

## LEARNING FROM EVALUATION

Srik Gopalakrishnan

Over the last year, the Ball Foundation has been engaged in designing an effective evaluation framework that can answer essential evaluation questions:

- *What difference are the Ball Foundation's partnerships making in aiding system transformation to promote literacy?*
- *What is the quality and extent of implementation of the partnership work?*
- *What are we learning about what works and how does that inform the formation of partnership strategies?*

In the spring of 2005, the Ball Foundation carried out a pilot evaluation of its partnership efforts in Springfield and Chula Vista. The pilot evaluation was an attempt to field test the evaluation questions, methods and instruments. A mixed-method approach was implemented, including both qualitative and quantitative methods: surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, document review and anecdotal story interviews.

The schools that participated in the pilot evaluation were selected based on their level of involvement with the partnership work. Schools with sustained involvement as well as schools with emergent involvement were selected in both districts.

### Highlights of Pilot Evaluation Findings

Both districts have demonstrated progress in the identified areas of organizational capacity (culture, competencies and conditions) and organizational learning (knowledge creation, acquisition, interpretation, sharing and use). However, the concept of systems transformation, which

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## VOICES FROM PRACTITIONERS:

### What difference is the Ball Foundation partnership making?

Rex Babiera

As part of the Ball Foundation's evaluation pilot, foundation staff conducted interviews of teachers, literacy coaches, and a parent from schools in Chula Vista and Springfield. Interviewees were asked to provide stories of success related to continuous improvement and communities of practice efforts supported by the foundation.

The rich stories shared by these practitioners helped illustrate the key evaluation questions.

#### *To what extent and in what ways has the school system undergone a change in culture (i.e. beliefs and values)?*

"People who have been in our building before have walked in and said that there is a completely different feel. Teachers are more willing to go outside the building to increase their knowledge. [They are] willing to make more sacrifices for their kids. We are not allowed to say that the kids can't learn – that if they had books at home, if their parents had read to them, if they used Standard English – we don't use those as excuses anymore. We take what we can do and then implement it."

"Before, we were going through a lot of changes and there was a lot of negativity. ... It was always like you had to be proving yourself. ... Now, I feel like everybody worked so hard to get us to have a school focus. I feel like teachers are doing their job and ... we know what is expected of us."

"Everybody understands what our goal is, how we are going to get there, and what they need to do to make it happen. If you were to take a walkthrough in our building last year and a walkthrough today, you would see a tremendous change just in the

classroom and the environment and the climate of those classrooms."

"I think we now all see the purpose of where we are and where we need to go. I see so much conversation about instruction. You know we are really trying to work together to get the rigor across the board, and the kids hear the same thing from kindergarten to fifth grade, to push our test scores to where they should be and where we want them to be."

"We went from being pulled in all different directions to being focused. Professional development is evaluated on whether it is within the realm of the focus. ... The teachers are much more open with one another, willing to let people come into their rooms and see what they are doing. ... Teachers aren't afraid to ask for help."

"It's been a good journey and it's been very systematic for us, for all of the departments in general. [The change process] has reinforced the idea that everybody has a role to play in the success of this building and it's going to take the whole building to move things forward."

#### The Ball Foundation

The Ball Foundation is a 30-year-old non-profit operating foundation that conducts programs in two areas, Career Vision and Education Initiatives. The foundation also undertakes research to ensure the continuous improvement of its programs and practices. The foundation's mission is to help individuals recognize and develop their potential.

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“The teachers on the bilingual committee [would say,] ‘Let’s teach them (parents) how to do math. Let’s teach them how to read with their kids.’ Now I think it’s changed from being a teacher teaching the parents into more of a dialogue and really not just one person in charge. The whole committee (parents and teachers) has a [job] to do and I like that because it really does embody what we wanted the parents to see.”

*To what extent and in what ways has the school system undergone a change in competencies (i.e. knowledge and skills)?*

“We are looking at our [test] scores much more intelligently. At one of our last faculty professional development days, we sat down ... with the Reading First coach [who] ... really showed us what the facets of the tests were.”

*To what extent and in what ways has the school system undergone a change in conditions (i.e. relationships, policies and processes)?*

“In the past when teachers [went] to a workshop, they just [returned with] a new worksheet or a new book to teach, as opposed to a strategy or a skill that our students needed. Now with ... everyone being much more collaborative, we all take more responsibility for our whole building. No one can hide anymore. Our district’s policy of teaching the standards and benchmarks has enhanced [the change process].”

“[Our principal] has given us some clear direction. She has her expectations and she holds us accountable for our teaching.”

*To what extent and in what ways does the school system acquire, interpret and create knowledge?*

“I took all the English Language Arts standards, looked at the released test questions and then dovetailed them [with my instruction and] the way that I assess the students, so that students are exposed to and have a chance to learn not only the concepts involved with the standards, but also the way that they word the questions and even the answer choices.”

“Specifically with respect to my own teaching, I feel like ... I have got a set of parameters now, almost a heuristic that I use in terms of thinking about what it is that I do on a daily basis and why I am doing it that way. I think teachers are rethinking what it is they are doing in their classrooms.”

“Teachers during the day get out of their classrooms and meet with their respective coaches and talk about the best reading strategies or how we are going to get the kids to comprehend their text. The coaches go into the classroom and work alongside the teachers.”

“I see us looking at test scores and trying to find more reasons why data are the way they are, rather than just looking at the data and pushing them aside and continuing to teach the same way for years.”

*To what extent and in what ways does the school system share knowledge?*

“Our grade level [team] meets every Wednesday. We do all of our planning together. We plan in a different classroom every time, so we can kind of see what each other is doing.”

## VOICES FROM PRACTITIONERS...

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“Our leadership team has gotten together with the leadership team at the high school that we feed into. Conversations with the high school have made us think about how it is that we are preparing these students. Based on this we’ve changed the way we teach.”

“We have found that we have quite an expertise within our own district and our own buildings. So sharing that [expertise] seems to be important.”

“We had a staff meeting in which we did the same exercise as [we did at] the Ball Foundation meeting ... and we did that in grade level teams. ... From there, the other grade levels took it and did it, so it worked for them.”

“We’ve had a lot of interest from other schools in the district. They come to find out what we are doing, why we chose it, and how it is working. ... We had a triad earlier this year with two other schools and we all talked about our focus and what we do and how we came up with it and shared the books that we studied.”

“I see more team involvement with teachers sitting down at grade levels and talking more about where they are going to go from here, as far as lessons or instruction. I see grade levels going back and forth – like the fifth grade works with the kindergarten, for example, around strategies [for] conferring.”

*To what extent and in what ways does the school system use knowledge to achieve its desired results?*

“We had a walkthrough in the classroom and the first thing that I saw was the kindergarteners. They are writing a lot better. They are reading. They are doing math.”

“[We used World Cafes] to get the message out and educate parents about the bilingual program and the whole English language learning process.”

“The benchmark scores [on our monthly assessments] have jumped up, especially in my English Language Learners.”

“Teachers are not just giving students activities and trying to teach the skills, but rather, actually modeling them and going through a whole guided process of meta-cognition, so that they are successful.”

“There is clearly more work being done in reading and writing across the curriculum, building-wide.”

“We created an assessment that we used three times throughout the year to see if their vocabulary really was improving. We scored higher in several different areas in the ISAT test ... which we know we couldn’t have done without the vocabulary piece. The internal assessment scores improved as well. We noticed the change in comprehension and in their writing ability, just by investing in the importance of vocabulary.” ■

## DOUG FISHER PROVIDES LITERACY EXPERTISE TO THE BALL FOUNDATION

Anne-Marie Bracken



As the foundation prepares to partner with another school district, the Education Initiatives (EI) team has been making an effort to increase its capacity in literacy. EI is

fortunate to have the opportunity of bringing Doug Fisher's knowledge and experience into its partnership planning.

Dr. Fisher will collaborate with the EI team around:

- *Effective use of data to improve literacy instruction*
- *Determining literacy standards and developing common assessments*
- *Literacy leadership strategies*
- *Literacy strategies that support the foundation's family engagement work*
- *Methods for developing a literacy instructional framework*
- *Development of an evaluation plan that encompasses student literacy achievement*
- *Assessment of the literacy assets in one prospective new partnership site*
- *Support for EI and its new partner in implementing the work as it relates to literacy*

Dr. Fisher's education and experience are extensive. He obtained his Ph.D. from San Diego State University / Claremont Graduate University with a joint doctoral emphasis on Multicultural Education / Research Methods. His MBA in Executive Certificate / Management Process was granted by the Peter F. Drucker Management Center of the Claremont Graduate School. Dr. Fisher also acquired a Masters in Public Health with a major in Public Health Epidemiology and

Biostatistics and a minor in Quantitative Research Methods. When Dr. Fisher originally attended San Diego State University for his Bachelor of Arts degree, his major was Language, Acquisition and Structure.

Pursuing his interest in teaching language and literacy education, Dr. Fisher has served on the faculty of San Diego State University, School of Teacher Education for several years.

*"Literacy is the foundation of all learning. Learning to read and write is necessary for participation in the democracy, as well as for becoming a contributing citizen of a global society." Doug Fisher*

Since 1999 until present, Dr. Fisher has functioned as Director of Professional Development for the City Heights Educational Collaborative in San Diego, California. His responsibilities have included teacher development across elementary, middle and high schools including pre-service, induction, graduate, and in-service education.

In collaboration with other authors, Dr. Fisher has produced an impressive body of work about literacy, teaching, professional development, leadership, and language, as well as the role families believe they should play in the early literacy development of their children. ■

# FOUNDATION'S SEARCH FOR NEW PARTNER IS UNDERWAY

Janice Crawford

While the work with its current partner school districts is going full throttle, the foundation is also in the midst of the process to select the next school system to join the partnership. The selection process began this summer when the Education Initiatives team identified the following demographic profile that districts had to match to be considered for potential partnership as a mid-sized urban district:

- *Student Enrollment-10,000-60,000*
- *Minimum of 45% of students qualified for free/reduced lunch program*
- *Minimum of 45% of students identified as African American, Latino, Native American, or English Language Learner or any combination of the racial/ethnic/language groups*

The process is unfolding in four phases that will culminate in March when one or more new partners will be selected. At each step in the process prospective partners share increasingly more in depth knowledge and information about themselves and their system-wide plans to achieve educational excellence and equity for all students. By the final phase of the process, the foundation will have amassed a comprehensive Asset Portfolio on the new partner(s).

After the universe of potential partners was identified, the foundation designed the following four-phase process that would result in the development of a complete asset portfolio for the finalists:

## **Phase I: July-October 2005**

Letter of interest and marketing packet was sent to potential partner districts.

Districts responded with a two-page narrative on their mission and identity as a district, their strategic vision for the future, and a summary of the most recent elementary state standardized test scores in reading and/or language arts.

## **Phase II: October-December 2005**

Districts selected for participation in this phase complete a comprehensive organizational profile survey, including specified artifacts.

## **Phase III: December-February**

Foundation visits finalist districts and have in-depth conversations with a variety of stakeholders about the transformational nature of the partnership work.

## **Phase IV: March-June**

Comprehensive baseline evaluation data is collected about the new partnership district.

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The foundation is looking forward to building on the invaluable lessons learned from its current partners as it prepares to begin work in a new site. ■

# BALL FOUNDATION / CHULA VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT KICK-OFF:

## Community of Practice Event, November 8, 2005

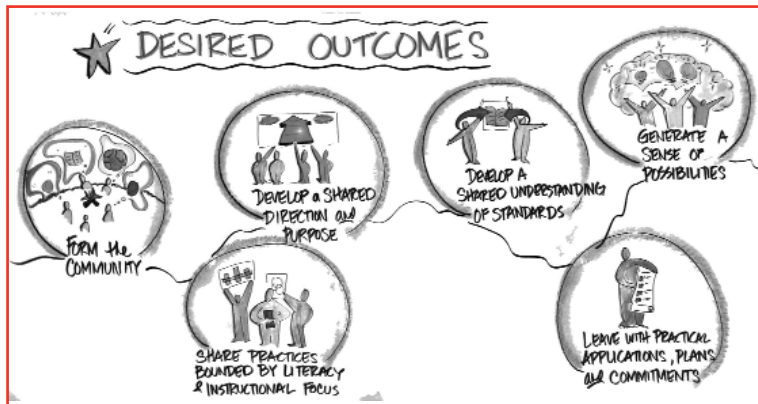
Photos by Rex Babiera



Linda Gomez of Finney Elementary explains her promising practice to fellow second grade teachers.



Teachers in the Chula Vista Community of Practice inquire about each other's promising practices.



Graphic recording done by Mary Corrigan



After hearing about each other's promising practices, third grade teachers in the Chula Vista Community of Practice break into small groups for deeper inquiry.



Fourth grade teachers in the Chula Vista Community of Practice design a lesson based on a read-aloud of Dr. Seuss' Horton Hatches the Egg.

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is called out in the foundation's theory of change, is something that participants had trouble describing as well as connecting to Ball Foundation work and the goal of improved literacy.

The length of time that a school is involved with Ball Foundation work appears to influence clarity of purpose and commitment. While schools with similar length of involvement display similar understanding of content, a more hands-on approach by the foundation and its staff appears to yield higher levels of recognition and understanding of Ball's philosophy.

Communities of Practice and Focus on Results are valued both for process and content by participants. A high degree of satisfaction is reported for both Communities of Practice and Focus on Results work. However, a key learning for the foundation and its partners is that participants indicate that the connections between them, and to literacy, need to be strengthened.

### Next Steps in Ball Evaluation

The next critical step in the evaluation process is the redesign of the evaluation framework based on the experiences from the pilot project. The implementation of the revised evaluation is planned for February 2006 (Springfield) and March 2006 (Chula Vista). The revised evaluation will consider the fact that both the Springfield and Chula Vista partnerships will be moving into the transition phase. The Ball Foundation is also in the process of developing baseline evaluations for new partnerships that are planned. In addition, a key goal of the foundation's evaluation process is to capture more intentionally the learnings from both current and new partnerships and disseminate them more broadly to the field. ■