SCHOOL LEADERS IN A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

AN INTERNSHIP REPORT

GLORIA COMPTON MOORE

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By

Gloria Compton Moore, B.A., B.A.(Ed)

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ABSTRACT

This is an internship report based on the concept of a learning organization, as defined by Peter Senge. In particular, the roles of educational leaders as teachers, designers, and stewards were examined.

The setting for the internship was a two-stream elementary school which serves five smaller communities. It was chosen as the site because of its reputation for collaborative efforts among the staff and administration.

This report consists of a research component and critical reflections on the experience of the internship. The focus throughout has been the five disciplines which comprise a learning organization. These disciplines are personal mastery, challenging mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. The research was in the form of a case study to look for and describe how these disciplines appear in a K-6 school, from the perspective of a practicing administrator. Application for educational leadership has been the focus throughout the research component.

The critical reflections indicate that several elements of a learning organization were evident in the elementary school site. These reflections take the form of a descriptive narrative of daily experiences observed by the intern. From these experiences, a critical analysis was conducted to indicate evidence of school leaders as teachers, designers, and stewards as outlined in Peter Senge's concept of a learning organization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERNSHIP

Rationale for Internship Option

Course requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Leadership) included courses in theories of organizations and leadership, teacher evaluation, educational law, and change processes in education. To balance the theoretical aspect of this degree program, an internship was chosen to complete the program requirements. Having been a classroom teacher for twenty-two years, an internship was also seen as a way to broaden my perspective to include administrative interactions that take place within a school setting.

The Internship Setting

X Elementary is a two-stream school with a population of 357 students located in Newfoundland. It serves five smaller communities under the auspices of a school district which includes urban and rural schools. This school has a reputation for collaborative efforts among the staff and administration. Just recently, the teachers completed computer training to become better equipped to include this aspect in their curriculum at each grade level.

A number of the teachers at this school have excellent reputations throughout the school district. In this past year, one of their number was selected by a local newspaper as Newfoundland's Teacher of the Year. These teachers always speak positively about their work environment and they exhibit a desire to learn. Initial contact with the principal was quite

positive. He showed much interest in my internship proposal. He believed that this internship would provide one way for him to remain informed about latest theories in educational leadership.

Description of Internship Experiences

This internship was planned to allow me to become a part of the administrative team of this school. Specifically, the experience included the following:

a) observation of timetabling for language specialists, physical education program, and music program;

b) experience in planning staff meetings;

c) observations of ways in which the school's discipline policy was carried out;

d) observations of informal teacher evaluation of a new staff member;

e) observations of principals' meetings at district level;

f) experience in home/school/community relations;

g) observation of school guidance team meetings;

h) attendance at Enterprise Education teacher inservice presented by Department of Education.

Method of Self-Evaluation

During the internship, my main objectives were to gain experience through observation of and participation in the experiences indicated above. To personally evaluate my progress,

and as a means of recording my experiences, I kept a daily journal of what I learned, experienced and accomplished. On a regular basis, my responses were discussed with the administration and their feedback was noted in my journal.

On-Site Supervision

The principal and vice-principal conducted supervision throughout the period of the internship. A formal visit was held at Memorial University with Dr. Jean Brown and Dr. Bruce Sheppard, at the outset of the internship. The purpose of this meeting was to enable me to gain focus on the research component of the internship. Dr. Jean Brown made a formal visit to the school at the midpoint of the internship. The principal and the vice-principal attended this meeting. Much positive feedback and encouragement were provided by these individuals at that critical stage in my internship. In addition, frequent telephone calls to Dr. Jean Brown were made.

Research Component

The research component required an examination of each of Peter Senge's five disciplines which comprise a learning organization. These disciplines are:

a)   personal mastery

b)   mental models

c)   shared vision

d)   team learning

e)   systems thinking

The research was in the form of a case study to look for and describe how these disciplines appear in a K-6 school, from the perspective of a practicing administrator. Although this concept is being applied to educational settings, there are few studies which capture what schools as learning organizations actually look like.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on each of these disciplines, from a leader's perspective, and an overall description of the concept of a learning organization was examined. This led to a search for practices which would illustrate the concept as found in this elementary school.

Because the internship report is from the perspective of a practicing administrator, application for educational leadership has been the focus throughout the literature review. Senge argues that the five disciplines overlap as leaders assume the roles of teachers, designers and stewards. These three roles proved to be useful in describing practices observed in this school and will be used to present the findings.

Limitations of the Report

The goal of this internship was to gain experience as an administrator through job shadowing and ongoing interactions with all school personnel. It is meant to provide

opportunities for personal growth. As such, this report may be useful for others with similar professional growth needs. The research component (Chapter Three) provides an image of one school's experience with professional learning, and although it might give insight into the process as it takes place in an elementary school, it does not pretend to be generalizable to other schools. It should also be noted that this is a report of an administrator rather than teacher, perspective. There was no effort to interview teachers. Observations on teachers were gained through a participant/observer role as an administrator.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized in three chapters. Chapter One provides the reader with the goals and objectives of the internship along with an overview of the report. Chapter Two is the research component, which examines the concept of a school as a learning organization. Chapter Three is a reflective commentary of the internship experience, and on the practices which illustrate the school as a learning organization.

Chapter One and Three have been written in the first person because of the experiential and reflective nature of the contents. Chapter Two is presented in a formal academic manner, and is written in the third person.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Leaders and Learning Organizations

"Powerful forces in the environment are pressing on public and private organizations throughout the world. Rather than abating, the pressure on organizations to alter existing policies, patterns, and practices are likely to increase" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p.311). The challenge today is to modify organizations so that they have the capacity to generate change in order to achieve optimum results.

Most principals have gained their experience in stable, policy-based, procedurally directed organizations. These principals have relied heavily on a structural frame. However, the complexity, conflict, and uncertainty resulting from the constant change in today's organizations necessitate the viewing of leadership and organizations through multiple lenses (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

Principals and other leaders need to learn and use new skills as the old rules and behaviours no longer work in these times of constant change. If principals are to accomplish this, there is an increased likelihood that they will be able to achieve the goal of creating organizational cultures that value quality and strive toward excellence. How can principals achieve this goal? According to Senge (1990a) the answer lies in creating learning organizations. Senge states "an organization's ability to learn may make the difference between

its thriving or perishing in the years ahead" (O'Neil, 1995). Senge considers learning organizations to be organizations in which everyone is continually and collectively increasing their ability to create what they want to create (O'Neil, 1995; Senge, 1990a).

Most schools are not learning organizations in Senge's view. In order for schools to become this kind of organization, there are fundamental changes needed in their culture through collective learning. He recognizes, however, that collective learning is more difficult to institute in schools than in other organizations. This is because the educational system is very stratified and fragmented, with educators at all levels feeling disempowered. On the other hand, he points out that schools are advantaged by the fact that a great proportion of teachers enter the profession with a great sense of personal purpose, even though cynicism often follows later (O'Neil, 1995).

Becoming a learning organization goes beyond changing structure. It has much more to do with changing culture. Because culture is so much a part of how people identify themselves, it is much more difficult to change. It goes to the very essence of what motivates people to do the things they do. Fullan (1993) states that changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs (p. 49). The new work of leaders in the future is to building learning organizations (Fullan, 1993; Senge, 1990b). They are indeed responsible for learning - their own and that of others (Senge, 1990b).

Fullan (1993) provides four conclusions about educational leadership in a learning organization. These are:

1. Neither principals as strong 'unilateral leaders' or principals as 'weak followers' are relevant to the future role of schools as learning organizations.

2. Leadership skills require great sophistication. (Of particular interest here is Fullan's comments that research on leadership by women indicates that they may be better prepared to be leaders in learning organizations).

3. Educational leaders must learn to influence and coordinate non-linear, dynamically complex, change processes.

4. The principalship, as we now know it, may disappear and be replaced by a community of leaders. (p. 74-75)

In addition to Peter Senge, whose concept of a learning organization is the focus of this paper, there are others who have written of this kind of organization. Smith (1995) states that this dynamic organization accepts and adjusts to constant change. It has no particular form that can be drawn on an organizational chart. It may even be a state of mind (p. 91). She adds that these organizations must also teach. Focus must be on education and development. In general, people in a learning organization share a common program and language or way of communicating (p. 90).

Greenwood, Wasson, & Giles (1993) give the following definition of a learning organization:

- where individuals take ownership for their own development and learning on a self-directed basis.
- where the organization supports and recognizes and rewards people for learning.
- where the organization has developed the capacity of capturing learning in its

different parts and capturing them into the corporate knowledge base to generate new capability. (p. 7)

A very important dynamic that should be noted is that the transformation to a learning organization must be approached as an ongoing process, not simply a reform process with a beginning and an end (Greenwood et al., p. 11).

In an article describing an ideal school as a learning organization, DuFour (1997) identified eight prerequisites which are summarized below:

1.   Attention to orientation for new faculty members. This would include a well defined mentoring experience and a support group with teachers who share the same teaching assignment.

2.   Curricular teams/interdisciplinary teams. Every teacher would meet in such teams on a regular basis to collaborate, with the most important goal being to assess their teaching practices to improve student performance.

3.   Peer observation. Giving and receiving feedback in teaching practices would be the norm for all teachers. They would receive training in observation, analysis of instruction, and conferencing skills for such endeavours.

4.   Study groups. All teachers would participate in groups, learning more about topics that are of interest to them. Researching, reviewing, professional articles, discussing ways to implement new strategies in their work, and bringing what they have learned to the entire staff would all be included.

5.   Action research. As a commitment to continuous learning, a school would embark on some area of study and develop a hypothesis, collect and analyze data, draw conclusions and develop an action plan.

6.   School improvement task forces. All teachers at various points in their career would become involved in school improvement task forces. Identifying the discrepancy between what is and what the school's vision statement reads would be the jumping off point of these task forces. Teachers would help by recommending ways to reduce the discrepancy.

7.   Professional sharing. Teachers would be encouraged to share their own insights on teaching and learning with their colleagues through presentations to peers in staff meetings, to the district in workshop settings, and by submitting their writing to professional journals.

8.   Collaborative structure supported by time. All of the previous activities described above require collaboration. Time would be given to teachers in a learning organization to become involved in these endeavours. Such a school would recognize that by allowing teachers to reflect upon their practice would have a positive impact on students' learning.

DuFour (1997) suggests that the following questions need to be asked if a school is to be transformed into a learning organization:

1. Is our approach to professional growth purposeful and results-oriented?

2. Do we recognize that the best place for professional growth is the school itself?

3. Does our culture reflect the receptiveness to change that is critical to continuous improvement?

4. Do we regard professional development as a continuous process rather than an event? (p. 86-87)

According to Senge, it is the responsibility of principals to initiate changes in the schools. Principals should start by seeking out those teachers who have a commitment to improvement and finding ways to get them talking to each other. Then, they should develop a process to involve all stakeholders, including the parents and even the older students, so as to change school cultures in order to create learning organizations (O'Neil, 1995).

Principals must assume new roles in a learning organization, namely that of teachers, designers, and stewards. These new roles will require new skills, such as: fostering systemic patterns of thinking, surfacing and challenging mental models, building shared vision, promoting team learning, and encouraging personal mastery (Senge, 1990a).

Leaders as Teachers

DePree (1989) states "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality" (p. 11). However, the leader as teacher should not assume the role of expert and teach people what (s)he considers to be reality. Instead, (s)he should reflect on his (her) own view of reality and

guide others in the organization to acquire more insight into current reality, so that they can see beyond the superficial day-to-day events into the underlying causes of problems.

This is the essence of systems thinking. It encourages organization members to assume new responsibilities for the overall success of services and results, thereby seeing the interrelationships in an organization. It recognizes that it is the system and not incompetent people that cause most organizational problems. It avoids symptomatic solutions or quick fixes. It recognizes where a change with minimum effort could lead to lasting improvement (Acker-Hocevar, 1996; Betts, 1992; O'Neil, 1993; Senge 1990a; Snyder & Snyder, 1996).

One way to develop systems thinking in schools is to guide individuals in surfacing and sharing their mental models or assumptions because these mental models significantly influence how individuals view problems and identify solutions (Dalin, 1996; Senge, 1990b). The term mental models is widely used today by cognitive psychologists and scientists, as well as administrators. It refers to the images, assumptions, and stories that individuals carry in their minds regarding themselves, other people, institutions and other aspects of the world. Isaacson & Bamburg (1992) state that "in their simplest form, mental models are subconscious, take-for-granted beliefs that limit people's thinking about how the world works" (p. 43).

When two people viewing the same event or listening to the same conversation explain it differently, it is because of the difference in their mental models. It is understandable then that people who do not understand each other's mental models can spend time arguing ideas, becoming frustrated and reaching a stalemate, or ending up in a compromise in which neither

one wins (Senge, 1990a). If they were able to surface and discuss their different mental models, decision-making processes in organizations could be immensely improved. But how does a principal enable individuals in the organization to surface and discuss their mental models?

The answer to the above question has been provided by Harvard's Chris Argyris and his colleagues (one being Donald Schön), who in their work on "action science" have developed theories and skills for reflection and inquiry into the reasoning beneath our actions. By using skills of reflection people can slow down their thinking processes, so that they become more aware of how they form their mental models and how these mental models influence their behaviour. This kind of reflective practice engages professionals in the redesign and reconstruction of their world (Canning, 1991; Reitzug & Burrello, 1995; Wellington, 1991).

According to Killion and Todnem (1991),

> Reflection is a gift we give ourselves, not passive thought that calls aimlessly in our minds, but an effort we must approach with vigor, with some purpose in mind, and in some formal way, so as to reveal the wisdom embedded in our experience. Through reflection, we develop context-specific theories that further our own understanding of our work and generate knowledge to inform future practice. (p. 14)

Once individuals realize what their true mental models are, they are able to acquire the skills of inquiry and advocacy. These are skills for honest investigation. Inquiry means to ask questions in a genuine effort to understand another individual's point of view. Advocacy

is the ability to present one's own position in an attempt to influence the views of others. These skills involve the manner in which individuals operate in face-to-face interactions with others when discussing issues which are complex or conflictual (Senge, 1990a). Many individuals are skilled at advocating their views, but most use pure advocacy and no inquiry. They explain their own point of view and avoid discussing any issues that would weaken their position. If advocacy and inquiry are balanced, both sides of the argument are brought out to be clearly examined by others. The goal of a balance of advocacy and inquiry is to find the best argument, whereas the goal of pure advocacy is to win the argument. By balancing advocacy and inquiry into their own views, as well as the views of others, it is possible to develop completely new views for all involved (Senge, 1990a). It is then that new learning can take place.

Enabling individuals in the organization to use the skills of reflection and balancing advocacy and inquiry is one way to begin changing an organization from within. However, there will always be some individuals in any organization who will feel vulnerable in this type of atmosphere. Some people hesitate to express their view because they are not willing to be seen as wrong. Others may be disinterested to the point of refusing to articulate their views. Such individuals cannot be coerced into using these skills. In a school, this often occurs when an outside facilitator leaves after a period of inservicing teachers. This is why it is essential for principals to be adept at these skills. (S)he must lead by example and create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect for individuals and their ideas (Bergman, 1992; Depree, 1992).

According to Caine and Caine (1995),

> A change in mental models is perceptual change. For it to evolve three elements must be at work simultaneously:
>
> 1. Relaxed alertness, that is, creation of a challenging, but nonthreatening environment;
>
> 2. orchestrated immersion in complex experience.
>
> 3. Continuous active processing of ongoing changes and experiences to consolidate the emergent mental model. (p. 47)

Leaders as Designers

The first task of the leader as designer is to design the governing principles of purpose, vision and core values, by which people will live (Senge, 1990b). Vision is defined by Duke (1990) as "an image of what is desirable that can be expressed in ways that inspire and motivate people to work toward improvement" (p. 26). According to Sergiovanni (1987) "vision refers to the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working in the organization" (p. 57).

However, vision should be shared vision and not just the vision of the leader imposed upon the organization; imposed visions at best command only compliance and never commitment (Rogus, 1988; Senge 1990a). Senge (1990a) states:

> A shared vision is a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. At its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question 'What do we want to create? Visions are exhilarating. They create the spark, the excitement and lifts an organization out of the mundane with a shared vision we are more likely to expose our ways of thinking, give up deeply held views, and recognize

personal and organizational shortcomings. Shared vision provides the focus and energy for learning. (pp. 206-210)

The capacity to create and realize a shared vision is the one characteristic that the last decade of research has been able to associate with effective leadership (Bennis, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 1991).

According to Ross (1992), "In effective schools a shared vision provides a focus and common identity; aspirations are uplifted and they feel a sense of exhilaration and belonging to a larger purpose" (p. 8). A vision must grow from the needs of the organization and should be owned by those who have created it. Bennis and Nanus point out that the vision must become part of the social architecture of the organization (Rogus, 1988).

However, in order to create shared visions, individuals in the organization must be continually encouraged to develop personal mastery or personal growth and learning which consists of their own personal vision, commitment to the truth and creative tension. Without the development of personal vision and commitment to the truth, there will never be commitment, only compliance, to a shared vision. However, as well as developing personal vision individuals need to generate creative tension in order to develop personal mastery. Those who have generated creative tension are able to see the gap between their vision and reality. Creative individuals use the gap between their vision and current reality to generate energy for change. An organization composed of this type of individuals can together create a powerful synergy toward a shared vision. However, it is not sufficient to just create shared

vision, it must be perpetuated. This can be best achieved through fostering systemic thinking so that individuals think in terms of generating change, rather than reacting to change as has been customary with linear thinking and "event mentality" (Senge, 1990a). This vision needs to be "incorporated into the organization's culture and ... reinforced through the strategy and decision-making processes" (Rogus, 1988, p. 49).

In creating a shared vision leaders empower others making them feel like owners and enhancing commitment. The critical ingredient to provide impetus for ownership and commitment is collegiality. Effective leaders promote collegiality and collaboration through dialogue and discussion as well as design the means for teamwork and team building. Leaders should recognize that teamwork is essential for the success of learning organizations in the future. "Effective teamwork is based on synergy - the fact that the whole (team) is greater than the sum of its parts (individuals)" (Ross, 1992, p. 11). When a team functions as a whole its energy creates synergy and harmony which empowers individuals as well as the team and promotes self-esteem through valuing people and involving them in decisions that make a difference.

Maeroff (1993) states that the ties between teachers and principals are strengthened by the team process" (p. 26). Teaming leads to a sense of collective responsibility for one another and for students and provides an emotional and instructional support network (Reitzug & Burrello, 1995, p. 48). Working together to share assumptions, learning through dialogue, building new mental models, and actively transferring their learning to others, are all components of team learning.

Leaders as Stewards

According to Senge (1990b), stewardship is "the subtlest role of leadership. Unlike the roles of designer and teacher, it is almost solely a matter of attitude. It is an attitude critical to learning organizations" (p. 8).

An act of trust, personal responsibility and professionalism, and placing oneself in service to ideas, ideals, and to others all represent stewardship according to Sergiovanni (1992).

First of all, trust is a highly regarded value, both to individuals and to organizations. Greenleaf (1977) states that a high level of trust is needed in institutions. He states that trust must be at the forefront, and that nothing in an organization will move until it is firm. The trust we exercise today can be an enabling force for the future. According to DePree (1989) "we free each other to perform in the future through the medium of trust" (p. 115). He further states that in organizations "we must trust one another to be accountable for our own assignments" (p. 116).

How can principals help develop this virtue of trust among teachers? Leadership flourishes when leaders and followers view each other as being credible. Rost and Smith, as cited in Sergiovanni (1995), in describing credibility, cite character as its first component. Character is defined as honesty, trust and integrity. In the field of education, we think of professional trust. It is not necessary to understand all the details of each other's role in order to trust each other's ability to get the job done. Perhaps this statement serves as an adequate

response to the question previously asked. When principals exercise the required amount of trust in teachers, it is possible that the seeds of a more collaborative culture can be germinated. Sergiovanni (1995) states that school leaders must use enough "style" to build an interpersonal climate characterized by trust, and demonstrate enough knowledge of and commitment to issues of substance to build integrity.

A second component of leadership as stewardship is personal responsibility and professionalism. One of the major dilemmas faced by educators today is that the profession is not viewed as a profession. One needs to look to school leaders as those who can help develop within teachers those attitudes of personal responsibility and trust. Lieberman, as cited in Hargreaves and Dawe (1990), states that "building a professional culture of teaching which is more responsive and receptive to change has become an important managerial priority for many schools and school systems" (p. 227).

Principals are faced with the task of merging the two aspects of professionalism: competence and virtue. Competence is one's expertise which has been acquired through specialized training in a particular body of knowledge. Schön, as cited in Hargreaves & Dawe (1990), states:

> At the heart of professional knowledge is a reflective attitude wherein practitioners are constantly engaged in reflection - in - action (that is, thinking about the problem at the very moment one is dealing with it) and also engaging in reflection-on-action, once the action is over, perhaps reconstituting the principles which will guide their next action in similar circumstances. (p. 230)

More often than not, this reflection takes place through sharing with colleagues. In a truly collaborative culture, teachers will keep each other in check regarding competence issues. Virtue, on the other hand, denotes value. Teachers frame their collaborative effort, or collegiality, by the value they place upon becoming exemplary practitioners. This brings to mind, once again, the values of integrity and trust. As professionals, teachers are committed to such values. Traditionally, the teaching profession has been steeped in morality. The principal's role then is to help develop this professional ideal because (s)he should be the master teacher.

Fullan (1991) states that "the principal as the collaborative leader is the key to the future" (p.161). In viewing collaborative cultures, leaders must be aware that true colloraboration occurs only rarely. It is often replaced by a contrived collegiality which has much of the appearance of a truly collaborative culture. Hargreaves & Dawe (1990) alert administrators to the danger of imposing a contrived collegiality. It serves as "a quick, slick administrative surrogate for more genuinely collaborative teacher cultures, cultures which take much more time, care, and sensitivity to build than do speedily implemented changes of an administratively superficial nature" (p. 238). Such collaborative cultures depend, once again, on trust and sharing. Lieberman, as cited in Sergiovanni (1992), suggests that the receiving culture is key in determining whether administratively induced collegiality is contrived or becomes real.

The third component of stewardship is placing oneself in service to ideas, ideals, and

to others. Sergiovanni (1994) outlines four stages of leadership for school improvement in order to show the development towards servant leadership. The first, bartering, has both bureaucratic and psychological sources of authority. As the word suggests, there is a trade-off because the leader and followers do not share the same goals. The teachers get what they want, usually in the form of extrinsic rewards. In exchange, the principal gets what (s)he wants, usually in the form of compliance to some innovation which the principal wishes to implement. The phrase "what is rewarded gets done" is the basis for this stage of leadership. The initial bartering process is part of transactional leadership. Burns, as cited in Sergiovanni (1995), states that this type of leadership is identified as being focused on extrinsic motivation. It responds to physical, security, social, and ego needs of people at work. It is important to recognize that bartering can be useful as a starting point in a process towards stewardship. With cooperation and compliance as its purposes, it is a safe area to begin. In discussing collaborative cultures, it was noted that professionalism is determined partly by competence. Sergiovanni (1995) states:

> Bartering is an especially effective strategy when the issue is one of competence. However, once competence has been achieved, one needs to look to leadership by building and bonding for the strategies and tactics that will help transcend competence to inspire and extraordinary performance. (p. 120)

This second stage of leadership, referred to as building, moves the focus from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards. Building up the psychological support systems of teachers becomes the task of the principal at this stage. Sergiovanni (1995) states that "leadership by building

responds to esteem, achievement, competence, autonomy, and self-actualizing needs" (p. 119).

The principal provides a climate where teachers are given greater opportunities for the

aforementioned needs to be met. The phrase "what is rewarding gets done" is often used to

describe what is happening. The motivation comes from the work itself.

The third stage of leadership in this model is bonding. It serves to further develop the

building process. As teachers feel empowered and show response to this process, the goals and

interests of the principal and teachers begin to merge. A myriad of important linkages occur

at this stage. Moral leadership, covenantal relationships, purposing and building followership

are concepts that all find their place in this stage of leadership.

Covenantal relationships emerge in bonding. DePree (1989) has had some profound

ideas regarding this. He states:

> A convenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to
> values, to goals, and to management processes. ... [They] are open to
> influence. They fill deep needs and they enable work to have meaning and to
> be fulfilling. Covenantal relationships reflect unity and grace and poise. They
> are an expression of the sacred nature of relationships. ... [They] tolerate risk
> and forgive errors. I am convinced that the best management process for
> today's environment is participative management based on covenantal
> relationships. (pp. 60-61)

At this level, the motivation to work comes from a sense of moral purpose. Sergiovanni

(1995) uses the phrase "what is good gets done" and it gets done well without close

supervision. The source of authority is moral and professional. When teachers have shared

visions, values, ideals, and ideals, a sense of community emerges based on covenantal

relationships and moral purpose (Fullan, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1995). As a part of this moral authority, there is an emotional commitment to a set of ideas. This is referred to as followership. Kelly, as cited in Sergiovanni (1992), states "the concept of followership poses a number of paradoxes. It turns out that effective following is really the same as leadership" (p. 71).

There is obviously a change in the hierarchical structure when followership and leadership are joined together. Instead of a top-down system, the only constant is that the ideas, values, and commitments are at the centre with leaders and followers as the spokes of the wheel. Followership is established through purposing. Referring again to covenantal relationships and shared vision, the basis of purposing can be seen. Purposing can be defined as: (1) defining core values (2) acting on core values (3) supplying resources to support core values (4) embodying core values in personnel evaluation (5) expressing outrage when practices violate core values (Sergiovanni, 1995).

Finally, leadership can be binding. This is where the innovations become institutionalized and routine. Its source of authority is moral and the leader views him or herself as a servant leader. In this way the needs of the school are being ministered to and the values of the school are guarded. Because innovations are now routines, there is room for the school as a community of leaders to give attention to new challenges and improvements.

Conclusion

In a school which is a learning organization, the roles of the principal are to act as a teacher, designer and steward.

As a teacher, a principal would define clearly his/her own reality and guide colleagues to do the same. By viewing the school and its environment systemically, the principal would encourage colleagues to think about how each of them has responsibility in the total functioning of the school. The principal would challenge the mental models of his/her colleagues so that all individuals examine their own perceptions. The very essential work of dialogue would occur as the principal helps teachers find a balance between forcing their own views on others and asking meaningful questions to better understand their colleagues.

As a designer, a principal would quietly design the governing principles of purpose, vision, and core values in the school. As the principal's own personal vision is crystalized and shared, s/he would encourage others to do the same. From this perspective, shared visions for the school can evolve. A principal who is a designer encourages others towards personal mastery, challenging them to improve as they see the principal doing the same. All of the learning processes are designed so that colleagues learn from each other. A designer sees the great value of life long learning for everyone in the school.

As a steward, the principal places him/herself in service to ideas, ideals and others. An attitude of servanthood enables the principal to build trust with one's colleagues. In such a climate, a commitment to learn from each other can evolve. Personal responsibility and

professionalism are necessary in a principal who is a steward. Professionalism requires competence in the role of principal. It also requires virtue or value in the profession. The principal must help develop this professional attitude in teachers through collaborative cultures.

It must be noted that in defining the leadership roles in a learning organization, some overlap exists in these elements. The table below outlines these roles.

Table 1

Principals' Roles in a Learning Organization

Principals' Roles in a Learning Organization
Teachers   •   Define their own reality and guide others to do the same   •   Encourage systems thinking   •   Challenge mental models   •   Balance advocacy and inquiry
Designers   •   Design the governing principles of purpose, vision, and core values   •   Work towards shared vision   •   Encourage personal mastery   •   Design learning processes to help others learn   •   Encourage systems thinking
Stewards   •   Place oneself in service to ideas, ideals and others   •   Build trust   •   Assume personal responsibility and professionalism   •   Merge competence and virtue

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

The goal of this internship was to gain experience as an administrator through job shadowing and ongoing interactions with all school personnel. The research component focused my observations, as a practicing administrator, on the ways in which this school and its leaders exhibited the components of a learning organization. During the period of the internship, these goals were met. Under the mentorship of the onsite supervisor, the principal of this school, I feel that I have developed skills to become competent as an administrator and have gained a greater understanding of the role of an administrator in an elementary school.

Using a daily journal, I recorded my experiences and my impressions of those experiences. To the best of my ability, I kept a focused view of the components of a learning organization. In particular, I observed how the administrative team of this school worked on a daily basis. My reflections rest upon the roles of leaders in a learning organization as designers, teachers and stewards.

This report represents a slice of life in X Elementary School. It includes specific events such as meetings which caused immediate and more explicit changes in the life of this school, as decision-making occurred. But along with the record of such events, there are reflections on everyday experiences which may not, on the surface, appear to be very significant. These

everyday experiences collectively represent a school culture of caring, support, and trust, all important ingredients in a school that is a learning organization.

Reflections on Leaders as Teachers

Leaders as teachers define their own reality and guide others to do the same. They encourage systems thinking, challenge existing mental models, and balance advocacy inquiry, as shown in Table 1. There was evidence that the principal of this school was a teacher. A new teacher had been assigned the school. While she had many years of experience, her new assignment as an elementary classroom teacher was a challenge for her. Her class had a few disruptive students known to have been difficult cases for teachers in earlier grades. One particular student was a concern for the administration. The administration wondered if this student had been appropriately placed. I was an observer in a meeting that took place between the guidance counsellor and the principal to discuss this matter. A number of factors were considered:

1. the mother had asked if the child could stay where he was presently placed;

2. the child had indicated he had a positive attitude about the first day of school with the new teacher;

3. the other teacher in the grade level had experienced problems earlier with a sibling in this family;

4.   the feelings and concerns of the new teacher had to be considered.

The final decision was made by the principal and guidance counsellor to keep the student in the new teacher's class. Careful monitoring and support of guidance counsellor and principal would be given to the new teacher.

As time went on, this teacher became frustrated with the language arts curriculum, much of which was new to her. She wanted to use a grammar workbook as a supplement to her program. This workbook was not prescribed by the Department of Education. A meeting was held with the two grade level teachers, the principal and vice-principal. Prior to this meeting, the principal and vice-principal met to discuss the district's view of using workbooks as opposed to teaching grammar in context. Their own views were clear that the use of a workbook was not desirable. They brought this view to the meeting and I observed the frustration of the new teacher. The principal listened to her views and suggested a compromise. The school would be willing to subsidize the cost of the workbook if parents were willing to pay a certain amount. He asked the two teachers if they were willing to accept this compromise. He concluded this way. "We do what's best for the students, but we also have to do what's helpful for teachers".

From this exchange, I saw a willingness on the part of the administration to suspend their own thinking on this matter for the greater good of the teacher. It was obvious by her tone and physical appearance that she had reached a high level of tension and frustration in her

new teaching assignment. The principal and vice principal, while initially expressing their own and the school district's view of workbooks being used in language arts, quickly realized a need to ask more questions and allow the teacher to have freedom in expressing her views. While the teacher's mental model was challenged, her self-confidence was somewhat elevated by the final decision to allow these workbooks to be used. The principal and vice principal quite adequately balanced advocacy and inquiry in this situation and gave evidence of their role of leaders as teachers. I also observed that the new teacher began to trust the administration a little more after this decision had been reached. She had been heard and was shown respect for her views. In this way, this situation also gave evidence of the stewardship of the administration.

Case (1992) states that systems thinking allows us to focus on all the key variables and the dynamic complexity of the relationships among then (p. 33). In such a whole system, we see clearly and are better able to understand how to change them.

An excellent example of how systems thinking can make a difference is in the co-teaching which takes place particularly in the early primary grades at this school. Special education teachers and regular classroom teachers work closely in the same classroom as special education students are integrated as much as possible with the regular class in instructional time. While the main goal is to provide the special education students with as enriched environment as possible for optional learning to occur, a systemic view is larger than this. In a school which is a learning organization, teachers talk about their practice in ways

that help each other gain new insight. I observed the meaningful dialogue between regular classroom teachers and special education teachers. Through such dialogue, new instructional strategies were shared by special education teachers with regular classroom teachers. Ways to manage larger groups of students were shared by regular classroom teachers with special education teachers as they both planned co-operatively in their curriculum planning meetings.

The complex interactions that are observed when we think systemically were also recognized through the involvement of parents in classroom learning. I observed and became a part of a resource unit with Grade One students. I joined a team of three parents with the classroom teacher and resource teacher who is also the vice-principal. We monitored five groups of students as they participated in a resource-based unit. I observed the positive interaction among teachers, parents, and students in an equally enriching environment.

Reflections on Leaders as Designers

Senge (1990a) refers to the quiet design work of leadership (p. 341). Table 1 indicates that leaders design the governing principles of purpose, vision and core values. They work towards shared vision, encourage personal mastery and systems thinking. They emphasize team learning by designing learning processes to help others learn.

My internship coincided with a very demanding time in the history of education in this province. With educational reform at its height, involving consolidation of many school boards, I was able to observe the ways in which this particular leadership team coped with

these changes. At the initial staff meeting in September, the principal outlined the interim plan of the phasing out of the existing school board. Many changes were to occur that would have direct impact on teachers. In a clear, non-threatening tone, the principal explained that for the foreseeable future until the new school board as in place, this school would operate very much under site-based management. Because district curriculum co-ordinators would not be named until several months hence, the principal would act as a sounding board for curriculum matters within the school. He made it clear that they had the expertise within the staff to handle many of the issues that may arise in the area of curriculum planning and development. I observed at this time a reiteration of the school's purpose and core values. In a very unstable external environment, where the employer could hardly identify him/herself, this school continued on in a very stable manner. When there could potentially have been much chaos and frustration voiced, this did not occur. The leadership team was quietly designing strategies to keep their school environment as stable as possible in these changing times. Senge (1990) states that the work of real designers is to design the organization as a whole, to see it systemically. The reorganization at district level may have been a frustrating experience at many points. In the case of this school, it served to help them see their roles with a continued sense of purpose and vision.

The principal, in a subsequent staff meeting, referred to the issue of changes at the district level and the stress that these people were feeling. He stated that the school could empathize with their colleagues at the district level. He concluded by affirming the strengths

of the staff and encouraging their efforts "to survive the storm" that was going on outside their walls. He concluded: "We will continue to operate to the best of our ability here".

In the year prior to my internship, this school had been involved in computer training for all teachers. Through the leadership team made up of the administration and a number of lead teachers, the entire teaching staff had received initial training for better utilization of computers in the classroom. At the time that I was in this school, the principal indicated to me that some teachers were ready to forge ahead in this area while others were still somewhat reticent. For those who felt ill at ease and overwhelmed by the demands of this training, no pressure was placed on them. It was interesting to observe the lighthearted, nonthreatening tone that the principal used in staff meetings. He clearly reiterated the need for further work in this area and this was received favourably. I observed that there was no tension exhibited in such meetings.

The principal encouraged personal mastery of basic computer technology for classroom teachers. A positive response to the need for more training was clearly evident. As I participated in upgrading a number of the classroom computers for Windows '95, I had an opportunity to observe and speak to teachers about their views regarding computer usage in the classroom. They shared the vision of the administration and the lead teachers that all students should become computer literate at an early age. It was clear that they saw their role as being very important in achieving that goal.

This process of preparing for the demands of computers in the classroom indicates that

team learning was going on at this school. All teachers participated, with the more knowledgeable teachers in this area helping to train their colleagues in this important endeavour.

Reflections on Leaders as Stewards

Leaders as stewards place themselves in service to ideas, ideals, and others. They build trust and they assume personal responsibility and professionalism. In their role as stewards, they merge competence and virtue, as shown in Table 1.

The principal gave much evidence of his stewardship at the school. An incident which reflected this concept of service to others concerned one of the bus drivers at the school. While this episode illustrates a number of important aspects of leadership, I use it here to indicate how far the principal and others in the administrative team were willing to go to alleviate the bus driver's anxiety. This driver was a very timid gentleman. He was having great difficulty keeping control on the bus after the duty teacher had left, once students were settled in their seats. With no one to supervise them, a few students were becoming unmanageable on the route to and from school. He spoke to the principal about this problem. This, coupled with one or two parental complaints, caused the principal and guidance counsellor to put an action plan in place. Using my car and donning caps so as to remain unrecognized by students, they followed close behind the bus after it left the school. They each observed the behaviour of students through the rear window of the bus. The bus was

followed through its entire route, with the principal and guidance counsellor boarding it on its second last stop. The rowdy students were made aware that their inappropriate behaviour had been observed for the duration of the route. Both the principal and guidance counsellor returned to the school and decided that, during the weekend, they would make their individual notes of what they had observed. In many schools, such an expedition would not have occurred, especially late on a Friday afternoon. On the following Monday, the principal and guidance counsellor met and discussed their observations. From this meeting, the manner in which to deal appropriately with the students in question was decided jointly and the plan was subsequently carried out. The stewardship of these two individuals was evident in their concern for the bus driver, the safety of the students, and in response to concerned parents whose children were being harrassed on the bus.

One of the demands made on personnel during the transition period before the new school board took over was to update and put finishing touches on many policies of the present school board. The guidance counsellor of this school was asked to serve on a committee to further develop the school board's guidance policy. Because deadlines were fast approaching, the guidance counsellor would be away from her school responsibilities more often than had previously been realized. The school board agreed to provide substitute time in guidance for the times that the counsellor would be away at committee meetings. The principal, in discussing this matter with school board officials, explained that the nature of the guidance counsellor's work, particularly at the outset of the school year, made it difficult for another

individual to step in and provide adequate substitution. The guidance counsellor's position was a two-thirds teaching unit. If she was willing to attend the meetings in the one third that was not part of her work assignment, she could actually become her own substitute teacher by continuing to work two thirds of the six day cycle.

While this proposal was received favourably by the school board, it was turned down by the department of education because of the legistics involved. Nevertheless, this experience showed the stewardship of the principal towards the guidance counsellor and the high risk students at this school who so desperately needed her presence at the beginning of the school year.

DePree (1992) entitled one of the chapters "God's Mix". He states:

> By accepting our responsibilities as leaders in that mix, we can uncover the secret to our own individual maturity and potential. We can derive strength from our human bonds rather than building walls out of human differences. We are personally incomplete, inchoate, in our lonely, isolated state. We need to become submerged in this mix if we are to move in the direction of wholeness. Our fulfillment in life depends on this wholeness. (p. 62-63)

I believe the principal of this school did not find it difficult to show himself as a steward. From the outset, I perceived that his mental model for interactions in his job was that of service. This perception was greater confirmed in a conversation with him. I was made aware of his personal Christian convictions and an attitude of service in all of his endeavours. There was much evidence of trust, respect for the dignity of students, teachers, parents, and an overall recognition of the potential of others and himself. On more than one occasion, he

indicated to me that he knew that he did not know all the answers. He trusted those within the school who had specialized knowledge and expertise in particular areas.

Community Building in a Learning Organization

This school was a place where the leadership team ensured that celebrations took place often. The building of a sound culture where teachers and students felt uplifted and valued was quite evident. On the first day of school, an assembly was held to welcome students and teachers back to begin a new year. Of particular note was the manner in which Grade 6 students were addressed by the principal. They were asked to stand for all to see. The principal led in an applause for these students. He reminded them, in a very positive way, of their responsibilities and that all the students, whose eyes were at that moment fixed on them, would be looking to them for guidance and encouragement. I had never seen that kind of approach taken before. Such a positive environment was evident at the outset of the school year.

Other celebrations included saying goodbye to a caretaker who had worked at the school for a number of years. He was invited to return to the school early in the fall to receive a special gift from the student body, during a special assembly held in his honour. A luncheon followed organized by the staff. The vice-principal took responsibility for many of these kinds of celebrations in the school and provided reminders to the principal of ways that such events could be carried out.

Thanksgiving Day and Remembrance Day were recognized quite effectively. The entire stage of the school was laden with food items at Thanksgiving. At Remembrance Day, a very moving assembly was held. Each grade level selected two students to lay a wreath which had been made by the students. I sensed that these children were being taught much about the dignity of human life, even to the detail of the selection of orchestral music which accompanied the laying of these wreaths.

At Hallowe'en, the kindergarten students paraded through the school in their costumes including a visit to the office area. The principal stood at the counter and spoke to numerous students, commenting on how great and scary they looked.

In mid-October, one of the teachers had a new baby. The principal promptly announced this on the public address system, giving the weight of the baby and adding that both mother and baby were fine.

These events give an image of the kind of community that exists in this school. At the forefront of all of these celebrations was a leadership team who, without any contriving, had found real reasons to celebrate the important events both on the yearly calendar and in the lives of people who comprised this school community.

An interesting structural change had brought much more open communication between the administration and teaching staff. The principal related to me that in previous years a feeling of isolation existed in the area of the general office where the principal's and vice-principal's offices were located. With the placement of a doorway in the solid adjoining wall

to the staffroom, all of a sudden there was a free flow of communication and much greater ease of movement for the teachers and administrators. Recess and lunch breaks were very relaxed with the intermingling of all staff members. While conversation in the staff room was generally unrelated to curriculum issues, an uplifting environment existed. The administrators were full members of this culture with respectful interchanges in conversation occurring so that a unity was clearly evident.

Conclusion

Many days passed uneventfully as I participated in the life of this school. I became involved in routine activities and was made to feel very much a part of the staff. However, I was reminded that schools are unpredictable environments in which to work. This internship experience gave me the freedom to see how the routine can often be interrupted when a crisis takes place.

This leadership team stood ready to deal with many issues. I watched them respond to the needs of students, teachers, parents, district office personnel and custodial staff. A caring attitude was always at the forefront. Trust was well established. Teachers were recognized for their value and were empowered to make their own choices.

A learning organization is one that is constantly evolving. This takes time. In the short duration that I was a part of this school environment, I saw evidence of a growing and learning community. Senge's model provides a philosophy of life long learning. The optimal choice

for any school would be to have all members continually learning. While real-life does not present itself in optimal circumstances, it was important to see that this school gave an indication that many were learning; some quickly, some slowly. For those who did not appear to be learning at all, a sufficient number of engaging people surrounded them. This suggests a ripe environment for new growth in those who have been stagnant.

DuFour(1997) states that school leaders must recognize that schools will not produce students as continuous learners and effective collaborators without teachers who have these same characteristics (p. 87). Herein lies the essence of a school that is evolving as a community of learners. I believe my internship experience provided me with a glimpse into an environment that possesses many of the key elements that will help it grow into a learning organization.

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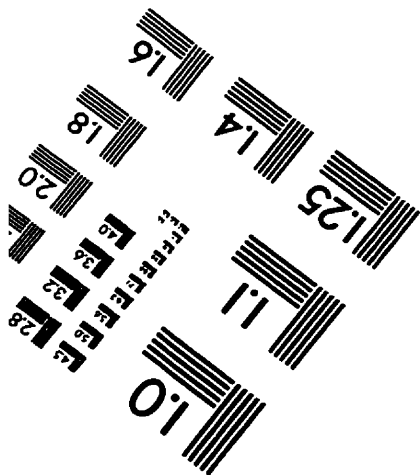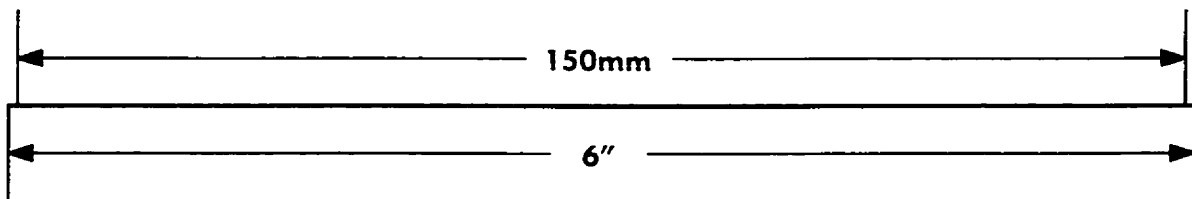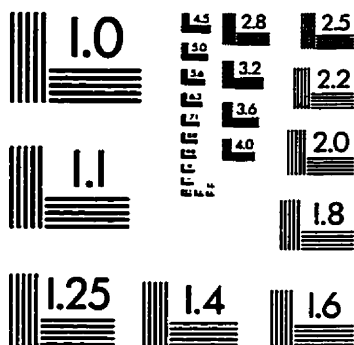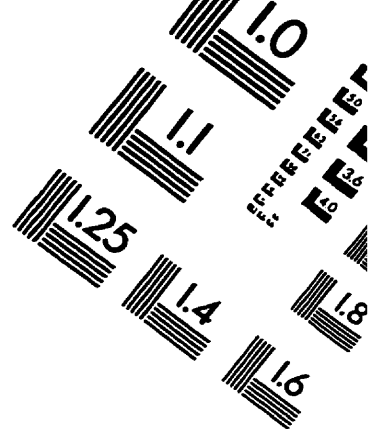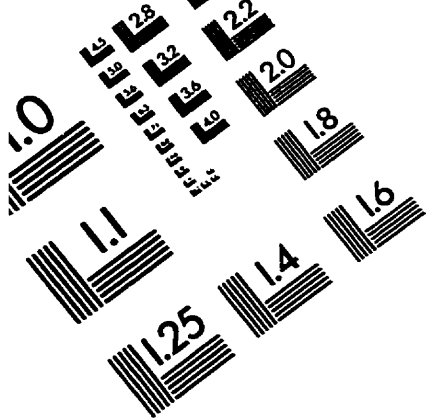
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Fax: 716/288-5989