

Karen Seashore Louis & Sharon D. Kruse
editors, "Professionalism and Community:
Perspectives on Reforming Urban Schools,"
Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 1995, pp. 45-75.

Professional Community and Its Yield at Metro Academy

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Metro Academy is a high school of the New York City style of school-within-a-school, or mini-school. It is an independent program housed within a building that also houses another, entirely separate program, the High School for Social Sciences. The latter is a semi-selective high school with 1,500 students. Altogether, nine of the host school's rooms have been given to the Metro Academy, a program enrolling perhaps 100 10th through 12th graders. Metro is an alternative school, a designation that allows it considerably more freedom from central control than the average city high school. New York City's High Schools Division is widely perceived as one of the most rigid and controlling units within the school system. The Alternative Schools Office, on the other hand, is more likely to be perceived as a source of information and advice, and a buffer from the rest of the educational bureaucracy.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Portions of this chapter were published in Raywid, M. A. (1994), "A School That Really Works," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 63(1), pp. 93-110. Reprinted with permission.

To be admitted, Metro students must visit the school, be interviewed, and fill out an application that includes brief thoughtful essays and general math problems. But the application is not used as a screening device. Metro is not a selective school, and admission is not based upon prior achievement or behavior. Indeed, many students entering from other high schools are quite explicit about seeing Metro as "Last Chance High." Certainly, student abilities, achievement, and performance span a wide range, although most Metro students are minority and, according to staff reports, few are middle-class. What most students explicitly share is a past that has included difficulties in accepting and dealing with school authority. When they enter, very few see themselves as college bound. Yet according to Esther, the staff member primarily responsible for college advisement, 95% of Metro Academy's students enter college after graduation. Essentially, the only graduates who do not are those entering the military.

The Development of Metro

The Metro Academy grew out of an instructional program, an inquiry learning project developed some years ago by its two directors and operated by them in what eventually grew to be 12 New York City high schools. Begun initially as a staff development project for teachers, the program then evolved into a half-day instructional program for students. Eventually, it appeared that both youngsters' needs and staff interests might better be accommodated in a full-time school. Thus, Metro Academy opened in 1985, featuring an inquiry approach to learning. The teachers consisted of interested people the two directors had either met during the staff development project or known earlier. Although some of these people had met one another at summer workshops associated with the demonstration project, they had never worked together and had not really known each other.

Staff members construe the Academy as "the working laboratory for the Inquiry Demonstration Project" (Cook, 1991, p. 149). Partly because of its past, partly due to still continuing activities, and partly due to its experimental and nontraditional orientation, the Metro Academy characterizes itself as a laboratory school. A steady stream

of visitors comes to observe, and several faculty members still offer in-service courses on the Academy's approach to teachers in other schools.

Metro Academy reports 16 staff members, but this total is misleading because it includes the two codirectors, full-time teachers, part-time teachers, and interns. Nine of Metro's teachers are full-timers. There are only two formal status differentiations, teachers and codirectors. Until last year there was also an assistant principal who took care of much of the administrative work, but when he left, staff decided together to assume his duties and use his salary for other purposes. Thus there is considerable differentiation as to function among staff now, because teachers share most administrative tasks, including admissions, keeping track of attendance, handling student transportation (New York City students get special passes), and the record-keeping role of registrar. These assignments appear to have been arrived at by mutual agreement and in consequence of individual teachers' interests and talents. Thus faculty view them as permanent assignments, until a reason for changing them surfaces. (A request for reassignment, or an interest in the function by a newcomer would stand as such a reason.) Besides the teaching staff, there is one individual who coordinates the community service program and has responsibility for helping with college applications, and there is one secretary who serves the entire faculty. A single former classroom houses all of Metro's offices, making for a room so crowded with teachers' desks that navigating the four narrow passage aisles can prove challenging. An adjacent room serves as a gathering place for both students and faculty.

The codirector arrangement is novel on several counts. One of the two codirectors, Art Coe, functions in effect in the more familiar role of principal, assuming responsibility for coordinating Metro's daily operation. Staff look to him for instructions, help, and advice, and he is also perceived by students as a strong, supportive, and benevolent though firm father figure. The other codirector, Lynn Adams, functions primarily in the role of ambassador to and liaison with the external educational and political community. She is active in New York City educator circles and assumes a major role in bringing news and also new pedagogical ideas into the Metro Academy. Although Lynn regularly teaches at least one course (as does Art),

and is almost always present for staff meetings, she spends a lot of time out of the building and is often on the phone when she is there.

Metro's codirectorship arrangement is also novel in that Adams and Coe have been longtime professional collaborators, having devised and pursued a number of projects together. They designed and piloted the Inquiry approach that is the theme of Metro Academy. They are also husband and wife, and the parents of three adolescent daughters.

According to Wisconsin's federally sponsored Center for School Organization and Restructuring, one of the hallmarks of a restructured school is that the experience of being a student—or a teacher—in such a school is quite different from what it is to be a student or a teacher in a traditionally structured school (Newmann, 1991b). One's days are spent differently and the school has a different sort of ambience, leading both students and teachers to feel differently about being associated with it and about their roles within it. In short, the lived experience of school has been transformed for these students and teachers. This is clearly true of school life at Metro. As students readily report without prompting, it is quite different from their previous school experiences.

Modifying Student Experience

Perhaps the most arresting qualities of restructured student experience at Metro Academy accrue from (a) the literally ceaseless efforts to make school a thought-provoking place; (b) the determined arranging and rearranging of the daily schedule to serve programmatic purposes, rather than vice versa; and (c) the unremitting efforts to provide needed support for students.

Insistence on thought-provoking pedagogy is rooted in the Inquiry Method that is the school's theme and unifying thread. The single word "WHY" dominates the front cover of Metro's brochure. Opening sentences on the following page elaborate:

That's what the students at the Metro Academy ask each day, in every class, at every opportunity. When they enter the Metro Academy they become members of an academic community seeking understanding in the same way as inquiring

minds have done over the centuries. They ask questions and examine the variety of ways they can be answered.

But one of the most noticeable ways in which the Metro Academy differs from many schools as an institution is that these words are not simply words. Metro means what it says it means, and students get just what they've been told they'll find. Put succinctly, the school mission is not simply the "philosophy" statement prepared by some authority to satisfy some regulation or other: It represents a commitment that suffuses everything the school does.

For instance, the attempt to arouse questioning and thoughtfulness is reflected in the curriculum and the courses offered. Although there are some standard, discipline-based classes like American History, Algebra, Economics, and Chemistry, most are topically articulated instead, and by topics of concern to urban students. Telling Stories, Popular Culture, Puzzles, Evolution, Religion and Society, American Autobiography, Utopia/Dystopia, Animal Rights, and Women Across Cultures are a few of the courses from recent semesters. Moreover, students can expect to encounter at least three types of learning in virtually every course: There is always material they recognize as usable now (e.g., knowledge of the city's subway system or its museums, or landmark buildings); there is also content they can use later, which is more typical school fare; and content is always treated in such a fashion as to increase reflectiveness and thinking ability, as well as to enhance work habits.

The thoughtfulness theme is omnipresent. This is not easy to accomplish with a student population that would probably not comply with the reading and other daily assignments associated with traditional secondary education. It is also very challenging to get students to tackle activities that must be sustained over an extended period. One response on the part of the faculty is to probe different facets of a broad topic on different days, introducing novelty through added complexity as the discussion proceeds. Most classes manage to present an issue students find genuinely challenging. It is always one that can be tackled at a more penetrating level than simply "getting the facts" or "mastering the basics" during a class. Thus, Art's popular course titled Issues one day tackled, "What are the most important values?" and another, "What rights does a parent have and

what rights does a kid have?" Marcus's Pop Culture course demanded inferences about popularity and power from data detailing cassette and CD sales by various vocalists and instrumentalists. And Jan's Seminar on Animal Rights explored whether zoos are, in the very nature of the situation, inhumane. On a day when I visited, a Women's Studies class taught by Lynn tackled "Which is more dangerous: pornography or censorship?"

As this suggests, efforts to make students think don't end with the in-class efforts of individual teachers. The entire school is constructed to provoke adolescents to think. For instance, a question based on a prominent current news issue is always posted in the hall outside the office: for example, "Should football be outlawed?" (following the accident of a professional player whose neck was broken) and "Should gays be allowed to serve in the military?" (while the issue was being discussed in the press). The question is mounted on a large sheet of poster paper, where students anonymously pen their responses to the question and to each other. (There is also a sheet of similar size on a nearby board, inviting Graffiti, which serves to keep the question sheet, and other Metro Academy areas, largely graffiti-free.)

Another means of provoking thought is the 3-week project that launches each semester at Metro. This is a carefully worked out cross-disciplinary venture that involves the whole school, working in groups of 8 to 12, to tackle the various dimensions of a broad question. For instance, one recent project theme was "What makes for a good subway system?" For a previous semester it was "What is community?" Prior to that, another theme was "How does architecture affect lifestyles?" Each project is planned in detail, with intensive day-long group activities, some exercises and activities shared by all students and others that are differentiated according to student interests and the talents and focus of individual teachers. Fulfilling project requirements is a demanding and intensive venture occupying the full day of students and teachers working together in school and outside it. After the 3-week project period has ended, the semester's regular classes begin.

Meanwhile, the September project has served as a notable way to induct new staff and students into the life of the Metro Academy. (And the February project has served as a welcome midyear change

of pace, bringing variety to the school.) The project yields extended opportunity for teachers to work together in planning a set of experiences equally novel to beginners and old-timers. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for the staff to pursue and model the same sort of inquiry process they want students to internalize. And it enables students, teachers, and the two groups together to work less formally and more closely with one another than class time usually allows.

A new way to stimulate student thinking added this year is special-topic seminars on issues of sure concern to students. The seminars are small classes by design and they make heavy demands on those enrolled. In addition to extensive reading assignments, a paper is due each week. Because Metro has no library of its own, and because it would be unlikely that daily reading assignments requiring library access would be completed, readings are typically photocopied for students. Seminar students receive weekly packets of carefully chosen articles that form the basis for their papers.

Events that began in the Animal Rights Seminar yield further evidence of staff commitment to generating student thinking. Jan, the teacher, was disappointed by students' failure to fulfill his writing assignment that called for *analysis* of the materials in the reading packet. So he made multiple copies of one articulate, otherwise well-written paper that erred by instead *summarizing* one article after another. He brought copies of the papers for all to the staff meeting that afternoon and distributed them at the start, because Art had placed him first on the agenda. Thus, for 45 minutes the staff discussed what an adequate response to the assignment would be, and the challenge of how to teach students to undertake genuine analysis. The discussion ended with an agreement to return to the matter for general staff consideration after Jan and another teacher had a chance to consider some further ideas. *Analysis* is a frequently used term at Metro, and there seemed embarrassment as well as chagrin that the concept at issue—and how to operationalize it—appeared so elusive. At a subsequent meeting, two teachers agreed to bring in selected packets of student papers so that the staff could together advance the effort by exploring which papers provide the best analyses and why.

A statement that hangs on the wall beside Art's desk, having struck a responsive chord, seems to project the sort of ambiance Metro Academy students have come to expect: *I fully realize that I have*

not succeeded in answering all of your questions. . . . Indeed, I feel I have not answered any of them completely. The answers I have found only serve to raise a whole new set of questions, which only lead to more problems, some of which we weren't even aware were problems. To sum it all up . . . In some ways I feel we are confused as ever, but I believe we are confused on a higher level, and about more important things.

As previously suggested, a second way in which the lives of Metro students and teachers differ quite extensively from the lives lived in most other schools is associated with the way in which the school schedule is viewed. At Metro, the schedule is not the all-powerful structure to which everything must conform. Instead, it is designed, and constantly redesigned, to serve the programmatic purposes staff have selected. When it fails to do so, it is the schedule and not the instructional program that must give way. Although that is more easily accomplished at the end of a semester, when the schedule is regularly redesigned anyway, adjustments can be made in mid-semester. As will be seen, the schedule at Metro is simply not construed as unvarying; by design it contains enough day-to-day variation that everyone must be reminded of each day's components and sequence. Thus changes are far more easily introduced than when the mindset calls for invariant time segments and sequences.

The design and use of the school schedule at Metro are sufficiently unusual that they appear to be a major reflection of the restructuring the Academy represents. A proposed schedule is created each semester by Art, after meetings that air exactly what each teacher would like to have. According to reports, a proposed schedule always goes through multiple versions before it is completed. This means that in resolving conflicts and accommodating needs, the whole thing is scrapped several times and the task launched again from the beginning. The fall version this year represented the sixth such take-it-from-the-top try.

Unlike most other schedules, Metro's does not divide the day into equal segments for classes. The first class in a Friday schedule lasts 55 minutes, the second and third, 50 minutes each. Lunch is an hour, and the two afternoon classes each last 75 minutes. (Most classes fall within the 50- to 75-minute period. Tuesdays, however, have one 90-minute time block.) There are also two 10-minute breaks, one after the second class and one just before the last class of the day.

The time classes are assigned differ according to teachers' requests: Some classes are always longer, some are always shorter, and some teachers may want one or two 50-minute sessions plus one 75-minute class. Accommodations are also made to preferences as to morning versus afternoon classes, although the more frequent pattern is to shift class time so that a class which meets at 8:30 on Monday may meet at 10:35 on Wednesday. The result is that students rarely memorize schedules, and Art posts the schedule for the day outside each of Metro's rooms early every morning.

A final illustrative manifestation of the use of the schedule to serve the needs of the program, instead of forcing instruction to fit into preset time blocks, lies in the building in of nonclass time. The staff meets regularly on Wednesdays, from 12:15 to 3:15 (and on alternate Tuesdays after school). The collaboration time is made possible by having students perform service activities in the community during this time. All students are required to provide such service weekly, and on a volunteer, unpaid basis. Assignments include such activities as helping in a legislative office, a school, a teenage treatment center, or an animal rescue group.

A third characteristic of restructured student experience at Metro accrues from the staff's determination to provide whatever is necessary in the way of student support. This determination surfaces in many ways, in the school's culture as well as in its structural features and operation. In the first place, Metro has the increasingly familiar advisory groups in which students largely explore school problems. For example, the topic in one session of Vivian's advisory group this year was "What's screwed up around here?" But this year there is also a new set of groups called Organizational Tutorials, which involve all students and meet weekly. These were started to preserve the integrity of advisory groups while also providing something of a more explicitly academic advisory setting. Before the weekly meeting of the small groups of seven to nine, each Organizational Tutorial teacher checks with the teachers of all the tutorial members' classes to find out how each of his/her tutorial students is doing in the class. There is a particular emphasis on whether work is being completed, and whether any other class-specific difficulties are occurring for each student. This arrangement was launched in the interests of proactive troubleshooting, and of trying to identify cognitive diffi-

culties when they are emerging. It is a brief, highly task-oriented session. The Organizational Tutorial teacher goes around the circle, both asking for student response on how things are going and providing feedback from teachers. There are often suggestions about needed priorities, time management, work organization—whatever seems needed.

Three kinds of labs are operated to assure that students get needed support: Homework Labs, course-connected labs, and College Labs. The Homework Labs function as study halls and are operated for those who want them. Because some Academy students are totally without supportive conditions for doing homework outside school, such an elective fills an important function for them. The students enrolled in Homework Lab get help as needed and must arrive at each session with an assignment to work on, or one is provided for them. Students who do not elect to enroll in a Homework Lab take Independent Study instead and can pursue individual or group projects. Most select the latter and at the moment, one Independent Study group is reading Dostoevsky, another is working on conversational Spanish, and a third is doing a videotape of the school.

Another sort of lab is attached to specific courses that make heavy demands in terms of reading or writing. Such a lab might be scheduled for a course assigning an extensive research paper, or a series of short analytic papers, where several rewrites will be suggested. The intent is not remediation but the provision of proactive support to enable students to meet demanding standards. This year, American History and Television Analysis had labs during the fall semester, and the History and Issues courses had them in the spring. Just one of their unusual features is that the lab segment of each course—which meets for one separate, and longer, period each week—is, by design, taught by a teacher other than the person who teaches the course. Typically the lab teacher(s) will sit in on the course's regular classes occasionally, to remain aware of course expectations, but not in the usual role of study hall teachers.

The purposes of assigning staff this way are several: It affords students additional help because there are now two sources and two sets of resources to tap; but at the same time, it leaves the student in charge of carrying out the assignment and satisfying the class's re-

quirements, because the lab teacher's role is to help the student, not to coteach the course; and it places Metro staff in yet another collaborative setting, giving them a view of others' teaching and perhaps prompting questions about their own. This semester lab teachers have helped the students enrolled in Television Analysis and American History to organize themselves to pursue research, to organize notes and materials for writing purposes, to get going, and to revise as indicated.

Still a third kind of lab has emerged in connection with Metro students' enrollment in college classes. The Academy's students have the option of enrolling in such classes. But based on difficulties some have encountered, and on students' insecurities and hesitations, a Metro teacher now accompanies the students and sometimes sits in on the classes in which they are enrolled. The group travels together to the campus of a local 4-year private college, or to a two-year City college, and one or two Academy teachers sit in as observers in the courses Metro students have selected. Back at the Academy, in a specially scheduled College Lab class, whatever support the students need is provided.

There are also many other sorts of support extended to Metro students, although not all of them in typical ways. There are no counselors at Metro, because every teacher is expected to fill the counseling role in the sense not only of academic advisement but also of standing as an interested and concerned adult to any student seeking help. A part-time psychologist is supposedly available to Academy students for 2 half-days each week, though he reportedly often gives many more than the hours that are expected of him. Otherwise, he maintains a private practice.

The Academy population is small enough, and there is sufficient psychic closeness in the school, that when kids are in trouble it quickly becomes evident. A teacher who happened to spot difficulty, or to wonder about whether there was some, might first address Art about it, or go first to the advisory group leader enrolling the student. Or he or she might simply comment to another teacher. It might then occur spontaneously or by design that the youngster would be engaged by a staff member attempting to discern the difficulty. Art has frequent access to the students because they pass his desk in going from the office/staff room to the student study/lounge next door. He

also stocks two aspirin bottles on his desk with M&M's. Students stop by constantly throughout the day and help themselves to the supply (requiring Art to refill the bottles all day long and to purchase 15 pounds of M&M's per week). This means that a student stopping for a handful of candy may become engaged in an exchange with Art, or with another student who is on the same mission. Art is a father figure to the entire school, and students feel they can ask him for an unusual range of assistance and advice. The notes mounted on the walls around his desk attest eloquently to this:

- Hola Art. There's a leaky pipe in the Women's Bathroom. Check it out TODAY.
- I hate you, Art. Love, Bill
- Art, I feel crabby and/or cranky. I'm sick. Please come and get me in Dance A.S.A.P. — Jean
- Art, Lily is driving me crazy. Please help me. Shanti
- Dear Art,
I have been diagnosed with "School Burnout"!!! So I'm going home to sleep it off.
P.S. See you tomorrow.
Your hardest working student, Jane
- Dear Art:
i appreciate the fact that you have saved all the letters that i have given you over the years. But you should take them down soon, because i have grown tremendously and find them quite embarrassing . . .
Very happily, May

Lest these messages seem to suggest a highly indulgent environment where students do as they please, a further look is needed. An observer who concluded that Metro Academy is a permissive school where student whim or choice governs would have missed the essence of the school. An important contrast separates Metro Academy from schools where students decide most things. Students are constantly consulted at Metro: They are invited to participate in decision-making sessions, they are asked what courses they want to take and with which teachers, and they are encouraged to express their reactions to events and conditions. What they have to say is

listened to not only courteously but also intently; what they like and dislike gets serious consideration, as does what they find meaningful as opposed to what they find obscure or inscrutable. They are obviously taken seriously and influence events. But they are not the decision makers at Metro. The teachers are.

For instance, students' choice of courses may be overridden in the interests of getting an appropriate balance for the class, getting a schedule that makes more sense for the individual with an eye to meeting graduation requirements, or separating students whom staff feel should not share the same class. Similarly, within curriculum and content, student interests are taken very seriously, but it is the staff who make the decisions. Though students are the major determinants of what happens at Metro, their influence is not manifested through votes or statements of preference; it is mediated by staff decisions on what seems indicated in light of student preferences as well as in light of other considerations.

One final way in which the culture at Metro Academy extends enormous support to students is through the clear priorities that exist there. At most conventional high schools, it is simply assumed that adults are entitled to courtesies denied students. It is also assumed that communication among the adults who are there to run the place takes precedence over other exchanges. Thus it is not unusual in most schools for an administrator or another teacher (or a public address system) to interrupt a class or a student-teacher conversation to deliver a message to the teacher or to get the answer needed to a question. This is clearly not standard operating procedure at Metro. Classes, and student-teacher conversations have priority and a kind of sanctity, so that if a student is standing with a teacher in the hall, or seated at a teacher's desk in the crowded staff room, they are rarely interrupted by another staff member—especially if they are talking quietly. In fact, the norm is just the reverse of what one typically finds in schools. At Metro, staff and other adult conversations may be interrupted by students or teachers, but not student-staff conversations. There is too much commitment both to respect for students and to the importance of "the teachable moment" for such interruptions to occur. As one teacher put it, if a teacher and a student arrive simultaneously at Art's desk seeking his attention, it is the student and not the teacher to whom he turns first.

A rather different kind of support also prevalent at Metro Academy accrues from the dogged attempt by staff to figure out exactly why their academic expectations of students are not being met, and then to do something about it. They consistently reject answers like "They're just lazy," or "They were careless," or "They didn't think" in favor of diagnoses as to specific process deficiencies. When a full class failed to analyze material, the situation was pursued sufficiently to ascertain that they didn't know how. Hence they needed help in how to conduct the process, and the staff set to work figuring out how to provide the assistance necessary.

A consequence of such an approach is the tendency at Metro to render explicit a great deal that other schools simply take for granted. When Academy students are instructed in how to do research papers, for example, the instructions are not just as to length, and what note cards and footnotes should look like; there is an attempt to have them understand the nature of the mental processes one goes through in doing research. This marks a considerable contrast with customary educational practice: We tend more typically to tell students to "analyze," "discuss," or "appraise," and then we test them on whether they can do so; but rarely do we offer, in between, the step-by-step guidance on just how one performs these operations. It is characteristic of Metro Academy staff to try to figure out the process and instruct youngsters on how to conduct it.

Teachers' Experience

Metro Academy teachers work hard, but in several important respects their work appears different from that of teachers in traditional schools. In the first place, their workloads do not look like those in comprehensive high schools, because the array of duties and expectations is far broader than the teaching of classes. As mentioned earlier, some teachers perform regular administrative functions, like the handling of admissions or the categorizing and recording of credits on student transcripts. Others may have an assignment to accompany students to a college course, and still others may be assigned to conduct the lab portion of a colleague's course. New teachers are expected to audit one or two classes taught by a senior teacher in a

related field. New teachers (and interns) also meet weekly with Art, in small groups, to discuss challenges and difficulties as raised by either party. All teachers are expected to be available to cover a colleague's class, or to assist with it (e.g., by participating in a demonstration or debate) on absolutely minimal notice (such as 3 minutes). Asking for and receiving help is common.

Although a look at schedules may show a teacher teaching during only three of a day's scheduled five periods, no teachers appear to have prep periods in the form of assigned time that commonly belongs solely to themselves. They are expected to be available at any time for whatever appears to be needed. Although some might find this an infringement on individual entitlements, it seems closely tied to the deeply rooted conviction that all are jointly responsible for making the school work—and when something is needed and one is the logical member to do it, or simply the most available member, one does it. Obviously, such an attitude could not long prevail were individuals to believe themselves exploited or victimized. But a sense of reciprocity—a conviction that one can count on comparable support from others when the need arises—prevents a sense of being exploited.

Metro's teachers clearly work hard in ways that are demanding and place a premium on invention and creativity. Working out the curriculum described in these pages is extremely demanding—particularly because change and novelty are perceived assets to sustaining student engagement. By virtue of the quality of effort required, teachers at Metro experience their work as highly professional in nature. They see themselves as performing an intellectually and emotionally challenging task and although, or perhaps because, they find almost constant reason to change and improve their efforts, they are proud of what they do and the success with which they do it. They seem to relish the intellectual challenge that their problems sometimes occasion. In multiple ways the staff project the message that educators generally would have much to gain by emulating their program and arrangements.

One reason is the sense of confidence and efficacy that is evident. The school's descriptive brochure proclaims: "The Metro Academy is recognized as a rigorous academic school serving a diverse population of students who have often been unchallenged in previous

settings." As staff describe this population less formally, they say it is a group that has had trouble with authority in other school settings. What Metro does is to construe a population, which has elsewhere posed disciplinary problems, as posing a primarily pedagogical challenge instead. It seems to work. There appear to be few disciplinary problems, and virtually none of a confrontational, showdown sort. The school's sole absolute is "No fighting." I am told that it has never been violated in Metro's 9 years—and that on the sole occasion when that record was threatened, it was students who stepped in to uphold it.

There are, however, a normal number of adolescent challenges to adult authority and numerous other infractions that, in more traditional schools, might become confrontational occasions. To cite three sorts, lateness is a chronic problem for some Academy students; locker fronts sometimes exhibit displays of questionable taste; and male students often want to wear hats while walking through the hallways of The High School for Social Sciences, where hats are forbidden. Metro handles such challenges with careful inquiry into causes and circumstances, a receptivity to discussion and negotiation, and often with considerable humor. Depending on the circumstances, lateness may be viewed more sympathetically than at other schools and it is handled on an individual basis, but only after an effort to detect its reason. Sometimes the answer has been to give the student an alarm clock—or to do a morning call. Other measures have included careful scheduling to lure youngsters into arriving on time, and a support group is currently under consideration.

The challenge of locker fronts displaying sexually explicit photos, or language that would undoubtedly offend some, are more likely to turn into First Amendment discussions than personal confrontations, and staff are quite willing to applaud (even if they do not concede) when students put forward strong defenses. When students who feel they have been wrongfully censored respond with locker fronts proclaiming that message in some way, staff are willing to accept that and often to appreciate the student's stance, even though the taboos remain in force.

One of the most important features of Metro's nonconfrontational stance is a willingness to negotiate matters that are not elsewhere negotiable. Lynn talks about the hats in the halls question this

way: When students begin insisting, she and Art express a willingness to negotiate it, if the students assign it a priority. Because negotiations will probably necessitate giving as well as getting, the students must decide what they are willing to surrender: their right to leave the building at noon? their right to use Walkmans in Homework Labs? When so approached, the hat issue usually recedes, although some rules have been modified through such negotiation between Metro students and staff.

The general absence of confrontational disciplinary problems doubtless contributes to the staff's sense of efficacy. They are spared a lot of struggle and unpleasantness hard to avoid in other schools. That may be a factor in the strong sense not only of accomplishment but of the group's self-sufficiency and collective competence to cope successfully with the challenges that arise.

Professional Community

Metro Academy enjoys an extraordinarily close professional community, although it does not appear to have spawned the kind of social interaction indicative of close personal relationships. There have been brief stretches when as many as two thirds of the staff go out for Friday afternoon coffee together, but apparently such practice is not sustained as custom. There may be some socializing among those who live on the Upper West Side—a group that roughly approximates the old-timers—but that does not appear extensive. Thus, Metro does not represent a place where all are close friends and personal relationships will spontaneously coordinate interaction.

Yet these are obviously people who like and respect and admire one another enormously. It does not appear that there is regularly a great deal of discussion of personal affairs among colleagues—less than in the typical teachers' lounge. But word spreads quickly among the staff of major tribulations, and there are efforts to accommodate such personal difficulties as Lily's father's illness and the lengthy terminal illness of Marcus's father. There are also many expressions of congratulation over events like Vivian's marriage and the birth of Marcus's son. Birthdays are usually celebrated with a cake at the staff meeting nearest to the event. There seems a consistent and genuine concern for staff as people and also fellow professionals.

It would be hard to find a faculty group with members more respectful of one another's knowledge and skills. One remarkable staff meeting involved a short, good-natured rivalry between Lily and Marcus about who was to present a description of a new course each was currently teaching. After the meeting I asked each privately the reason for the desire to describe what they were doing (a desire that might be expressed among most faculties only in consequence of extreme pressure). The two responded similarly: They expected substantial valuable help from the anticipated reactions so they were eager to obtain the benefits as soon as possible. As Marcus put it, each teacher genuinely seeks answers from the rest of the staff—and equally significantly, expects quality answers to be forthcoming.

There is considerable fundamental agreement among Metro Academy's teachers. Although they express it in varying degrees of detail and eloquence, they are engaged in sustaining and inducting young people into an intellectual community. Their intent is occasioning cognitive learning and development for young people, in the interests of making them independent thinkers able to function as adults both receptive to and capable of further education.

As Marcus put it, the school's several purposes are first to provide an empowering education for students that enables them to establish their place in the world with self-confidence, openness, and critical mindedness. Second, the aim is to create a community and to teach kids what it is. And a third purpose is to provide an enduring, successful instructive model of alternative teaching.

Lily expressed the Academy's purpose as "to turn students on to school and thinking." Ruth, a new teacher, put it in terms of bringing students to love learning in the interests of enabling them to be able to handle further education. Bob, a senior staff member, said simply "to create independent learners." Naomi, another new teacher expressed it as "to create a community of students." Lynn expressed it as "getting kids to buy into intellectual rigor and to see themselves as intellectuals."

Some systematic differences are discernible in the ways that older and newer teachers set priorities for the school's purposes. New teachers are sometimes bowled over by the home and neighborhood situations from which many of the students come. They often focus on "the emotional baggage weighing these kids down"

(in Ruth's terms). Older teachers appear continually conscious of and responsive to such problems, but they seem to have arrived at a more clearly delineated ordering of purposes—in which responding to the problems is an instrumental purpose to be met in the interest of encouraging intellectual accomplishment and development. The differences are subtle, because all Metro Academy teachers are much concerned with the personal and affective dimensions of their students' present lives, and with their future prospects. But the professional culture at Metro is strong in insisting that all youngsters can and must become competent independent thinkers, and that contributing to this development is the Academy's ultimate purpose.

It is indicative of the strength and extent of collegial agreement among the faculty that there is comparable unanimity about taboos. Teachers respond quite similarly to questions about the worst thing a Metro Academy teacher could do as far as students are concerned. Several spoke explicitly of showing disrespect. They also replied in terms of "putting a student down," "taking away a student's self-esteem," "making kids feel incapable," and "attacking or humiliating a student." When asked what would be the worst thing they could do as far as the codirectors were concerned, they spoke of "turning kids off intellectually." And one particularly sensitive teacher, Lily—to whom many students turn—also spoke of keeping oneself "unavailable as a human being" and of a "failure to engage or connect, a 'not being there' for kids."

There is similar agreement that the Metro Academy's particular strategy for bringing about the intellectual development sought is the inquiry approach. This is the school's unique focus. When I asked each teacher what would happen were they to disavow the approach, all but one concluded that such a position would be incompatible with remaining. Bob's reply was "I'd leave; the inquiry approach is nonarguable." Marcus jokingly said "I'd be an enemy of the people." Only Lily felt that such a personal conclusion would be discussible in staff meetings, because inquiry, after all, applies to a process of searching and learning.

Lily is a highly respected member of the senior staff, and her answer suggests an important feature moderating the press for conformity to the inquiry approach. The approach is differently interpreted and differently carried out in each classroom. To some extent

such differences are imposed by epistemological differences in subject matter, but even where this is the case, approaches are sought to render the material subject to inquiry. For example, the claims of algebra and geometry are not inductively substantiated, so the open-endedness and tolerance of difference that mark Art's Issues course cannot occupy the same place in Bob's math and Puzzles courses, where the questions are deductive and only one answer is correct. Nevertheless, the group work that Bob pursues in his courses places students in the position of cosearchers and coinquirers as they jointly pursue solutions. And care is taken to acknowledge more than one approach as a valid way to tackle a given problem. Many of the questions that arise in other courses fall somewhere between the open-endedness of the Issues course and the necessarily more prescriptive stance of a math course. Thus, although Art and Lynn are widely thought to offer the quintessential inquiry courses, it is recognized that the approach will not work out the same way everywhere.

Personality also clearly seems to have something to do with the particular way in which an individual teacher employs the inquiry approach. Art is nondirective with respect to the substance of students' views on the issues considered. He operates as a facilitator (which is, incidentally, the same role he assumes in faculty meetings). His most directive move in dealing with content is to raise a new question (or subquestion) that either elicits challenges to what has been said or channels response in an altered direction. Art's version of the inquiry approach is to raise a broad question, identify those who want to address it, call on them in the order in which they sought to speak, and take careful notes on everything said. He may occasionally offer a brief summary of what has been said, or raise a new question, but he does not offer or endorse any replies. His contributions are exclusively process-oriented rather than substantive. Lynn follows largely the same pattern in her Television Analysis class, beginning with a broad and provocative question thrown out to a class seated in a large circle. But the effects are different because Lynn is more tempted to exert an influence on substantive outcomes.

Other teachers pursue the approach in different ways. For instance, the descriptions just offered provide opportunities for each individual who wants to speak to do so. But it minimizes opportu-

nities for engagement in sustained pursuit or exchange on a particular point. The purposes of the Debate course call for a different arrangement, as could frequent purposes of the Political Philosophy course and the Plays course.

Thus, the inquiry approach appears not so much a matter of particular moves and techniques as of broad intent and orientation. Teachers and codirectors both characterize it by contrasting an inquiry lesson with a developmental lesson, in that the latter begins with a particular point in mind that the successful lesson must arrive at before it concludes. An inquiry lesson, by contrast, has no such single-minded and specific endpoint, and may go in quite different directions from what might have initially been envisioned.

In further seeking the common ground that marks the inquiry approach as applied across various classes and subjects and by different teachers, it seems to represent: (a) a commitment to maximal openness and receptivity to student responses, with a willingness to pursue hypotheses even when they seem wrongheaded; (b) a commitment to exposing students to a variety of information and opinion on all matters considered, thereby expanding awareness of existing knowledge and theory; and (c) a commitment to casting the student in as intellectually an active and demanding a role as possible.

So understood, the approach appears strongly embraced and consistently reflected in all classes. It is broad enough not to pinch: Academy staff do not experience the inquiry orientation as a constraint on their own practice, but instead report a totally unprecedented degree of autonomy. The inquiry approach is also sufficiently specific that it would undoubtedly prove alien and restrictive to some teachers, but the orientation lends consistency to what students experience throughout the school. It does so by enabling Metro to stand for something, as distinct from what its faculty may stand for as individuals. And it is this that in turn enables both students and staff to select the Academy for what it represents.

But lest this suggest that the core agreement among the faculty is only to a broad or abstract set of ideals, that is not the case. Metro has honed several approaches and techniques to a high level of development, and these are used repeatedly in projects and from class to class. One is an expert panel. This is a frequent activity for opening an area or topic of study. One panel, for instance, dealt with the ques-

tion of "What's an education for?" It combined two Metro teachers and two outside educators, each of whom spoke from a single, deliberately focused perspective. One advanced the idea that the central purpose of an education is to take on the culture; another, that it is to prepare the individual for a career; a third, that education's aim is to acquire the values and orientation of the family; and a fourth, that education is for learning how to think independently and to look critically at conditions and ideas.

A second frequent activity is a debate between two Metro teachers. This is a particularly effective way to make students aware of conflicting perspectives, and of knowledge bases that are not always consistent. But well-staged debates between teachers also serve several other long-range Academy purposes extremely well. They provide a platform for teachers to model how adults think about and pursue issues, and to model how intellectual disagreement and conflict can be handled. Thus, Art came in to Marcus's history course one morning to argue that Columbus was a hero for his time, and that his own context rather than ours is the appropriate grounds for judging him; and Marcus argued the position that Columbus was an exploitative business man who pillaged and murdered and is undeserving of the place history has accorded him. Lily came in to moderate the debate, and Naomi sat in to observe it. After the debaters' statements and rebuttals, Lily moderated the class discussion that followed.

Still a third technique extensively developed and often used at Metro is the "sort." A sort calls upon participants to review and assess a large number of possible responses to a broad question such as "What are the characteristics of a good parent?" or "What are the most influential documents in American history?" Participants are typically asked to arrive at the 10 best answers to the sort question, and the 10 least acceptable answers (usually out of 60 possibilities presented). They are asked to do this by literally sorting the packet of 60 small cards each individual receives into three separate piles: 10 best answers, 10 worst, and the remainder. They are often asked next to examine their own answers in relation to others', to discuss rationales, and to arrive at some agreement.

As such approaches and techniques would suggest, there is quite a bit to learn in becoming a part of the faculty of Metro Academy. Although not all of the staff seem fully aware of it, there is quite an

elaborate system for inducting new teachers into the Academy's culture and readying them to develop their own style of carrying out the inquiry approach. It is accomplished largely by modeling and participation in collaborative circumstances. The 3-week project that launches every semester at Metro Academy is the new teacher's introduction to the school. The project occupies the full school day for 15 days and it immerses the beginner in intensive interaction with colleagues and students. The school's entire population is pursuing a single inquiry theme, partly in an all-school group, and partly with differentiated segments of the broader question being studied by 8 to 10 small groups of students, each led by a teacher. The new teacher begins working with colleagues, then on what is a brand-new curriculum for everybody involved. Because the content is novel for all, newcomers are just as likely to have valuable substantive contributions to offer as veteran staff. The process, however—not only of elaborating the plan for the project but of carrying out the inquiry it represents—is a 3-week demonstration epitomizing what the school stands for. While carrying it out, staff model the inquiry process for newcomers and for students. It is a good introduction to the way challenges are met at Metro, together and separately.

But the induction process for new teachers does not end in 3 weeks. When regular classes begin, newcomers are put into a series of collaborative relationships. Naomi, for instance, is a new teacher who came to Metro last spring. She had the following assignments this fall: She taught Political Philosophy and Plays, and she was also assigned (with Marcus) to the laboratory for Lynn's Television Analysis course. Additionally, she worked with Vivian on *Highlights*, the school paper, and audited Lynn's course. Thus, by the end of the semester she had had abundant opportunity to work with, and become acquainted in some detail with, the teaching of three Metro teachers. At the end of the year she will participate with the rest of the Academy staff in a 1- to 2-week intensive review and evaluation of the year, and planning session for next year.

It is probably these several sorts of association and contexts for collaboration that assure the high levels of agreement among the faculty. There are the project-generated connections, the class-related relationships, the connections built when two or three teachers find themselves working together on a specific activity or challenge (a

frequent occurrence), plus the full-staff involvement of the weekly regular meetings and the biweekly curriculum meetings. When these activities are added to the proximity of office space described earlier, it becomes clear that new teachers do not long remain on the fringes of life at Metro. It is these several factors that also sustain some other prominent and very fundamental tenets of the Academy's culture, the largely unspoken, taken-for-granted realities.

The Professional Culture's Core

Assumptions about collaboration and change probably underlie most of the more explicit tenets and themes observable at Metro. As Jan speculated, the capacity to collaborate probably operates as a screening criterion for teachers applying to Metro. The willingness and ability to do so are essential to the school's operating procedures, and the assumption that almost everything is done collaboratively runs deep. As Hank expressed the sense that accompanies such practice, "The key to this place is a shared sense of responsibility." It is also a strongly felt shared sense of ownership. As Lily put it, "It's *our* school."

An additional widely shared and pervasive part of the taken-for-granted reality of Metro Academy—an assumption that goes far toward determining daily activity—is the conviction that a successful school is always in the process of changing. As Marcus put it:

Here, courses are constantly revised, the amount and quality of learning is constantly examined, we're always looking for effective ways to offer support to kids. The grading system, the approach to colleges, voluntary community service have all changed. In traditional schools, changes are implemented and if they don't work the kids are blamed. Here, it's back to the drawing boards.

As both meetings and conversations attest, there is a shared assumption that very little about the school is beyond question, that virtually everything can be done better, and that what they are there for is to try to do just that. It falls well short of flux, because there are durable fundamentals. But change is constant.

These commonalities as to beliefs, values, and assumptions yield several themes that seem to pervade most of the arrangements and practices at Metro. Five elements of this cultural core assume particular prominence: the nature of school structure; the centrality of the mission; efficacy and hence obligation; professional autonomy, and responsibility and conformity expectations; and teacher sense of affiliation.

Structure

Structure serves consistently as a highly manipulable instrument or means at Metro. The school and the way it operates are an effective counter to those tempted to see organization and structure as tools used only by bureaucrats and traditionalists to standardize and create rigidities. At Metro, such structured regularities as schedule, task assignment, and roles must constantly bow to achieving purposes.

Structure, as we have seen, is carefully used to sustain professional culture and community. This occurs naturally, in consequence of physical structure—the physical proximity of crowded office space, and the need to share classrooms; but it is encouraged even more specifically through the intricately interwoven patterns of interaction and assistance built into the Academy's work patterns. The teacher collegiality so sought after today can range from "parallel play" situations—where side by side each does his or her thing independently—to high degrees of mutual interdependence. Even the parallel play arrangement may be an improvement over the solitary traditional circumstances of the teacher, but it is a long way from genuinely collaborative interaction.

Metro's structure stimulates collaboration in several ways. It puts teachers into multiple relationships of mutual dependence as they together generate and design two 3-week, cross-disciplinary projects annually; as one teaches the lab section of another's course; as one serves as a presenter in another's course, providing a requested perspective or set of data; as they together pursue new solutions to the challenges introduced at staff meetings; as advisory teachers obtain student feedback about how things are working and bring it before the full staff; as Organizational Tutorial teachers follow up on explanations from students about why they are working hard in one class but not in another. Both program and organizational

arrangements are constructed to maximize contact among teachers, both individually and in groups. They do so, assuring frequency of contact, contact with a number of teachers, and intensity of contact through task assignments that create interdependency. It appears a highly effective way to sustain the culture within the group and to induct newcomers into the school's professional culture.

Mission Power

Metro is a rare example of a school that does what it says it sets out to do—where the announced mission serves constantly as the criterion and desideratum for everything: for selecting content, materials, activities, processes, structures, assignments. The influence and control exerted by the school mission are evident everywhere, from the bulletin boards to the all-school projects, to trips taken and the particular way the surrounding community is used as the object of inquiry, to the way each class is conducted, to the way teachers address and query students and the way they address and query one another. The determination to make the school an inquiring community, where intellect is valued, pursued, and exercised, is visible in all that goes on.

One reason for such consistency and power may lie, as the directors believe, in the fact that Metro's theme or focus is pedagogically centered rather than substantively centered or focused on school governance or elsewhere. Such a pedagogical focus obviously responds to a central concern of teachers. It connects closely with what they all do and decisions they must all make constantly. Such a focus is also of sufficient logical centrality to a school's operation to bear relevance to most of the decisions the school must make. This contrasts with many of the themes articulating school reform and restructuring efforts (e.g., school-based management and/or shared decision making) and with the themes often selected as the focus for a magnet school (a particular discipline or a cross-disciplinary topic) that lack such advantages.

Efficacy, Therefore Obligation

Metro Academy teachers have a strong sense of their power over the life chances of their students. They are sensitive to the difficulties

these youngsters face, with respect to their current lives and their chances for the future. And they are totally convinced of the importance of learning to use their minds as effectively as possible, to the long-range opportunities these young people will enjoy. Metro staff have a high opinion of just how much previously unchallenged youngsters can do, and they have a high opinion of just how much they can accomplish as teachers. This generates what Lynn called "a sense that all is fixable." And teachers' sense of their own power to realize their goals is buttressed by their faith that the school's co-directors can get them what they need to function well. To date, this assumption has proved justified, because over the years Art and Lynn have managed to obtain private support for a number of projects and activities that public funding could not cover.

If the perspective appears a bit too rose-colored, given the backgrounds and prior histories of many of these students, it does not yield that sort of optimism assuming things work out and will take care of themselves. Indeed, almost the opposite seems true: If it is so enormously important for these kids to learn to use their minds well—and if they all can do so—and if outside support and means can be found if needed—then it becomes a moral imperative for the school, and each teacher within it, to make this come about. Thus there is a constant drivenness and urgency at Metro, generated by a shared awareness of youngsters' needs and teachers' power to meet them. This is the unarticulated driving force of much of the Academy's persistent efforts to improve what they do yet further.

Professional Autonomy, Responsibility, and Conformity

Teachers at Metro Academy feel they enjoy much more autonomy than in previous schools where they have been assigned—save for one teacher who came to Metro from another alternative high school. To a considerable extent, Metro's teachers are free to select or design the courses they will teach and the content comprising those courses. The desire to make offerings enticing to students places a premium on variety, so one need not teach the same thing semester after semester. Instead, teachers are encouraged to design new courses. They are also encouraged to offer courses based on hobbies or personal interests, and in accord with the "generalism" espoused

by the Coalition of Essential Schools, they are encouraged to teach outside their own specialization. Thus, Lily, the psychology teacher, has offered a horticulture class; Bob, whose subject is math, has taught a course in ancient history; and Jan, the science teacher, teaches a course in novels.

But as Art points out, teacher freedom and autonomy are not total, and their justification is not academic freedom. An Academy teacher's freedom is limited by two kinds of constraints: One is a matter of responsibilities to the school operation, the other is a matter of conforming to the school's mission. The first can limit the time and other resources to pursue one's own classroom needs, and the other defines the range of possibilities deemed acceptable in the school.

Each Academy teacher is responsible for the success of the total enterprise. This means that individual responsibilities are not sharply delineated, and if there is a need, one is expected to simply step in and fill it. A student's need to talk, or a colleague's need for assistance, is normally expected to take precedence over the sanctity of any unassigned time. In recognition of this, although Metro teachers have unscheduled class periods, none is designated as personal preparation time.

The school mission also restricts the range of a teacher's choices. The inquiry method delineates acceptable instructional strategy, and if a teacher wanted to present developmental lessons instead, such a pedagogy would be found incompatible with the Metro Academy orientation. Art has no hesitation in stating that this is the toll exacted by a strong mission orientation and a consensual commitment to it. As far as the school is concerned, its integrity cannot be maintained without this operational conformity by all involved. So far as the individual teacher is concerned, the pedagogical restrictions could prove considerable. The trade-off is that those who accept the parameters thus imposed will find unprecedented amounts of professional freedom within the school. But a faculty member who did not accept the mission and its parameters could not find the Metro Academy a comfortable place. And given the public nature of teaching there, it would be impossible for a dissident to conceal or downplay divergent practice, or to retreat to isolationism as the comprehensive high school allows. This is the reason joint selection of faculty—as

exercised by a prospective candidate and also by the school—is seen as critically important at Metro.

Teacher Identification

A final theme that underlies professional life at Metro is the priority teachers assign their affiliation with it. For many teachers elsewhere, the primary identification is as "a New York teacher," or as a member of an occupational/professional group epitomized by the union, or as primarily a teacher of biology or of reading or of special needs students, or as a professional of a particular persuasion (e.g., a whole language or an inquiry learning advocate). Most Metro Academy teachers report primary identification not with these but with the Academy. Although they maintain other loyalties and experience other points of identification, their strongest affinity is evidently with the school.

This assumes particular importance in a city where the union is strong, and where most teachers may come to see it as having a primary claim on their loyalties and obligations. This appears not to be the case at Metro Academy. There is a union representative, whose teaching field (history) has made him highly knowledgeable about union matters. Furthermore, his own political orientation would render him responsive to and sympathetically disposed toward union contributions. But the teachers union's agenda simply does not loom large in this school. The union rep explains this by noting most decisions are jointly made by staff and administration, and no grievances are filed by the school's teachers—both somewhat atypical features for a New York City high school. Indeed, because staff participate in interviewing prospective new teachers, they rather quickly arrive at a sense of the incompatibility of the union's insistence on seniority transfer rights with the sustenance of Metro Academy's mission and mode of operation. Their inclinations under such circumstances seem clear. (Formally, the Academy is bound by the New York City-United Federation of Teachers contract and its transfer provision. Transfer rights have never been invoked by an applicant, however, because prospective candidates who would prove incompatible with the school's orientation are carefully supplied with enough insight when they visit to perceive that.)