

Foreword

Talk is cheap these days when it comes to accountability. Everyone in education makes noises now about its importance and the need to move forward with an effective plan. But precious little has been done to turn “accountability of schools” into what the phrase really means: a manageable and credible system of ongoing feedback. Beverly Parsons has done the remarkable then: written a book chock-full of helpful and wise advice on how to collect information and use it to improve schooling—without overwhelming us with typical approaches to data collection that are neither feasible nor useful.

More important, perhaps, her book makes clear that evaluative inquiry is not an onerous chore. Rather, we are regularly reminded here that collegial consideration of what works, what doesn’t, and why is engaging activity—interesting and enjoyable professional work—if we are willing to overcome our fear and inertia to give it a try. In fact, accountability will only become the norm, not the exception, in schools when faculties are invited to become better collegial researchers into their own practice—invited to understand their own effects better (as opposed to being pressured by simplistic directives) as part of the job.

What is true for students about genuine learning is true for teachers, in other words: understandings are constructed—uncovered, not covered—through the asking and pursuing of important questions, in this case about results versus intentions. We cannot reasonably expect students to develop a deeper understanding of possibilities and obligations unless teachers are helped to have the same ongoing experience.

Parsons makes the case elegantly and practically that “professional development” must be recast as ongoing inquiry into the effects of our teaching, in other words, through the use of such tools as the elegant five-stage process described herein. Her book offers a sorely needed map for getting us to our destination in school reform: a place where we constantly promote and tap our collective pedagog-

ical wisdom. She alerts us to a lost truth: The truly “effective” school is not some idealized static institution but a responsive and purposeful place.

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