacher expressed her understanding of what Parella intended: "It seems like everybody has an equal say in it. You would assume that [Norm] has a lot more influence, but he's really kind of held back. I don't feel like we're really being dictated to at all." Another teacher concluded succinctly, "He wants us to work like a community."

Opening up groups with multiple interests to discussion and decision making runs the risk of creating a power vacuum that certain individuals might try to fill. We did not observe this with the PRC, however. There were moments when one of the board members asserted the power of his position and attempted to steer the group into a

particular direction. His confrontational attempt to trump the PRC's learning experience and use position power to maintain the status quo began as "...this isn't going to fly....this is never going to get past the board so you're kidding yourself..." Group norms were powerful enough to overcome these attempts, however, and the PRC went on to craft a revision of the retention policy that was ultimately unanimously approved by the board. Thus, despite the symbolic and real power of accountability, the status quo, and a strict retention policy, we find that re-design of board policy can happen through democratic processes.

Having established a deliberative committee and placing all members on an equal footing, the next issue is what happens in the committee that leads to a particular decision. At this point, we take up the second research question: What are the characteristics of democratic decision processes focused on local policy re-design?

Given strong feelings about how the retention policy was established five years before and experience working with it, Parella and the consulting professor needed a means to take PRC members out of their pre-conceived beliefs about promotion and retention into a more knowledge-based or, in the words of Superintendent Parella, data-driven decision making mode. This step was critical for making the PRC a persuasive advisor to the board regarding the policy. To acquire the new knowledge necessary, the PRC was guided through a two-pronged approach. The first was to discover what published literature had to say about the effects of retention and the second was to engage in action research to determine how the effects of retention are perceived inside the school district and in the community at large.

While surfacing espoused theories exposed the differences within the group, a year of reading the literature on retention and conducting local action research regarding the effects of the current policy helped to reveal the degree to which those espoused theories aligned with current practice, or theories-in-use. Throughout this process of testing espoused theories against literature and local evidence, an important role of the GDI facilitators was to help the PRC break out of the district's deeply embedded acceptance of preconceived outcomes and autocratic decision-making. The parameters of knowledge would now expand beyond teacher, superintendent and board member values and experience alone.

PRC members were guided to generate revised espoused theories through stages that allowed time for reflection, provided separation of findings and results from conclusions and insured transparency so that all data from literature and local action research was seen and discussed by all committee members. Reading the literature on retention combined with the results and findings of local action research helped PRC members to construct the new learning that was ultimately applied as policy redesign.

Interview data provides clear evidence that the process of discovery and learning had the desired effect of bringing PRC members to a new understanding of the effects of retention—both historically nationally and in the present locally. One teacher who enjoyed much respect as a union official and informal leader explained that she deeply believed in the idea of

what a gift it was to have an opportunity to have a second year of first grade...a gift of time,...so that the second, third and fourth grade were going to be so much easier. I truly believed that with all my heart. It wasn't a sell job.

This teacher cried during a PRC meeting when she discovered from collaborative action research that students she retained remained far below standards several years later in higher grades. “I realized we were missing something about the way children learn, or are not learning. I think we were looking at my class as a cure. It wasn’t.”

The board member on the PRC served during the period of initial adoption of the retention policy and expressed an equally dramatic change in understanding. Initial conversations indicated great pride in the fact that, “kids would be held accountable...” and that social promotion would be ended even if a student had already been twice retained.

We’re not just going to do nothing. Something’s got to be done. We’re not going to socially promote this kid because he couldn’t make it twice. [I]f he’s just being lazy and not doing the work, then we’re going to retain him.

Reading the literature, seeing and discussing the fact that retained students were not improving their achievement two years after being retained and time for reflection produced the statement from this board member that led the way for policy re-design: “We’ve got to do something for these kids!”

What kinds of data could elicit such powerful shifts in understanding? The teacher who chaired a sub committee to learn about faculty attitudes toward retention reported that matched scores on the California Standards Test over three consecutive years for retained students in Math and English Language Arts were the most significant factor in changing minds. Although the policy had eliminated social promotion, it’s objectively documented lack of success in lifting student learning to standards brought into sharp relief the values on which it was based. The effect was universal for the PRC.

Guided Democratic Inquiry provides a means for managing the learning process necessary for multiple stakeholders to come to consensus about how to make strategic change. In SRUSD it provided the catalyst necessary to move teachers, administrators, and board members out of a previous perspective so that all could implement a change intended to improve the district’s response to accountability pressures. Perhaps more important, GDI helped the school district community to modify the policy such that members of the PRC and the board could believe that it was more helpful to students and their parents striving to meet state-determined learning standards. Table 1 displays the specific characteristics of the democratic decision process employed.

Table 1. Steps of Guided Democratic Inquiry in Salmon Run

Activity	Description	Facilitator Role
<i>Step 1</i> Identify espoused theories	Share, discuss, chart concerns and beliefs. Read literature, frame issues. Open, honest dialogue.	Insure democratic values of inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, leadership to community
<i>Step 2</i> Test and revise espoused theories	Compare espoused theories with literature and theories-in-use: Pose questions and conduct local action research, results and learning reported to all.	Supportive thoughtful feedback, reflection, expertise
<i>Step 3</i> Apply revised espoused theories to policy revision	Subcommittees give results of questionnaires and Calif. Standards Test to whole committee. Discussion.	Buffer against power, urgency; create safe space for thought, expression.
<i>Step 4</i> Superintendent recommendation, board consideration	Superintendent crafts revisions from inquiry results and learning. Seeks feedback from committee prior to recommendation to board	Consult, reflect, support superintendent

The notion of inquiry posits from the outset that issues to be discussed are the subjects of investigation, not the focus for exercises in power or control. In step 1 and throughout the process, both superintendent and professor who empower the inquiry must lead under the proposition that the solutions sought in the specific context are unknown. The authenticity of the stance is validated by treating the PRC with respect—the results of the work count and will be applied.

Understanding and supporting the emotional aspect of practitioner learning is also a key. When belief-based practice in step 2 is challenged through inquiry, long held values may also be questioned. It is important to dampen the group's feeling of urgency to resolve the problem quickly so that difficult issues such as changed values can be fully explored and discussed. In SRUSD, slowing the process down and tolerating ambiguity resulted in deeper collaboration. Facilitators explicitly reassured participants that the result of their unhurried, reflective learning would take form in significant action.

The process did not eliminate the difficulty for practitioners to remain objective in the face of data when such data conflicted with their own practice-based belief systems. In order to understand the implications of the research and accept the need for change in steps 3 and 4, practitioners needed authentic triangulation that included reading the literature around the issue and intense discussion using data acquired through local action research. Once teachers were involved in the research, their role took on a kind of democratic community activism that the local school board both welcomed and could not resist.

By design, the PRC engaged in a multiple stakeholder decision making process intended to craft a meaningful policy revision and generate commitment to that decision

so it would be implemented with reasonable fidelity. By all accounts, Superintendent Parella succeeded in keeping members of this group relatively equal in their influence on the ultimate decision, allowing for divergent views and discussion during the learning process and strong consensus around the ultimate policy revision recommendation. This is no mean feat considering the hierarchical history in the district and status differences among the superintendent, the board members, the administrators, and the teachers. Appreciating the new conditions, a principal stated, "...there is an attempt to work with teachers as peers and not as, 'I'm the boss and we're going to do it my way.'"

The third research question asks, How do multiple stakeholders influence democratic processes? The answer in SRUSD is that they exercise influence on the basis of their understanding of published literature and their own action research and their persuasiveness within the group. Striking about this finding is the absence of position power. The three most important factors contributing to this outcome are (a) the superintendent's pursuit of an inquiry process to make change and his recruitment of an academic consultant to work with him to design such a process; (b) adherence to GDI in a manner that valued each committee member's learning and emphasized decision making grounded in the group's conclusions from published literature and local action research; and (c) the superintendent's ability to refrain from imposing his preconceived ideas and his will on the group—a key element in preserving democracy. Parella valued all participants:

...the intent, our objective was to involve staff in the research and inquiry that would lead to policy revision. ...the key part was to ensure that staff perceived that there wasn't a predetermined answer that we were marching everybody to....

Supporting the superintendent and professor's efforts to engage in GDI as a means to crafting a more effective board policy is the fact that most of the various stakeholders shared common objectives. Parella stated his student centered perspective clearly:

I was very concerned about the effect of the policy's implementation on students and wanted to know if in fact it was having a positive or negative effect.... The number one objective is to make a policy that supports students...that isn't punitive, doesn't punish students for lack of academic success but would be more of a support to them so that they can be successful.

A board member echoed Parella: "I'm here for the kids....what are you going to do to get this kid to the next level?" A teacher indicated her objective was to "... get clear on retention, whether it is positive or negative [for students]." A principal stated simply, "student needs."

It is difficult to tell if objectives came to be aligned because of basic beliefs about the five year experience with the policy, because of reading the same literature and reviewing results of action research, or a combination of the two. All members of the PRC reported that talking together about their experiences supported the most powerful learning. Thus, group learning experiences seem vital to enhancing democratic processes and placing participants in multiple stakeholder decision making on a more equal footing. A principal identified the development of new understanding as a combination of literature, collaborative action research and reflection on practice.

I think the research [literature and action research] changed the mind of some of the teachers. Even though some of the research had been presented at the very

beginning, I don't think it soaked in...it didn't connect with them. Most had a mind set when the policy was put in like we need to hold these kids accountable and this is a good thing...we're going to hold the stakeholders accountable. And so they ignored some of that research. But once they saw the research again and combined it with some of what they were starting to already feel or think, it really resonated with them, like this isn't the right way to do things. The teachers I saw kind of made a shift on how they viewed retention....they had personal experience to tie to it.

New learning for both individuals and the organization was accomplished and applied in a manner that could change both individual and organizational performance. Guided Democratic Inquiry provided a means through which multiple stakeholder decision making could take place with roughly equal amounts of power, legitimacy, and urgency. This collaborative environment allowed local action research to inform policy redesign. The juggernaut of external accountability which often has resulted in bureaucratic reaction instead of organizational learning was tamed and harnessed to new knowledge in the redesigned policy.

Conclusion

The achievement of the ambitious goals of the accountability movement is still far off for many districts like SRUSD. New knowledge must be created at the local level to provide increased capacity for districts to meet standards (Elmore, 2004). In this study we have shown that the application of democratic principles to a collaborative process of inquiry helps to create the new knowledge required to redesign a policy and re-orient the district toward the student-centered values it espouses.

In our case study, GDI is grounded both in the values of democracy and in the processes of practitioner-researcher and organizational learning. The externally driven accountability policy was redesigned and improved by re-framing issues through the lens of O'Hair, et al. (2000) democratic values of inquiry, discourse, authenticity, equity, leadership and service. The business-based ideology that stands behind the accountability movement can be applied more successfully in its worthiest aspirations when tamed by local democracy in action.

This case study suggests that inquiry based in collaborative action research, mediates the intensity of individual stakeholders' influence. At the same time the inquiry process makes space for the kind of learning that may be applied in such a way as to re-frame competing interests around common values. Guided Democratic Inquiry frames power, legitimacy and urgency within democracy in action, fosters democratic values and opens a door for local action research that sheds new light on conditioned perspectives.

Guided Democratic Inquiry shows promise as a method that education leaders can use to work through difficult, value-laden instructional issues. Norm Parella demonstrates that GDI requires a commitment from high level leadership to put aside temptations to exercise position power and hurry through to implementation. His patience and steadfast refusal to dominate or short-circuit the deliberative process in SRUSD allowed genuine learning to occur and to affect board policy.

We anticipate returning to SRUSD to analyze the implementation and effects of the new policy. In the process, we will explore the evolving dynamic among multiple stakeholders with multiple objectives engaged in decision making.

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