Chapter 3. Outcomes with a Public Face

The two cases in Chapter 2 revealed learning outcomes which may normally remain unseen. Some were surprising outcomes in which students transferred and even transformed what the combination of new ideas and experience had offered them to problematic personal, professional, and public lives. There, Case 1 suggested how a simple research tool, such as comparing easily coded critical incident interviews to what we hoped to teach, can give a clear measure of transfer to real-life situations. Case 2 drew on the rich, theoretically based tool of activity analysis to locate explicit instances of transfer in the social, cultural, cognitive context of an activity system. And in that case, when students worked out their own interpretations of outcome data, their collaborative work of tracking and discussing transformation became in itself a revealing educational experience—for everyone. Here, we turn to two cases in which engaged education can create a different set of public-facing outcomes. Despite their importance, they are also often more challenging to track.

Case 1: Altering Institutional Practice

This case returns to the Independent Student Think Tank (Chapter 2, Case 2) with a much harder challenge: how do you track a public impact, if there is any, that a course actually has? When the search for consequence shifts to the larger context of an institution or a community, we tend to ask, *what* is transferred: a report, an assessment, a tool, a program, and how? We can, of course, point to the literal publication of a text or the transfer of a "deliverable." On the other hand, tracking the less tangible outcomes, such as the possible impact of an altered discourse or the way a problem is framed, may require us to shift both our expectations and our methods. Like a tracker, we may need scatter vision to detect subtle movements in the trees, or the close, patient focus that eventually discerns the faint impression of a hoof. Many service projects do indeed see tangible, short-term effects and have developed a battery of useful tools to access attitudes and skills. However, the consequences of rhetorical engagement, of inquiry, and of deliberation are unlikely to be either direct or immediate. To begin with, such outcomes are neither defined nor produced according to our design specs but created according to the needs of our institutional or community partners. Unlike work teams or policymakers crafting coordinated action, the intentionally diverse set of folks who participate in community conversations, for instance, do so with the distinctive agendas dictated by their own activity system, and they go back home to its established set of goals, tasks, and practices. So the outcome—beyond the value of creating dialogue in the first place—is typically to be found in terms of each partner's own home agenda.

The Case

As the rhetorical exigence for the Community Literacy Center's Impact Report to funders suggested (Chapter 2, Case 1) showed, we may need to invent new, more-sensitive indicators of transformation and the categories of meaningful change that both students and collaborators can see. For example, in *Because We Live Here*, Eli Goldblatt's engaging, influential narrative of university/community program-building, he describes a year-long series of energetic coffeehouse conversations and plans with a community organizer from which the only apparent result was mutual insight and a strong relationship. No project emerged from those conversations, as urgent issues in the organizer's work took precedent. So why did their meaningful dialogue count as a significant outcome?

Likewise, Elenore Long's case studies open up the rarely studied, often-extended process she calls "early uptake"—the initial rhetorical art of listening and finding one's place in a community or local public (*A Responsive Rhetorical Art*). It's the work of figuring out, as Jeffrey Grabill puts it, "how to be useful" (Grabill 193). "Co-constructed among strangers . . . diverse stakeholders, value system, interests, practices and purpose," this responsive "attentive rhetoricity . . . signals a shared stance within public dialogue that engaged the demands of contemporary public life" (Long, Responsive 15-16). But in this case, being useful stood in sharp contrast to the expected outcomes of a university outreach program. The community was a disorganized, physically, socially and linguistically divided body of refugees from the Sudanese diaspora who had been relocated to Phoenix. And the strategies its women employed to navigate these transnational social worlds were often criticized as maladaptive by the professionals, such as educational administrators who design academic "outreach" programs that reflect structural requirements for assimilation. And that was the outcome Long supposedly should have been achieving. However, her "early uptake" attention to women's lives suggested that it was not the women but the traditional institutional interventions that were out of synch with their reality (see Chapter 6 for what early uptake did achieve).

Stepping into such a vortex, the community educator is not only trying to find her own place but also trying to help create a place to work from—i.e., an inclusive, multilingual, deliberative network where people can find their voice, define their own agenda, and achieve small victories and incremental changes through collaborative inquiry and support. It takes the stance Long describes as a responsive rhetorical art—a techné of eliciting and interpreting a group's real concerns—to discover useful ways to enter. For educators like Long, milestones and outcomes on this nonlinear path can take unexpected shapes, such as learning how to artfully negotiate hurdles that the city's outreach programs themselves put in the way of actually useful learning—while at the same time facing somewhat similar cultural tensions within the South Sudanese diaspora. As Long documents, the ability to progressively influence these assumptions and support new frameworks for being useful may have longer-lasting consequences than the more-visible outcome of mounting a traditional "literacy" project. But how do you go public with extra-institutional outcomes like these? Do they count?

Another potential category of hard to see outcomes to consider are the reciprocal ones in which both partners are discovering/sharing something. The title of Eli Goldblatt and David Jolliffe's book, *Literacy as Conversation: Learning Networks in Urban and Rural Communities* names the underlying dynamic. Goldblatt quotes,

> James Britton's (1995, 140) brilliant phrase "shaping at the point of utterance" which as he says, "sets up a demand for further shaping." And for the kids coming to Philadelphia's non-profit community Tree House, it "affords a space for 'shaping' that involves composing and interpreting, speaking and listening in the company of others. Conversation, both written and oral . . . draws people together into mutually respectful relations". And in this case, "over the years, easily a hundred college students interacted with Tree House children and parents, plus hundreds of others the organization touches." (69)

Just as Long used her community participation to conceptualize the nature of a responsive art and design new forms of engagement, the projects Jennifer Clifton describes were designed to call a deliberative public of students and various community partners into being. She sketches a reciprocal alternative to the way argument is taught in English language arts and first year composition classrooms. Describing the contrast between a genre-driven practice of text production and the "public listening" that marks successful publics, she then sketches an alternative educational model of argument. The goal in this model is not to produce a formally supported "argument" but to orchestrate a literal "dialogue across difference." But this, which this was not what her department expected, created a controversy

The question, of course, is how do dialogues such as these lead to both personal and visible positive institutional change? On that path, two potent-yet-often-indirect outcomes of dialogue depend, first, on moving both partners into the stance of inquiry—that open-ended recognition that there are significant things we don't know and need to discover. And this, in turn, can lead to an internal "reframing" of our knowledge, which emerged in light of inquiry. Rhetoricians of all stripes strive to strategically "reframe" issues for an audience in the name of a public good or self-interest. Although in our case, the goal is to reframe by discovering what we didn't know in the first place. As we will see in Chapter 4, discussions across race and differences in the internal, situated knowledge each partner may possess can be an enormous, unrecognized, unarticulated barrier.

In this context, one of strongest arguments for a theoretically grounded methodology that is designed not just to create new "knowledge" but to also drive social change comes from Aja Y. Martinez in her chapter called, "A Case for Counterstory." As she explains it in the context of community engagement around race, this "critical race methodology includes a range of methods such as family history, biography, autoethnography, cuentos, testimonios, and counterstory (3). The technique, however, is secondary to its driving premise: this methodology "recognizes that experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices" (3). This disguise matters because:

> a majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences of people of color and others distanced from the norms such stories reproduce. A standardized majoritarian methodology relies on stock stereotypes that covertly and overtly link people of color, women of color, and poverty with "bad," while emphasizing that white, middle- and/or upper-class people embody all that is "good." (23)

When the outcome of discovery is not merely information but the substantive reframing of a method of inquiry as she describes it, the impact can be both far-reaching and shared. In all of these studies, we see an array of non-material outcomes that emerge through talk, through social networks, and over time. Evaluating such outcomes will call for attunement to what John Dewey calls progressive "ends-in-view" rather than a fixed end or the point where activity ceases ("Nature of Aims"). And since institutional outcomes are rarely articulated as such, how can we recognize and argue for anything like a public, sociocultural "consequential transition" (Beach)?

Using the Lenses of Circulation, Conflict and Framing.

I admit to an academic attachment to measuring outcomes in terms of written documents, data, or organized public projects; these are satisfying and often influential. But a closer analysis of less obvious indicators—such as those Goldblatt, Long, Clifton, and Martinez describe—could reveal another level of meaningful learning for all of their participants. Studies of how rhetorically influenced change happens in publics and in organizations, for instance, would direct our attention to three areas in particular: expanding the reach of circulation, responding to sites of conflict, and, creating the new interpretive frames that build social networks.

One of the powerful ways rhetoric infiltrates a public and nudges change is through the circulation of ideas and identities. Circulation whether in print, media, tweets, or conversation—creates publics (not to be confused with the demographic models of publics created by marketers) (Hauser). A public, as Michael Warner so memorably argues in *Publics and Counter*publics, is created by mere attention which says, "Not only 'Let a public exist' but let it have this character, speak this way, see the world this way . . . Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes" (114). One important outcome of educating for engagement would be whether such a public is created, and if so, what exactly has your action put into circulation? And why does it matter?

As we saw in Engeström's model of activity analysis (Chapter 2, Case 2), the potential for and the sites of change are often found in those jagged lines in Figure 2.2 that mark "contradictions" ("Developmental"). These are points of tension within a system or between alternative systems—whether the conflict is articulated and acknowledged or not. For example, the comfortable structures of habitus, such as standard institutional practices for informing students about loan regulations, normally do serve a purpose for someone. Yet they may be at odds with the support others who don't fit the norm, such as Independent students, actually need. And authority may be so fragmented across a university system that a more inclusive, coordinated plan is unlikely to emerge. However, it is these very points of contradiction in the system, Engeström argues, that offer openings and sites for change—when they are acknowledged. And as his research with healthcare providers and teachers shows, such recognition may only come after multiple flags are run up by persistent calls for attention (Engeström "Developmental"; "Teachers").

So what kinds of thinking can rhetoric put into circulation that will support the recognition of contradiction, conflict, and the need to change? First, unlike the more tangible innovations other disciplines can boast, these community-based deliberative events can be intentionally designed to draw out competing representations, assumptions, and values, as well as the conflicts they engender—to create a space for generative conflict. And in doing so, as in political or policy discourse, they often go beyond producing information to actually constructing and circulating new frames for thinking with. As policy analysts put it so well, by "socially constructing the problem situation, a frame 'provides conceptual coherence, a direction for action, a basis for persuasion, and a framework for the collection and analysis of data—order, action, rhetoric, and analysis'" (Rein and Schoen, qtd. in Fischer 144). As discursive constructions designed to do "meaning work," these new frames are unlike widely shared schemas or cultural "tool kits" already supplied by ideology, narratives, or myths. Rather, such frames are actively negotiated shared meanings that not only identify problems and possible solutions but motivate a response, creating a call to arms and a vocabulary of motive (Benford and Snow 613-618).

As these new guides to interpretation circulate through academic and community dialogue, they are also creating a local public, a newly constituted body of people paying attention, maybe even widening the scope of the public through talk, text, or citation. (Perhaps even this published discussion will extend the public drawn together around recognizing, investigating, and discussing the nature of some overlooked educational outcomes? Perhaps the frame of an "Independent" versus an "at-risk" or "under-prepared" student could reshape our image of the problem?) So an alternative way to follow the tracks of circulation is to map not only the “reading public” as Warner does but also the social networks being created: who is now talking to whom, and what is the topic of this potentially “reframed” conversation? In organizational studies, it has become a commonplace understanding that the coordination of work is typically negotiated in employee networks. Moreover, diversified personal networks improve performance and promote learning and innovation in the organization (Cross and Parker). Is it possible that community engagement gives academics a way to build new networks for us, our students, and partners.

Social media has an unprecedented power to create reading publics and social networks; however, as Phyllis Ryder points out, social media does not create “deliberative” publics. Described in Ryder’s beautifully observed account of a non-profit kitchen and support center for homeless folks, the savvy social networking of Miriam’s Kitchen succeeds at what we expect—getting donations. However, Ryder shows how those exchanges achieve something more for their white, middle-class readers: their astute

> rhetorical work . . . brings fans, followers and their networks together as a public, one that adopts a particular attitude toward the conditions of homelessness, a particular understanding of their capacity to address those conditions, and a particular mode of interacting around those concerns. (Public 2.0 36)

When we look even further beyond a local site to the public writing emerging from community action, we can see not only multiple discourses but competing visions of democracy (Ryder *Rhetorics*).

Much of the research I’ve referred to calls on a variety of formal, sophisticated ways to conduct analyses of activity systems and their contradictions, patterns of circulation, frames, and intertextual references. In doing so, these formal studies both capture the ways ideas and practices morph and how they map the intricate links of social networks. My argument here, however, is that these concepts—such as activity systems, circulation, frames and intertextuality—can also offer more *informal* tools for tracking that can help all of us, students and faculty, better articulate the consequences of education for engagement and ways to support it.

Working in the spirit of *grounded-practical theory* as described by Robert Craig and Karen Tracy, such an inquiry would start with a perceived problem. On a disciplinary level, one such shared problem could be our failure to adequately articulate the impact of engagement in a rhetorically based education. At a more situated level—in this case, the Community Think Tank described in Chapter 2—the problem emerged as a contradiction within university practice. It seemed that the performance and experience of low-income, working, and/or first-generation (Independent) students was often misinterpreted as a failure on the students’ part when perhaps it was simply not on the radar of those who could help. Unlike attempts to test a hypothesis or apply a pre-defined theoretical paradigm to interpret or critique a live situation, *grounded* practical-theory building starts with systematic listening, observing, and documenting.

In the case of students organizing this Community Think Tank, grounded-practical-theory building took the form of a difference-driven inquiry that collected critical incidents and alternative readings of what the "problem" really was, which could then be put in revealing dialogue with each other. Their own next step was a reconstruction or interpretation (a theory or normative ideal) of these situated accounts which met the constraint of being actually useful. This practical interpretive reconstruction, Craig and Tracy remind us, is not presuming to solve the problem but may, in fact, reveal uncertainty, unresolved tension, or even a counterfactual ideal—one which, as they found, might raise a "very basic question that has hardly been explored at all" (267).

What We Observed

The obvious sorts of milestones that mark the Think Tank's public life and its entry into a university's activity system emerged over a period of 22 years, just as the Community Literacy Center had evolved. Seen in retrospect, the CLC's model of community conversations progressively turned into more elaborately documented, deliberative, problem-solving projects published in reports and in training materials on the web and in new course curricula. Some of these resulting projects also became more clearly action oriented. Our *Decision Maker's Guide for Peer Mentoring*, for instance, was designed for students to talk through problems investigated in previous Think Tank *Findings*. You could say we "reconstituted" our grounded discoveries into a more "practical" or useful form, which we began to test with campus advisory groups.

Some indications of useful consequences were encouragingly direct, such as the letter our university president received from the president of a local African American union. It described the Think Tank experience as "tremendously beneficial to [his] personal growth and to the efficacy and prowess of [the union]." The union leader also credited the Think Tank with preparing union members to participate in an upcoming district analysis of its institution's troubled promotional process.

However, like many public deliberations, Think Tanks typically perform like a wheel in which every spoke (every participant) looks toward a shared deliberative center but is anchored to its home place on the rim—and that's where the real outcomes are located. Public recognition of a project is far less significant than the subsequent uses to which it is put by individuals. The knowledge, frames or practices we put into circulation did not simply transfer but had to be *transformed* into innovations or adaptations integrated into the practice of a counselor, a professor, or an administrator. And unlike crafted publicity, the path of circulation is often serendipitous, depending less on websites and publications than on email exchanges, meetings with administrators, and informal talk.

In the cases sketched here, perhaps the most critical things put into circulation were some *practical* frames for thinking with and acting upon. In contrast to the familiar "student life as usual" frame, one new frame that emerged from the Community Think Tank was an assertion that a "problem" not only exists on campus, but that *we*—faculty, staff, and students—are implicated in it. In Gary Fine and Brooke Harrington's study of "tiny publics," frames encourage participation in civic life by unpacking the meaning of events and making sense of what we are doing (344). In social movement scholarship, the process of constructing a collective action frame, heated by the competing schemas and expectations participants bring, is frequently a contested one. Yet the very interactive nature of that process can also result in a "negotiated shared meaning" (Benford and Snow 614). And in Long's "responsive rhetorical" process, the process can become a way to seek out "alternative ways of naming this potentially public issue" (189).

Frames such as that of the "struggling student" can do this work of ordering (or re-ordering) our experience into meaningful coherence because they supply assumptions, implications, and appropriate responses often embedded in scenarios (Fischer). That all-too-standard "struggling student" frame typically accounts for late papers, underdeveloped work, or failure to meet financial aid requirements in terms of academic ability/preparation, failure to take responsibility, or low motivation. It might prompt us to visualize these in the context of a "warning" meeting in our office. But the Think Tank's new frame signaled by the term "Independent students" called up new interpretations; ones that recognized the achievement of having to manage so many demands "on your own." It foregrounded the challenges of working 20 hours a week on top of classwork or the difficulty of navigating a complex financial aid system without a knowledgeable network of support at home or an accessible guide to the labyrinth on campus. Equally important, it relocated the problem from inside the student to a conflict within the system itself. Thinking with such a frame might move us to alter our next student conference to discuss that late paper's Story-Behind-the-Story, or ways to manage deadlines, or how to negotiate those team meetings that get scheduled during your work shift.

Engeström and his colleagues argue that when a group can bring itself to recognize contradictions within its own activity system, it can open the door to what they call "expansive transformations"—changes that embrace a larger, multi-faceted reality ("Introduction"). Their argument for describing learning as "expanding" is especially relevant to the workplace contexts they study and to community ones. To start with, "learning by expanding" is not limited to changes in individual cognition or even communication, even though it may often "lead to self-knowledge and truly widened consciousness" (4). However, "true expansion is always both internal and external, both mental and material" (7). Beginning with the recognition of conflict, expansive learning confronts alternatives and competing positions in order to *integrate conflict and contradiction in a new perspective.* Not limited to mere ideas, this expansive (ongoing) reconceptualization leads to new versions of collective activity and to tools that can, as Engeström says, push "cycle of the expansive transition forward . . . The practitioners have the task of facing and solving the contradictions of their activity system as they are identified and intensified along the voyage through the zone of proximal development" ("Activity" 22-23).

Now all that may seem a rather large order for a course or community project. Engeström's research on "learning-by-expanding" speaks to cases drawn not just from classrooms and workplaces but also from social movements and the history of science. Yet activity analysis can help us uncover indicators of this expansive style of learning that builds a connection to larger activities. So the question becomes: is our community-engaged education able to "transcend the context given" or generate a new material embodiment of our values ("Introduction" 4-5)?

We observed ways the roundtables, supported by the voices in Briefing Books, could provoke the representation of unrecognized conflicts. For example, two staff members at the Round Table blandly asserted the sufficiency of their office's standard financial aid practices (i.e., the information students needed was posted "somewhere" on their website). However, the Briefing Book already had a student's direct response to the inadequacy of this very practice. The discussion that followed and the subsequent published *Findings* were able to juxtapose this apparent contradiction as an invitation to further thought—and concrete change.

A related end-in-view could be whether a documented deliberative practice and its texts put not only ideas and expanded frames but a Discourse, in James Gee's sense, into circulation. Here, a Discourse works as one of those mediational tools that shifts the dynamics of an activity itself. In line with Long's argument for an unabashed rhetorical art, the Think Tank named, modeled, and offered how-to accounts of its tools. Sharing its practice with participants not only offered a rationale for this difference-driven inquiry but put a Discourse in circulation (Flower, "Difference-Driven Inquiry"). Its data-based, problem-focused Briefing Books, mediated roundtables, and rhetorical practices such as rivaling oneself and others promoted a friendly but focused, self-consciously experimental discourse. One participant, the head of a hospital division, remarked as he joined in a "rivaling" strategy session, "We need to try this at our board meetings." I don't know if he did. But circulation can be an unpredictable—if underground—current.

Frames and forms of discourse can show up in texts, but perhaps the most lasting impact in an institution is a network of concern—new relationships linked by new understandings, which may take unanticipated shapes. Ultimately the outcomes with the longest reach are the result of an expanding network of people drawn to a shared concern. For example, serendipity created an early institutional outcome when a dean in biological science, who valued her participation in an earlier set of roundtables in the spring, became the university's vice provost for education in the fall. In the coming year's administrative discussions, she was not only knowledgeable about issues the Think Tank had raised but had already begun thinking about how to address them. In effect, this connection also gave the Think Tank's work an informal letter of introduction to other university administrators.

The motivation for an unanticipated uptake by the Financial Aid office shows up in comments from an interview with the Director: "This all stems from the Think Tank . . . I was blown away by the dedication of the students at the Think Tank. I thought that their interest and commitment to the project was amazing. I left that day and said, 'We have to do something.'" They did. (And we, of course, then circulated those comments in a newsletter on campus progress, highlighting their new approach to offering financial aid.)

As should be clear, these outcomes are more subtle than the documentation that supports a successful marketing campaign. But from an activity point of view, the ability to put new frames or even a Discourse that speaks to systematic contradictions into circulation, accomplished over time, may be the norm, even if it is the less recognized road to expansive transformation. And of all the outcomes engaged educational courses can support, this is probably the hardest to track but may have the most extensive impact. The challenge is putting new frames, unarticulated contradictions, and evidence of this uptake itself into circulation.

Case 2: Naming the Change You Want to See

In this second case, we discovered how a standard academic outcome—a scored, pre/post evaluation of students' performance—turned into an opportunity for a transformative outcome. Six months after the on-campus Decision Makers mentoring project (sketched in the Introduction) had ended, its high school Scholars returned to discuss the scored "results" from the pre-test of their decision-making. In ways we hadn't anticipated, they turned that meeting into an opportunity to recognize and interpret a new aspect of their own growth and identity. In doing so, they proceeded not only to "rewrite" the meaning of those statistical results but used the articulated, situated knowledge they created to construct a new image of their own path forward.

The Case

Like many community projects, the Community Literacy Center (Chapter 2, Case 1) was not conceived to be institutionalized but to explore ways to make a visible difference through locally adapted, evolving, and transformable practices. Ten years later, the Decision Makers project took that philosophy and its associated practices to campus as part of a new course: Literacy: Educational Theory and Community Practice.[1] The course combined reading research and studies in

1. Stacie Dojonovic of the Pittsburgh Public Schools had created the remarkable Start On Success program for these students. I was exceptionally fortunate to work with her and later Ashley McFall to engage these students.

literacy with mentoring junior and senior high school students with a learning disability as they wrote about decision-making in their own lives. In the Decision Makers project, the earlier CLC practice of prompting teens to talk about complex problems moved into the university computer lab. Paired with our high school students one-on-one, the "Mentors" supported their Scholars (as the high school students were identified) in writing a personal Decision Maker's Journey Book. The booklet, which sported a self-designed personal-identity cover, was comprised of three chapters, all challenging the Scholars to describe and evaluate their own decisions. The first chapter asked them to describe a good decision, a bad decision, and an imagined alternative to the bad one. (That last part on alternatives was written after a revealing, often hilarious, session in which the other students—who didn't yet know how the story ended—tried to predict what the writer did do, good or bad, then brainstormed options he or she could have considered. It sent a powerful, often-needed message that a person did have alternatives). In the second chapter, the Scholars tried out different decision-making strategies (such as seeking rivals or imagining consequences) to analyze a difficult decision they were currently facing. Finally, in the last chapter, Scholars composed a self-addressed letter detailing where they wanted to be in their lives six months in the future.

To write their Journey Book, Mentors and Scholars used a computer program we designed called the Decision Makers Guide (Decision Makers). This on-line Guide served three purposes: first, in addition to the online Journey Book Guide, the program allowed us to collect and score a set of pre-and-post "Starting Point" and "Check Point Profiles," designed to gauge the sophistication of the Scholars' decision-making. Second, it offered a template in WORD for writing their Journey Book. In addition, by posing questions and offering generic prompts in the margins of each online chapter, it incited the high schoolers to think critically about their decisions and decision-making as they were writing—and in the process, learn a key set of decision-making strategies (e.g., naming the problem, giving reasons and rivals, facing roadblocks, and using focused reflection).[2] Finally, the computer program enabled the Scholars to print out their own Journey Books, replete with charts and tables visualizing the Scholars' growing decision-making skills over the course of the project.

High school students with different sorts of learning disabilities face both learning and social identity problems. As we discovered in a Community Think Tank on "Naming the LD Difference: Dilemmas in Dealing with Learning

2. A link to *Decision Makers* (found on the front page of the Think Tank website) gives users access to the seven steps in writing a *Journey Book*, writing prompts, and links to supportive pages for writing each chapter ("CMU Community Think Tank"). Unlike papers assigned as a course requirement this data from collaborating with public schools was covered with a University Child Protection Form, Letter to Parent or Guardian, and IRB clearance.

Disabilities" held with students, school administrators, teachers, and counselors, the disclosure of an LD is a double-edged sword. Getting institutional help brings with it the stigma of incompetence, causing students to go under cover with teachers and peers (Flower, "Going Public"). (Yet that Think Tank also revealed a dramatically new public stance a Scholar from a previous Decision Makers was now ready to take.) Beyond stigma, traditional forms of evaluation, with which the students are so familiar, are designed to certify what a student can't do and reinforce a standard of normalcy (Mehan). So in addition to helping these students articulate some of their own strengths in print, it was important for the Decision Makers project to show the Scholars' schools, parents, and employers real evidence of the Scholars' growth and competence in a critical adult capability—decision-making. Accordingly, I use this case to demonstrate how some traditional tools of statistical evaluation can produce evidence—but in this case for the purpose of showing what students can do.

Using Coding and Statistics

To track the changes in the Scholars' decision-making skills over the course of the project, we also asked each student to create a Starting Point Profile, done in the initial writing session, and a Check Point Profile, done roughly nine months later. Both Profiles—which asked the Scholars reflect on their internal and external strengths—started with a survey of the students' Network of Support (people to whom they could turn for help and advice), followed by a multiple-choice "Asset Assessment" of personal resources (ranging from connections with one's community to a history of dealing with peer pressure or thinking through hard choices).[3] More important for the evaluation of their decision making, the Profiles also asked Scholars to think about five areas of their experience (from education to personal relationships, using money and personal time to physical, emotional, and sexual health) and then briefly respond in writing to three questions related to each area: 1) what are your goals, problems, or values in this area; followed by 2) what are the changes you are working toward; and 3) finally, what steps are you taking to get there?

We designed these prompts to gauge their ability to articulate a decision at increasing levels of sophistication. And as the Check Point Profile was not a memory test, a short reminder of the decision-making strategies we had discussed during the project appeared in the sidebar (see Appendix 3,1 for details). Our coding—tested for reliability—of replies to the three questions was straightforward. It gave its top score to a "Reasoned, Reflective Decision." This was an account of their decision that included "Reasons," "Specifics" (rather than generalizations), "Rivals" (alternatives or reasons against), "Consequences," and/or "Conditions" (including possible

3. The asset questions were drawn from the research of the Search Institute (searchinstitute.org) on the assets associated with healthy personal development and behaviors.

"Roadblocks") and "Qualifications"). A good but more limited decision at the next level was coded as "Supports Action/Developed," followed by a "Commonsense/General" account, down to a "None/No Fit" option (see Appendix 3.2).

Focused, informal research like this allows the researcher to show progress, make comparisons, and raise good questions. Unlike a more general qualitative analysis or a grade, it can identify specific, if challenging, actions or rhetorical moves an educator is working toward and share them with the students. In the context of this case study, it required a meaningful pre-and-post writing task and an explicit coding scheme that could identify the presence or absence of the decision-making moves we were teaching. The computer program made scoring the moves (and checking for them with another coder) easy. The coding rubric (on which co-coders achieved a significant 80% reliability) let us translate the score into four levels of sophistication in Reflective Decision Making, noted above. Then, the results were turned into a readable bar graph comparing possible and actual scores, as well as a pie chart showing the percent of comments each student was making at each level (see Appendix 3l2). This report was then available to each Scholar.

Making Sense of the Results

This use of straightforward statistical data differs in important ways from formal educational research. Unlike a well-designed experiment using the results to test the effectiveness of a specific teaching method, for instance, there is no control group and far too many variables in this small sample to make a statistically significant claim for either our methods or community engagement. (Maybe the gains in decision-making ability we saw in the students' Check Point Profiles were just the effects of maturation?) But informal research like this provides the kind of evidence that, given a clear focus and a coding rubric tested for reliability, can support a strong, reasoned argument. In this case, it is an argument for socially engaged learning and its ability to combine its focus on a critical adult skill such as decision-making with a small (but mighty) set of moves (e.g., giving reasons and specific details, rivaling, considering roadblocks, conditions and qualifications). These moves, drawn from research on writing, argumentation, and decision-making, were then named, discussed, and applied to decisions meaningful to the writer in a mentored, social experience. If we can combine this explicit focus with a significant change in the teenagers' ability to articulate their own thinking about a decision, we have a strong argument for a genuinely useful outcome—based here on the lens of documentation. In the present case, this visible, statistical evidence let us make a strong public statement about the thoughtful problem-solving capabilities of these students. And, unlike an experimental study, it made little difference whether we proved that our program was the sole cause or not. Especially for these students it was the demonstrated outcome that mattered.

However, at this point an additional "engaged" analysis let us go beyond a standard statistical lens to an interpretive one, based on an interactive inquiry with the Scholars (which also triangulated our interpretations). This collaborative analysis began when we invited that year's cohort of Scholars to return campus to discuss their personal scores and compare their school's score to other schools. The goal of the meeting was to explore *why* the personal and group scores differed, from their insider perspective. The questions on the table were "How do *you* interpret your results?", "What did you mean when you wrote that?", "Why is it these various differences exist (where you scored high on one area or low in another, or between you and other students, or between schools)?", "What do you think your decision-making looks like now, six months later?", and "What would you like to change?" Bringing this additional interpretive lens to the data had some unexpected outcomes.

A collaborative, interpretive lens complements and complicates the initial results by refusing to take the numbers, scores, and statistical patterns at face value as comprehensive indicators of growth. Instead, it uses that data as the ground for inquiry into a fuller understanding. The results of the scoring posed an interpretive problem to be solved: what did a student's written responses actually mean? What was behind that? Where is the opening for change or growth? Approaching the data through a collaborative group analysis asked the Scholars themselves to take on the job of interpreting what the Profile questions meant in their context. What choices did their scores reflect? How would (would?) seeing other options affect their plans for action and change?

Each of these ways of using statistics to look at outcomes has its own strength. But used together, they show us how engaged learning can build a public case for its outcomes and at the same time push all its partners to articulate new insights. The challenge is designing an assessment that retains the persuasive, visual, and circulatory power of statistics but without the goal of ranking the intellectual or personal worth of some above others. Rather, it is a tool for an experientially grounded reflection that affirms students' dignity and potential.

What We Observed

The Power of Documentation and Numbers

This form of tracking had two distinctive outcomes. The most obvious was the ability to create a visually persuasive documentation of growth in a highly valued adult ability: to make reasoned and reflective decisions in the face of significant choices. The use of focused documentation and coding let us create four representations of student performance:

1. The number of people in a student's Support Network—for whom they could offer a reason why that person mattered.
2. A bar graph showing each Scholar's self-rated level of social, experiential Assets (e.g., a history of dealing with difference or motivation in school). An

additional bar graph grouped the 22 Asset questions into four major categories (relations with adults; agency and responsibility; attitudes and motivation, planning and decision-making, and dealing with others), letting each Scholar and each school compare their level of Assets with their cohort.[4]

3. Most revealing, a pie chart showing what percent of the student's pre- and post-statements fell into each of the four levels of reflective decision-making
4. And finally, a simple bar graph that let Scholars compare their own score to what they could achieve if all their comments were a Reasoned Reflective choice.

We then compiled the results into a second small booklet for each Scholar and a more general one for each school with an explanation of the project which we distributed via print, PDF, and website in order to reach out to parents, teachers, and counselors. The booklet even appeared at some of the schools' annual exhibit events. Both the analysis and documents were cheap to make and easy to circulate (Appendix 3.2). The significance of circulation coupled with these somewhat formal results was clearly evident in the case of a Scholar, Jonathan. A high-performing student on the autism spectrum, he had been supported (and smothered, it seemed) by wealthy parents. Coming to campus on his own (without his aide) was a new experience in independence that gave him an enlarged sense of agency. Jonathan's parents were not going to allow him to move away for college (even though his preferred college could accommodate his disabilities). But as his school counselor told us, Jonathan's newfound sense of himself, combined with the formal evidence from the Decision Makers project, persuaded his parents to change their minds. Thus, this talented young person could now pursue his chosen path toward college and independence.

The Power of Interpretation

Another important, but less visible, rewarding outcome for the Scholars was the practice of interpreting the scoring—themselves. Coming back to campus to review their Profile results, we initially began by working as a group to score and discuss a sample of high- and low-scoring results from a previous project. But as we probed the differences, the teenagers began to explore and compare possible options, see new possibilities, and draw out the reasoning behind both good and bad choices. They then used this experience to interpret their own comments and scores. This collaborative analysis created a fascinating platform for interpretive action where Scholars could articulate their own goals and strategies as part of a socially shared inquiry. (I would add, their unexpected explanations and reasoning also influenced the interpretive frames of all of us, including the teachers, at the table.)

4. The set of Search Institute Assets we selected for this evaluation were ones a student could choose to acquire.

This set of interpretive outcomes was discovered rather than planned for. Although we had prepared some questions based on the initial scores, what mattered was how the students read these responses rather than how the institution scored them. After that, these roundtable talks held after each project became an educational invitation to interpretation, inquiry, and planning. For example, the eighth Asset Assessment question in the Starting Point Profile had asked students to rate themselves on a scale of 1–5 on this statement: "In conversations with adults, I can communicate my goals and my strengths in ways that they can understand." In one not atypical case, both schools in this cohort gave themselves low scores on this Asset question: 2.2 and 2.4 out of 5. It sparked an animated analysis of what those numbers really meant, starting with our question: "What does it mean to communicate goals and strengths with authority? Exactly how do you do that?" Everyone was seeing and naming new possibilities. Eventually, those questions lead to others: "So why are both groups low on communication strategies?" But for the teachers, perhaps the most instructive result was insight these upperclassmen had into the question: "What strategies do younger tenth graders actually use?" I would say, the outcome that may matter most here is not the particular answers, though often surprising, but the shared, self-conscious reflective thought this opportunity stimulated.

The scoring of Asset Question 19 raised an issue which often comes up for students with learning disabilities. "When I enter unfamiliar situations (where people have new expectations of me or confusing ways of explaining things), I am good at finding out all the things I need to know." It had received a low score of 2.7 and 2.2 from two high schools. We asked the teens: "Why is that? So how could you make that a strength? Anybody got good strategies?" Our request to interpret this data shifted authority to where the real interpretive expertise lay: with the students. It turned the limits of a written and scored assessment into a powerful tool for metacognitive work and shared learning.

So the really fruitful discussion began when the Scholars began interpretating and scoring responses to the written section of the Profile and its questions, such as, "What I am working on in my life?" and, "What are my goals and plans for achieving them?" Many Starting Point Profiles had relied on Level 1 *common sense* statements such as:

> I would like to make friends in my neighborhood.
>
> I want to go to college.

But, we asked the group, how would you evaluate the following statement (drawn from previous Profiles)?

> I want to do better in school, **because I know that if I keep getting bad grades, I won't be able to get into college. You have to work hard to get ahead in life.**

As the discussion drew out, key terms (here in bold) became cues as to why this statement works at a Level 2: it provides reasons and specifics, such as examples or steps, that make it a plan that could support action. Students saw the relevance to plans like the one below, which dealt with the everyday realities of a crowded household.

> I am going to **study every day after school at my desk in my room, with the radio turned off and my brothers and sisters not allowed to come in and bother me.**

Discussing the final example below served an additional purpose of letting students articulate just what it was that made this example into a more-fully packed Level 3. As we saw for the college students in Chapter 2, Case 2, being able to name and explain your intuitions and insights can make them both operational and open to reflection.

> I could get a job doing fast food. On the other hand, [Rivals] that kind of job doesn't pay much money. Doing something, even volunteering, with computers might not pay a lot either, [Consequences] but it might lead me to a job that makes a lot of money and would look good on my resume [Reasons].

Using the additional criteria that can support Reflective Action, the group then began to imagine possible Conditions, noticing how the words "if . . . then" could open up an inquiry into what those Conditions might be. The criteria of Reflection also turned up questions such as, "Is there a pattern in how I choose jobs?" Interpreting these scores went beyond text-based analysis, as it let students talk about why they made the choices they made, and led them to articulate the conditions and qualifications that affect their choices.

> I have to start asking my teachers for help at school when I'm having a problem. Before, I thought that asking my teachers would make me look stupid because my dad always hates it when I ask him questions. But now I know teachers are really there to help me.

This statement reveals the student's knowledge that even good decisions will meet roadblocks. The next statement shows a similar awareness, plus the willingness to take an experimental stance to a problem.

> One change I would like to make is to be more giving to my parents. But my parents aren't always good to me and maybe that's why I'm not always nice to them, but I'm still going to be nice to them and if I do that maybe they'll learn from my example.

The responses also brought issues in the social environments of schools up for discussion, leading to questions such as, why did this school score differently from mine?

To sum up, a fairly simple statistical analysis let us showcase the achievement of these students in a meaningful, accessible, and visually inviting way to a diverse community. At the same time, it created an opportunity to critically interpret an assessment and its scores in a way that privileged their insider knowledge, created new insights, offered exposure to rival readings and the recognition of a personal application. In the open-endedness of this interpretive analysis, the students were teaching themselves those reflective moves—what they could mean, how to recognize them, and the words that helped you try one out.

Later in the project, another outcome emerged. We had been noticing something unusual about the Scholars' personally focused writing on campus and its contrast to that at the neighborhood-based CLC, with its issue-centered work done in an inner-city social atmosphere on the writers' home turf. We were somewhat surprised to find how quickly the Decision Maker Scholars on campus were disposed to disclose (and write about) serious, personal dilemmas, from issues of gender identity to *projected* "unavoidable" fights with family members, peers, and teachers. (Sometimes these dilemmas precipitated small group discussions around the computer, which actually reinterpreted the "unavoidable" into better options.) We suspect that the Scholars' openness to raising and writing about such sensitive topics with their Mentors stemmed in part from Decision Makers' on-campus, computer-supported, one-on-one design, as well as its specific focus on personal decisions. By contrast, the atmosphere at the CLC and its focus on public issues tended to be much more teen-dominated and community-based. Perhaps the privacy of on-campus writing, combined with the Decision Makers' increased focus on quiet personal agency, primed the Scholars to put their deepest, most pressing dilemmas forward for analysis. At the same time, it was probably at the expense of an invigorated sense of a public voice and agency.

Finally, in my judgment, the consistently most-significant outcome of the entire Decision Makers project has been the transformation of students' perceptions of themselves as indeed decision makers in their own lives, often in ways they hadn't acknowledged before. Whether a decision was for good or for ill, a recognition of your agency brings with it a sense of responsibility—and often a change in the perception others have of you. By tracking participants' performance in statistical, graphic ways, we can give persuasive visibility to internal strengths and growth. And at the same time, the scoring may play an even more important role when it is interpreted by the writers themselves in a social context that supports articulation in the midst of rivals, reasons, and options from your peers. This less visible outcome is likely to be a new level of metacognitive awareness and knowing.

Appendix 3.1. Sketch of the Starting and Check Point Profiles

This overview of the Profiles shows its structure and key questions.

The Starting Point Profile

This computer questionnaire asked students to create four Snapshots of themselves, typing each reply in small, expanding boxes to encourage a focused response.

Snapshot 1. Who is Traveling with Me? (Network of Support)

The Profile asked for a brief written response: "Who are the key people you see as a part of your personal network and a reason they matter?"

Snapshot 2. What Am I Working on in My Life Right Now?

1. In learning and education
2. In personal & community relationships
3. In making, budgeting, and using money
4. In personal time and recreation
5. In physical, emotional, and sexual health

Under each of these five topics there were three expandable boxes asking for a short, written response addressing: "What matters to me in this area? What values or goals or problems am I working on in my life?" And then: "What specific steps am I taking to reach my goals or act on what I care about?" How they articulated their answers showed both their goals and concerns and the level of awareness and control visible in their response. These written responses would be the basis for coding their level of reflective decision making.

Snapshot 3. What is My Situation?

Based on research into markers for healthy personal development in adolescents by the Search Institute (https://searchinstitute.org/), this Snapshot asked students to rate the level of their "personal assets" from 1 to 4, in response to 22 options such as, "I am connected to a church or club where a young person can play a useful role in their community," or "I have a history of handling negative peer pressure, especially in difficult situations."

Snapshot 4. A Letter to Myself

Finally, the Starting Point Profile is rounded out with some forward-thinking questions, asking the writer to name a change they would like to make in three areas: 1) my network of support; 2) my goals or values; and 3) in building two personal assets." The challenge comes when they are asked to make their decision-making operational by using the two response boxes to describe: "1) Some steps I think I can take to make that change are . . . and 2) I'll know when I am starting to make progress when . . ." Again, the format of two specific boxes for each topic was designed to call for specific answers.

To be upfront about the critical criteria for good decision-making, the Starting and Check Point Profile pages offered a sidebar reminder of moves we had worked with.

> Tip: A reasoned, reflective decision includes
> √ Specific details
> √ Reasons (because . . .)
> √ Rivals (someone might say . . .)
> √ Roadblocks or qualifications (but, maybe, might . . .)
> √ Conditions (if . . . then . . .)

The Check Point Profile

The Check Point starts by inviting an updated Network of Support. Then, to motivate a discussion of some of the same questions asked in the Starting Point, it sketches a scenario that asks:

> Imagine that you are about to have a job interview with a new Supervisor. He or she has read your resume, but what they are really thinking is:
>
> - Is this person going to be a good member of my team?
> - Can she take responsibility? Can he make good decisions?
> - So how can you show that Supervisor what you can do?

The Profile then asks them to respond to the question by thinking of a time they had to make a decision and to then:

1. Describe the problem and the Story-Behind-the-Story.
2. Describe how you made the decision: your options, rivals, and outcomes.
3. Now tell what it shows about YOU!

Appendix 3.2. Asset Analysis Included in the Scholar's Journey Book

The Scholars' individual Journey Book included pre- and post-graphs from the Asset Analysis, plus pie charts based on the Scholar's decision-making statements. The Asset graph below is an example of an aggregated display of the five groups of assets made for each school who participated. These visual displays stimulated discussion for the Scholars and increased the impact for adult readers.

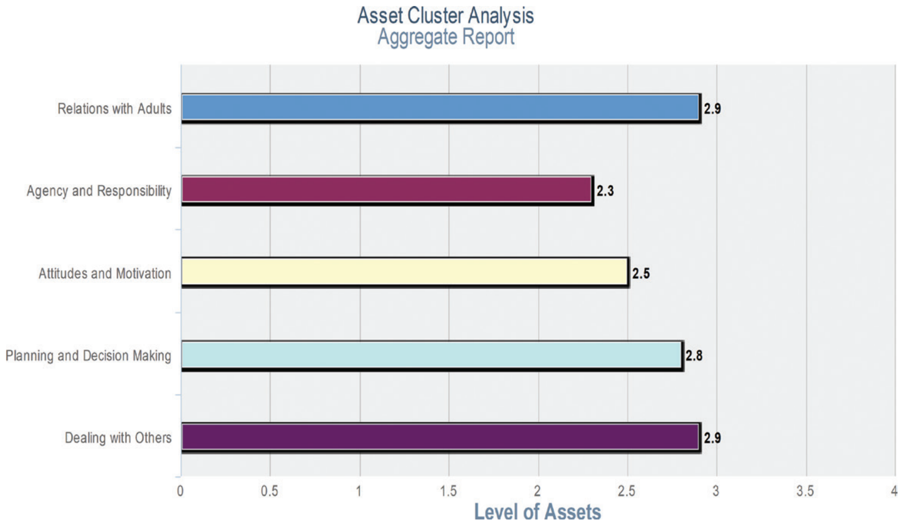

Figure 3.1. Level of assets.

The two pie charts below show the proportion of each type of statement this student was making in their pre-test at the beginning of the program and then six months later. The following reminder box was in the margin of the Profile they were creating.

> Remember, a reasoned, reflective decision includes
> - *Specific details*
> - *Reasons (because...)*
> - *Rivals (someone might say...)*
> - *Roadblocks (but, since, if...then)*
> - *Reflections on your choices*

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show pre- and post-test changes in growth of reflective decision making.

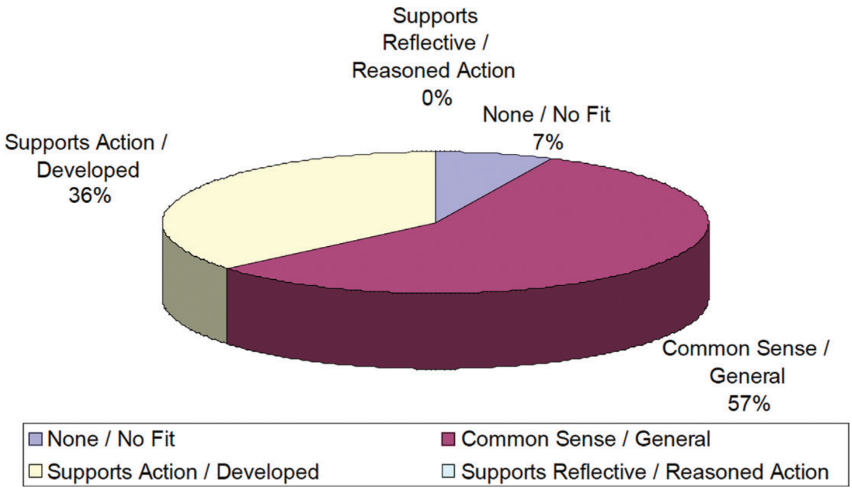

Figure 3.2. Scoring for Decision Making (pre-test)

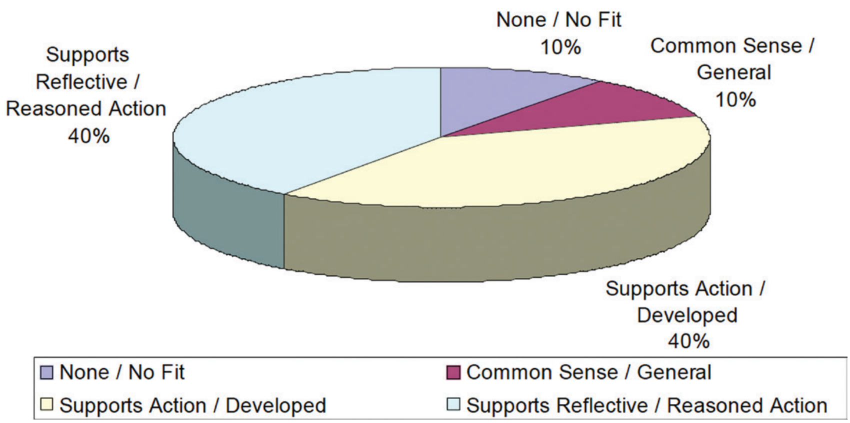

Figure 3.3. Scoring for Decision Making (post-test)

Those results are also accompanied by a table showing them numerically.

Scoring Rubric for Reflective Decision Making	Starting Point	Check Point
Level 0 None/No Fit	7%	10%
Level 1 Common Sense/General	57%	10%
Level 2 Supports Action	36%	40%
Level 3 Supports Reflective Reasoned Action	0%	40%

These figures are unlikely to show simple intellectual development. Rather they reflect these writers' awareness of and ability to use powerful new strategies in a context that called for them.