

PAPER ONE: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
PAPER TWO: A CASE STUDY - SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
AT ONE SCHOOL SITE
PAPER THREE: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Paper One: A Literature Review of School Improvement

Paper Two: A Case Study - School Improvement at one School Site

Paper Three: School Improvement Models

by

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FOLIO PAPER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abstract

Paper one of this folio presents a literature review of school improvement. The literature was accumulated under five components: factors related to school improvement; conditions supportive of change; phases of curriculum reform; role of participants in the school improvement process; and steps for initiating the school improvement process.

Paper two presents a synopsis of teacher attitudes toward school improvement as well as an evaluation of the progress of the school improvement process at one particular school site in St. John's, Nf. The primary sources of information include observation and informal discussion with various staff, analysis of documents such as minutes of meetings, and an audio-taped focus group session.

Paper three consists of a review of two school improvement models and a third model, to be applicable to the particular school site studied in paper two.

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The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on school improvement and summarize the findings of past and current trends relating to the school improvement process.

In the 1990's the educational agenda is increasingly being dominated by a concern to make sense of and implement reform policies which were prevalent in the 1980's. These reforms are coming to the forefront at a time of tremendous change as expectations for student achievement rise to and beyond the capacity of the educational system to deliver. One concern which is to be addressed revolves around the capacity of the individual school to implement a school improvement process which is adapted to the purposes and beliefs of the particular school environment. Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) contend that school improvement is largely about problem solving. It is about weighing and taking decisions. By becoming skilled in the process of problem solving, people develop as individuals and as contributing members of the school environment.

The Concept of School Improvement

The concept, school improvement, is a distinct approach to educational change which may enhance student outcomes and strengthen the school's capacity for managing change. David (1991) indicates that school improvement is driven by a focus on student performance and that it is a long-term commitment to fundamental, systemic change. School improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it. Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth, and West (1994) state that school improvement includes how schools can use the impetus of external reform to improve or develop themselves. Schools are most likely to strengthen their ability to provide enhanced outcomes for all pupils when they adopt ways of working that are consistent with their own aspirations as well as reform agendas of the day. Fullan, Miles, and Taylor (1980) claim that some of the key components in school improvement include: planned change, long range organizational improvement in problem solving, communication, collaboration,

participation, trust, and uncovering and confronting conflict. Ainscow et al. discuss five principles which could be applied to enhance the school improvement process: the school will develop a vision to which all members of the school community have an opportunity to contribute; the school will define important opportunities to secure its internal priorities; the school will seek to create and maintain conditions in which all members of the school's community can learn successfully; the school will seek to adopt and develop structures which encourage collaboration and lead to the empowerment of individuals and groups; and it will seek to promote the view that the monitoring and evaluation of quality is a responsibility in which all members of staff share.

The term "school improvement" is an extremely value-laden term depending on the perspectives of individuals and/or groups involved in the process at each school. What is considered to be a change for the better by some might be deemed to be a worsening situation by others. This scenario could lead to the conclusion that an exact definition of the term is not as

important as the commitment by all involved in wanting to change. Marsh (1988) comments that what is needed is a commitment, especially by teachers and students, to examine their current practices and routines to see whether these are appropriate for their present situation. This takes a lot of time, perseverance, and a considerable amount of collaboration.

School improvement, as indicated by Marsh (1988), can refer to relatively minor changes where there is some change to the program without any change in the basic goals and values; or it can refer to changes in the program and in the existing goals and values, which, in total, could amount to considerable change.

Who are the main proponents of the change process? Passow (1986) refers to students, staff, and parents as the prime residents of schools and so it might be assumed that these would be the major targets for school improvement. A common target for most school improvement endeavors is the student. The emphasis is upon ensuring that students attain their highest possible levels of understanding, skills, and values development. Teachers are

also a major client group in any school improvement activity. Teachers involved in implementing new curricula and/or concepts will need additional development time and inservice. Assistance and development are necessary for the proficient exercise of instruction in new techniques in addition to interpersonal and small-group collaborative teamwork. Parents and community members are another important component in the evolutionary process. These individuals/groups need to be aware of the criteria for school improvement if their expertise and input are to be utilized. This process of school improvement incorporates all aspects of the school environment and should thus be initiated at the school level. A school staff know their school situation best and can pinpoint areas of most need; they are the ones directly involved in implementing any changes.

Factors Related to School Improvement

Factors, according to Marsh (1988), which are important in bringing about successful school improvement include: committed people to participate in required planning and decision-making in the ongoing change

process; committed people to set the expectations and tone for school improvement and maintain general support and assistance, such as the principal; committed teachers who perceive that the new program fits within their overall framework of interests and if it helps them to be more effective teaching their students. Marsh also claims that a program is more likely to be implemented if it has a relative advantage over other programs currently in place and external staff and finances which provide ongoing staff development support for a new program. The staff development activities have to be task-specific and geared to teachers' concerns and skills.

A school which concentrates on the worthwhile aspirations of instructional leadership, academic instruction, student academic achievement, a safe learning environment, classrooms free of discipline problems, and parent and community participation creates goals aimed at providing increased opportunities for success. This is an idealistic goal, yet a goal to strive towards. A goal of school improvement is not necessarily to have a particular aspect of the school functioning in a particular fashion, but to

attain desired student and staff outcomes as determined by those involved in daily procedures. As commented by Klausmeier (1985) a foremost goal is maintaining already high student outcomes, knowledge and understanding, skill and competence, attitudes and values, action patterns, and citizenship, and improving those which are not. As a school attains predetermined goals from year to year, it achieves renewal as a social organization and develops and maintains a self-improvement capability.

Ainscow (1994) comments that three assumptions need to be addressed which are related to specific outcomes of students and staff. One assumption relates to school culture. Culture is an important yet often neglected component in the improvement process involving values, norms and beliefs that characterize the way individuals interact. Jones (1996) claims that in the presence of strong cultures, significant and widespread improvements are possible and strong culture can be created. Collaboration and consensus of all participants is of utmost importance. The school's background and organization are also key factors and a reflection of its values. A second

assumption is that school improvement will result in enhanced outcomes for students and staff such as critical thinking, learning capacity and self-esteem. It works best when a practical focus towards priorities is predetermined. Priorities that are few in number, central to the mission of the school, and relate to the current reform agenda, provide a link to teaching and learning and lead to specific outcomes for students and staff. The third assumption addressed by Ainscow et al. claims that a school improvement strategy needs to be developed in order to link priorities to the enhancing conditions. External changes such as teacher evaluation could influence the impact of teacher perceptions to developmental advances in curriculum or school improvement. The conditions for school improvement need to be worked on at the same time as the curriculum the school has set for itself. Internal conditions which are supportive of change and facilitate development need to be created if effective curriculum advances are to be successful.

Conditions Supportive of Change

School improvement is often based on a belief that effective change

strategies focus not only on the implementation of centralized policies or chosen initiatives but also on creating the conditions within schools that can sustain the teaching-learning process. Ainscow et al. summarize the conditions which are conducive to change: proper attention to the potential benefits of inquiry and reflection; a commitment to collaborative planning; the involvement of staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions; a commitment to staff development; effective coordination strategies; and effective leadership spread throughout the school.

The school improvement process may depend on the direction of initiation. According to Foshay (1975) changes are initiated through one of five ways: directly or indirectly through the school principal and other administrators; through the school community (via parent-teacher group etc.); through the materials of instruction; through the teachers, by altering their beliefs about what should be taught, to whom and how; and through the students by altering their beliefs, goals and purposes. Possibly the most common way of getting started is by way of initiatives launched by the

principal. Fullan (1992) indicates that planned change, school improvement, effective schools, and staff development all bear the mark of the principal as central for leading and supporting change. However, in some instances, school councils are being called upon to initiate their own school improvement practices. After receiving support from the district office or school board, the principal either establishes a school improvement committee that is responsible for leading and coordinating the school's improvement activities or delegates the improvement responsibility to an existing group(s). Foshay (1975) reiterates that this committee includes the principal and/or vice-principal and representative teachers and counselors. The improvement committee makes the staff aware of the need for establishing a self-improvement capability and builds staff commitment. The staff does not debate whether to start but focuses on when, where and how to start. A well planned program of staff awareness and commitment is essential. The committee uses available assessment information and gathers others to ascertain the extent to which the school's educational goals are

being attained. It identifies and prioritizes areas of improvement annually. Strengths and possible weaknesses, such as lack of attendance, are identified for individual students and for groups of students. The committee, through continual collaboration with all stakeholders, develops an improvement plan for each selected area of improvement annually. Needs identification is followed by problem identification, solution identification, implementation of planned activities, monitoring of progress, and evaluation of outcomes.

The committee ensures that the relevant staff is properly prepared to implement the planned activities before starting the implementation. In-service and staff development are important criteria if plans are to be implemented correctly. Planned activities are implemented and progress is monitored. Monitoring helps to identify and overcome difficulties and to confirm the desired performances of students and staff. The effectiveness of the improvement activities are evaluated annually. Evaluation information gathered throughout the year is summarized, reported, and used in setting goals and planning related improvement activities for the next year. The

cyclical nature of this process permits refinements to be made as deemed necessary.

Today's schools frequently adopt new programs and pursue altered activities in the name of improved performance. Schools need to adopt a stronger performance objective to motivate students to want to learn. Schools and students must learn from their experiences and use these as building blocks for future developmental strategies. Hanushek (1994) believes objectives of schools need to be clearly specified to meet the needs of the individual school and individual student. Goals need to be translated into clear, strong expected outcomes and consistent movement in their direction needs to be monitored. Goals to strive towards could include high levels of literacy, analytical ability, and scientific knowledge combined with the ability to reason abstractly. As commented in the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1992) report, goals should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need.

Phases for Curriculum Reform

Curriculum improvement calls for a cooperative effort by all. Klausmeier (1985) addresses six phases for effective reform of school curriculum: examination of the school's statement of program goals in relation to the district's goals and philosophy; examination of the objectives of each course in relation to the school's program goals and philosophy; examination of the content of each course in relation to the content of other courses; examination of the content of each course in terms of its effectiveness in facilitating the attainment of the course objectives; examination of the content of each course in terms of its providing an appropriate instructional program for each student; examination of the instructional arrangements, including the methods and materials, in terms of facilitating the attainment of the course objectives and arranging an appropriate instructional program for each student.

Appropriate measurement and evaluation techniques are used in monitoring each student's progress toward attaining his or her learning goals

and evaluating each student's instructional program.

Each student's educational program of course work and other activities takes into account the student's aptitude for learning different subject matters, interests, motivation, learning styles, career goals and other personal and social characteristics. Students need to be encouraged to participate more actively in their education and not simply be passive receivers for information. Hopkins (1994) comments that student involvement in school improvement could include decision making and encouragement in taking personal responsibility for day-to-day routines. Many students do not see directly the value of higher achievement, particularly if it takes additional effort.

Role of Participants in the School Improvement Process

Most parents have an interest in the success of their children. But, once their children are performing within a broadly acceptable range, and pressed by other demands on their time and energies, parents are frequently willing to

let schools assume primary responsibility for their children's learning. Much more could be accomplished with more active studying at home, a process which involves guidance, motivation and learning strategies. Parents' attitudes toward school and education, their expectations about how much their children will profit from schooling, their supervision of the children's education-related activities, and the intellectual climate of the home are all related to how well the children achieve. Good home-school relations are especially important when any major educational improvement program is undertaken. A program is more successful when parents understand the program, its main features and how it is expected to better the education of their children. Telford (1996) indicates that schools must engage parents more meaningfully in the education of their children and coordinate public services on behalf of children and their families. One of the most reliable ways of influencing parents' attitudes favorably toward schooling is through their participation in individual conferences directed toward planning their child's educational program and discussing the child's progress and

strengths. Another is through small-group meetings in which a teacher and parents discuss some facet of the educational program. Parent membership on school committees also enhances opportunities for collegiality and cooperation. Hanushek (1994) comments that any successful use of school choice depends on the decisions made by parents and students in evaluating the quality of school programs. Productive school reform will entail making more and better information available to parents, and the degree of success in reform will relate closely to what they do with this information. If they demand better schools, if they more actively participate in educational decisions, and if they evaluate schools' performance, parents can help forge a better school system.

Teachers rely for their planning upon the contents and methods outlined in textbooks and curriculum guides but what they actually teach is a unique blend based on their own preferences. They put together their own preferred synthesis, often based on intuition and experience. Teachers have to maintain stability in a very unstable environment. Unexpected reactions and behaviors

by students will often occur, and so the teacher has to make adjustments to his or her original plans. The process of fine-tuning and adjusting is a continuous day-to-day activity. The dilemma for teachers is that this fine-tuning is done without any real knowledge of whether they have been successful or not in promoting effective student learning. Hopkins (1994) claims that staff development involves providing the opportunity for immediate and sustained practice, collaboration and peer coaching, and studying development and implementation. Klausmeier (1985) comments on programming strategies employed by teachers to improve instruction as being facilitated by the teacher's openness to new ideas; willingness to work with other teachers; recognition of each student's need to experience success on learning tasks; ensuring that each student learns well rather than that all students cover identical course content; competence in using class time to plan students' instructional programs, to monitor progress, and to aid students in overcoming difficulties; competence in using the material resources of the school and the intellectual resources of the students in arranging appropriate

instructional programs for the students; and competence in arranging more than one learning path for students to attain the same objective.

Leadership and support by the principal and the school board are essential for continually improving instruction. One means of identifying the kind of leadership and support needed is for the principal to find out from teachers whether a desired school and classroom learning environment is being arranged and whether the resources for teachers are being supplied. In addition to these essential conditions for effective instruction, a continuing program of inservice/staff development activities directed specifically toward meeting the teachers' expressed needs is essential. Fullan (1992) indicates that one outcome should be a greater sense of critical collegiality and professionalism among teachers to increase the skills and willingness to work together on school improvement. The principal provides leadership and, with appropriate involvement of members of the improvement committee and the school staff, establishes policies and procedures, coordinates the use of facilities and materials, arranges schedules and provides time for planning,

and establishes communication lines amongst all participants. In most schools, the principal chairs the meetings of the improvement committee; however, in some schools a teacher or other person is elected. The improvement committee takes initiative for implementing the following improvement processes: making the staff aware of the need for establishing a self-improvement capability and building staff commitment; using available assessment information to ascertain the extent to which the school's educational goals are being attained; developing an improvement plan for each selected area of improvement annually; ensuring that the relevant staff is properly prepared to implement the planned activities before starting the implementation; implementing the planned activities and monitoring progress; evaluating the effectiveness of the improvement activities annually and writing reports; and repeating the cycle annually as a refinement process. Marsh (1988) comments that after the evaluative activity has been initiated, it inevitably highlights particular needs and problems, which in turn become the focus for subsequent school improvement activities.

Loucks-Horsley and Hergert (1985) identify seven steps for initiating a school improvement process:

1. Establishing the School Improvement Project. Many schools involve outside consultants to initiate the process of school improvement. A school improvement team should be relatively small and consist of school personnel, parent(s), and school board office representative(s).
2. Assessment and Goal Setting. The first step in defining the problem is to collect data about the nature and severity of the problem. Data sources include: classroom, school observation; test scores; group interviews; and documentation of activities. Following collection of information, the team must analyze it. When the assessment is completed and analyzed, the results need to be relayed to the people in the school and the community. Goals for the improvement effort should be based on assessment results and future visions of the school.
3. Identifying an Ideal Solution. Solutions may be carefully defined, multi-

component programs with materials, instructional approaches, and teacher support systems included. All school improvement efforts should involve a new classroom practice that improves the act of teaching and thus the process of learning.

4. Preparing for Implementation. Preparing to implement the agreed-upon school improvement practice involves creating awareness through training and in-service sessions; selecting implementers/teachers through a volunteer or negotiation process; assessing current practices of each teacher with respect to the components of the new program; setting expectations and standards such as time commitments and not making major adaptations; making logistical arrangements for new materials, facilities and personnel; assigning support roles for teachers if they are to successfully implement and integrate the program into their teaching; creating a realistic timeline such as three to five years for complete incorporation into the school environment. Leadership functions as support in this process in clarifying the goals and expectations and in monitoring progress toward them.

5. Implementing the Project. Good training and ongoing support will help overcome, or at least minimize, any problems which are going to surface. The more experience people can get with what they will be doing in the classroom, the better.

6. Reviewing Progress and Problems. Keeping a close eye on implementers and the implementation process is critical to catching problems while they are small, spotting areas where improvement is needed, and rewarding and reinforcing people and events that have exceeded expectations. Helping teachers discuss and analyze desired changes are worthwhile activities. Teachers learn to look at their own teaching and that of others to gather data for change; they share ideas about what works and what doesn't; and they develop a norm of collegiality that benefits them far beyond the use of the particular practice they have implemented.

7. Maintenance and Institutionalization. A belief that the process is successful and will continue to be implemented, with refinements, is the final stage of the improvement process. A decision needs to be made about how the

program will be maintained and what is needed for the program to become part of the school. The School Improvement Team Training Handbook for The Avalon East School Board (1998) recommends a process comparable to that proposed by Loucks-Horsley and Hergert.

Conclusion

In the ideal situation, the school improvement effort will never end. It will keep recycling itself into new spheres and new areas. The goal may have started as a limited one to solve a particular problem, but ultimately it may expand to establishing a professional climate where everyone constantly strives for improvement. Fullan (1992) maintains that a shared sense of purposeful direction of the school relative to major educational goals must be linked to norms of continuous improvement and experimentation.

The literature appears to indicate that school improvement is an established process, albeit a variable one, which has been successfully implemented and sustained by many school districts. Continued collaboration and cooperation amongst all participants helps ensure the adaptability to

specific scenarios. The whole idea encompasses a process of ongoing, continuous change which is based upon identified strengths and concerns of any particular school population. This could be a formula for continual improvement and reflection which leads to enhancement of goals and outcomes.

It is obvious that a system of shared accountability based on goals which are relevant to a particular school site is a critical requirement for school change. Access to knowledge and time for planning and reflection are necessary components which must be part of the daily schedule of all those involved in the process.

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MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

FOLIO PAPER 2

SCHOOL SITE EVALUATION

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Introduction

One purpose of this research is to formulate a synopsis of teacher attitudes towards school improvement at one particular school site. A second purpose is to evaluate the progress of the school improvement process at this same school. This will be accomplished through observation, communication, and personal reflections by personnel currently engaged in the process.

School improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching/learning process and the conditions which support it. The school improvement process at this school came about as the result of a two-fold initiative. The school board was encouraging all schools under its jurisdiction to become involved in the process; and the school staff perceived a need for improving the quality of the whole school environment.

Following a decision to proceed with the school improvement process, the administration made contacts at board level to obtain guidance as to the correct procedures to follow. A school improvement team consisting of staff and parents was formed to coordinate, implement, monitor, and evaluate

the school improvement strategies. Action teams involving all staff members and several parents developed questionnaires. These questionnaires contained information-gathering data related to individual perceptions of school curriculum and extra-curricular activities including communication, cooperation, motivation, achievement, discipline, homework, and expectations. These questionnaires were distributed to participants directly involved in the immediate school environment as well as community members. Replies were received from students, teachers, support staff, parents, and ex-students as to their impressions and expectations of the school. The data from these questionnaires were analyzed to discover overall trends, patterns and discrepancies. The school will then use the information to develop its mission statement and action plans to aid in achieving the collaborated goals.

Two initiatives had already been undertaken at the school as a prelude to the ongoing school improvement process. These included: the introduction

of a Violence Prevention Program on a weekly basis, and the broadening of course selections to involve Options courses such as Technology, Learning Strategies, Creative Writing, Art, Math Support, and Language Support.

School Background

This school environment is responsible for approximately five hundred and seventy students in grades six to nine. As reported in the 1996-97 school profile, there were eighty-one students in grade six; one hundred and fifty-eight in grade seven; one hundred and seventy-two in grade eight; and one hundred and sixty in grade nine. Student enrollment at the school has varied from a high of approximately seven hundred and fifty students in 1990 to a low of five hundred and seventy-one during the 1996-97 school year. The socio-economic status of students appears to be quite diverse; however, approximately fifty to sixty percent come from middle-income families. It appears that most students perceive a value in education and many have plans to complete high school and continue on to some form of post-secondary institution. As stated in a newsletter by the school administration,

the primary objective of this school is academic excellence where each student can achieve his/her maximum potential. The newsletter goes on to say that this objective can be realized when we respond to the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, and moral development of our students. This includes the provision of a rigorous and relevant curriculum to all students; a commitment to addressing issues of student behavior; a willingness to make organizational changes that will benefit students; and the use of a comprehensive student assessment system that evaluates both conceptual/factual knowledge and the ability of students to apply what they have learned. To accomplish this objective, a total community of staff, students, parents, and friends must be committed to striving towards pursuing and implementing the necessary mechanisms and processes to achieve its task.

Many teachers display this willingness in many ways, for example, remaining after school to offer tutorial classes in conjunction with peer tutoring sessions during lunch time. This emphasis resulted in mathematics

and language arts CTBS scores either equal to or above district and provincial sub-test scores in 1996.

The students are being accommodated by thirty-one teachers and five student assistants. Twenty-seven of the thirty-one teachers are full-time permanent teachers and four are filling replacement positions. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven permanent teachers have at least two degrees and eight of these have masters level degrees. The teachers on staff bring a vast array of experiences and knowledge to the learning environment. Teaching experience ranges from twenty-eight years to four years with approximately thirty percent less than ten years; thirty percent between ten and twenty years; and thirty percent over twenty years experience in the teaching profession.

A combined emphasis by staff, community, and parents on high academic achievement and non-curricular programs constitute the profile of this grades six to nine school.

Methodology

The success of school improvement depends on the level of interaction and commitment of those involved at the school site. The ethnographic research methods identified within this research involved interview, document analysis, and direct observation of the process. Guba and Lincoln (1981) identify this type of research as naturalistic evaluation. In this approach, the researcher visits a site to observe - perhaps as participant observer - the phenomena that occur in that setting. The researcher attempts to identify the chief concerns of the various participants, and to assess the merit, worth, or meaning, of the phenomena to the participants.

Audio-taped focus group sessions, analysis of documents such as minutes of meetings, and observation and informal discussion with various staff formed the basis for data accumulation. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) claim the

use of multiple-data-collection, or triangulation, contributes to the trustworthiness of the data. One direct way to find out about a phenomenon is to ask questions of the people who are involved in it in some way. Each person's answers will reflect his or her perceptions and interests. Because different people have different perspectives, a reasonably representative picture of the phenomenon's occurrence and absence may emerge and thereby provide a basis for interpretation of the phenomenon. Minutes are a written description of the actions considered and taken during a meeting. They are usually an official recording of all transactions and proceedings by the members. Minutes can give an accurate representation of what officially happened but usually lack the detail to help understand why. This forms a basis for a triangulation effect of data accumulation. A variety of research techniques employed adds merit to the validity and reliability of data. Observation as a research technique means looking for particular outcomes such as relationships between behaviors of various participants, motives or

intentions behind behaviors, and/or effects of the behavior on outcomes or subsequent events. It could also entail looking to confirm or dispute various interpretations that may have emerged from interviews or reports.

Data Collection

Permission to carry out an ethnographic study was granted by the school board and the school principal.

At a staff meeting, the purpose and procedure of the research was explained to the entire school staff. A request was made for volunteers from each grade level to participate in an audio-taped focus group session. Six teacher volunteers from the various grade levels had agreed to meet one day after school following several attempts to conduct the session during a lunch hour. Conflicting duty schedules did not permit a lunch hour meeting. The participants represented three of the four grade levels present at the school. Teaching experience among the participants ranged from ten years to seventeen years with an average of twelve years experience in the classroom. All participants had been teaching at this particular site for at least six years.

A classroom located in a less frequented area was chosen to help create a risk-free environment.

It was explained to the teachers that the audiotapes would be disposed of at the completion of the study and confidentiality would be maintained at all times. The session was informal and lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

The process of school improvement had commenced at this site approximately two years prior to data collection, with much groundwork being completed in the interlude. Aspects in place at the time of research included: school improvement team was organized, questionnaires were devised, administered and analyzed, and monthly meetings of the team had taken place. Most staff had previous experience with the process and were able to offer valuable insight into its daily effectiveness. One aspect of the research was to discover individual perceptions of the process thus far as well as its perceived validity to the school.

Data Analysis

The following questions were chosen in an attempt to ascertain the perceptions and level of commitment of various participants in the school improvement process.

What do you believe is meant by the term school improvement?

Participants viewed school improvement as a lengthy process whereby decisions are made on goals and mission statements. One participant commented, “ You may have an excellent school; however, this does not mean that you can’t improve in some areas.”

School improvement is a continuous process which encompasses the entire school environment. “A positive influence on the whole school body... involves everybody.”

Several participants compared school improvement to a model which was attempted approximately ten to twelve years ago, namely Project 2000.

This model involved a lot of discussion with very little action taking place. As with school improvement, mission statements were devised but they were never acted upon. This project “died in the water.”

School improvement appears to be a more focused process. The guidelines are clearer and more precise so that individuals know more about what is going on. “School improvement is a more positive approach. We don’t necessarily need to change things from the past, but rather to review past experiences and build on these to enhance the learning environment.”

What are your impressions regarding school improvement?

Is there a need and how does it affect a school?

Participants’ comments appeared to follow a common theme regarding the effectiveness as well as the accompanying stumbling blocks to school improvement. They agreed that it is a worthwhile process because each and every school has “room for improvement.” However, a common question kept surfacing, namely, “Will this turn into another monotonous Project 2000?” As with both processes, all the participants involved appeared to be

“really focused” at the beginning. However, time constraints and staff turn-over resulted in “very limited worthwhile progress.” Comments included: “Our plates are already filled with too many meetings, lesson plan preparations, and personal social life.” “This process sounds great as long as its not drawn out too much and we know where Project 2000 got us.”

This is a process of change which has to be ongoing all the time. As one participant stated, “Can’t change be addressed as obstacles present themselves?” Teachers address obstacles each day in the classroom while goals remain in the back of their minds. School improvement involves having goals in the back of your mind; however, “they have to be acted upon and not just left on paper.”

To improve schools, everyone works together on a particular plan consisting of one to two topics per year. When individuals pull together in a group setting striving towards common goals, participants believe the chances of success are greatly enhanced.

How would you feel about participating in school improvement on a
voluntary basis?

It appears at this particular school site that most individuals are in favour of progressing through the change process and can visualize goals being attained, yet most realize it is a "tremendous task." As is often the case, this process "came from above" with some expectations which some of the staff felt were unrealistic. Many questions were discussed, such as time frames and quantity of meetings.

School improvement should impact the entire school; therefore people need to work towards common goals, "We need to go down common pathways." "Teachers need to be given the opportunity to observe the goals of others in action as well as have others observe their own." Again, the topic of time constraints as a realistic hurdle was of major concern. One person commented, "Where will we get the time for all this?"

Staff collegiality would be an advantageous aspect of the process, "We

wouldn't get this pulling together if we weren't involved in school improvement."

Most participants would be active volunteers in the process if time constraints were addressed and positive outcomes were designed. Summarizing comments included, "We are the ones sharing the responsibility to see that the entire school environment benefits from this process. It should be part of our work ethic as professionals."

Do you feel school improvement will enhance the current conditions of your school ?

Has it had any effect as of yet, either positive or negative?

Most respondents felt that school improvement could enhance the school environment; however, as previously stated, they appeared quite concerned relative to the available time constraints.

The school has been involved in the improvement process for the past two years. Although changes have occurred, many participants felt that these changes were not the result of the school improvement process; rather they “came from school board level direction, for example, the Anti-Violence Program.”

The school had arranged a two day inservice with the school board to focus upon the school improvement process. Several participants expressed enthusiasm that some positive results would come from the inservice to “get everyone back on track.” Another stated, “We probably fell off track because of the school boards changeover which took place last year.”

Some perceived positive outcomes from the inservice included: discipline procedures, communication with parents, and school councils. One participant responded, “This looks great on paper; however, how realistic is it all?” “There appear to be too many factors, too many connections to make.” The comment stirred discussion to the process involving fewer groups starting off, then expanding as the process proceeded.

It is realized that the process never ends, that it is ongoing. However, certain discrepancies exist. "People were always involved in trying to improve their school, now they have a label on it. This label means everyone has to work together on a plan as opposed to individuals doing what they do best to improve the situation. Now we have to fit into a plan and your contributions are looked upon as conducive to the plan or not. I have a problem with that."

The general consensus appears to be that the process is worthwhile and could result in very positive advancements for the school if time and resources are allotted so that individuals and groups can become immersed in the process.

Conclusion

Change is a process whereby individuals/groups view events from a new perspective. It is a learning process which entails an open mind and often risk-taking efforts. Many individuals are not in a position, nor are they willing, to take risks therefore they often remain apprehensive to change forces.

Possible factors which may influence implementation include:

Lack of guidance and support as to actual procedures to take in progressing through the process.

Attempting to implement too many strategies at the commencement of the program.

The quantity of participants involved at certain stages could be too few or too many depending on the topic.

Many staff expressed concern over lack of time to accomplish required work such as lesson preparation and extra curricular activities for students.

This process would involve more meetings and less "personal time."

Participants not experiencing ownership of the process. Some feeling that it “comes down from school board level, therefore we have to implement it to satisfy higher ups.”

Lack of resources including time, money, and materials to implement the change process.

Some feel that things are progressing “well enough now, therefore why change when things are okay?” “Don’t fix something that isn’t already broken.”

Hopkins (1994) states, “We now live in a change-rich environment. We need to focus on the management of change in general, on the creation of effective and flexible structures, and on the empowering of individuals.”

This particular site has been engaged in the change process for approximately two years. During this time it appears that many staff members have individually reached various opinions as to expectations of the school improvement process.

Most individuals have come to realize that it is a lengthy process which is going to require some effort on behalf of most people. Several remain quite pessimistic partly due to the negative impact of a previously attempted project. Concerns were also expressed as to time requirements involved. Most staff members are already involved with several school-based committees and expressed a comment regarding meetings being held during school time or possibly increased inservice days.

Most agreed that there is a need for school improvement and that it is time to "actually get something done."

Most staff would be willing to participate if strategies were in place and time frames addressed. Board level guidance is expected in conjunction with school-based decision making towards attainable results. Many individuals believe the process will help improve the school environment, however, it has been ongoing for two years with little result. Participants had expected increased outcomes at this stage in the process.

Since inception of the process, individuals have come to perceive it as a worthwhile venture with increased focus over the previous project. Change has been progressing quite slowly during the past two years, however, following the inservice, expectations include a common pathway with foreseeable advancements along the way.

Stringfield and Ross & Smith (1996) reiterate many of the concerns expressed during research and conclude that individual schools need to continually revitalize themselves and that most need help in this ongoing process of finding opportunities to achieve exciting and valuable purposes.

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MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

FOLIO PAPER 3

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS

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The first paper in this folio presented a review of the literature on the change process, school improvement. Paper two consisted of an analysis of school improvement currently underway at a particular school site in St. John's, Newfoundland. Paper three will review two models which have been utilized in the school improvement process. A final model will be proposed by the researcher as a possible technique to attribute to the school improvement process at the site researched. It will be based on personal reflection and research into the change process.

The Ohio Model

The Ohio Department of Education has funds available for which various schools can apply to aid in the school improvement process. The Department has identified eight elements of good planning for school improvement: community readiness, integrated strategies, systematic plans, community

involvement, focus on learning, expanded teacher roles, supportive policies and practices, and resource leverage.

Two of the Ohio Education Department models to be discussed include The Ohio Classroom Management System and The Effective Schools Process. Both models are comprised of goals, vision, curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, higher education, roles and responsibilities, structure, and parents/business/community involvement.

The Ohio Classroom Management System, which addresses school discipline, strives to ensure a safe environment that is conducive to increased learner performance. The focus is on prevention, problem solving, and logical, connected intervention, and mediation. In this program, students are taught skills that will help them be successful learners and workers by accepting responsibility for their own actions. Self-discipline is developed through procedures, strategies, and community involvement. A portfolio outlining student behaviors is maintained and updated on a regular basis.

The process involves teachers, administrators, and community members who create partnerships to assume joint responsibility for discipline. They, along with students, work to create a climate that is supportive, inclusive, challenging, safe, and welcoming. A five step planning process is designed for newly participating schools . It involves framing a plan, setting goals, developing an action plan, and implementing and evaluating the plan. Training courses are provided free of charge to raise the level of confidence and competence of those individuals directly involved in the process. The training requires that one member be a community/parent representative.

One adopted motto is "Every opportunity to discipline is an opportunity to teach."

The Effective Schools Process focuses on student achievement. It aims to develop a comprehensive, continuous improvement school-based plan that ensures all students will succeed. There are two phases to the model. The first phase includes the formation of a staff-led team developing and conducting a needs assessment, sharing the needs assessment with the entire staff, and developing and implementing an action plan with ongoing assessment and evaluation. Seven factors of effective schools are identified, around which student achievement is determined: a clear mission, strong building leadership, high expectations for all students and staff, monitoring of student progress, positive learning climate, opportunities to learn, and parental/community/business involvement. The process is built upon four assumptions: all children can and will learn, increased academic achievement is the mark of effectiveness, the unit of change is the school, and school improvement plans must be tailored to the needs of the learning community - students, teachers, administrators, and community members.

The second phase of the model includes indicators that the model is

successful in raising student achievement. Annual and semi-annual indicators of success include: increased assistance with student learning, decreased discipline referrals, increased attendance rates, increased student achievement on assessment indicators such as standardized tests, subject grades, increased parental/community involvement, and increased effective homework practices.

Each of these models promote the creation of a learning environment in which participants are encouraged to be risk-takers in the all-encompassing goal of raising student achievement. These processes encompass many components of a shared decision-making model; when more participants become involved in student achievement, the goal becomes clearer and more attainable. All parties with a stake in student achievement must be supportive and dedicated to the vision/mission of the school. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community members must be empowered as the driving force behind the continuous improvement endeavor. According to Senge (1990): "Visions spread because of a reinforcing process of increasing

clarity, enthusiasm, communication, and commitment. As people talk, the vision grows clearer. As it gets clearer, enthusiasm for its benefits build” (p.227).

The Maryland Model

Maryland has adopted a “School for Success” comprehensive school improvement model which actively promotes success and lifelong learning. The model is based on a school-based decision-making procedure meaning that the total school community is empowered, motivated, and involved in a collaborative decision-making process that promotes student achievement and participation. The key components of their school improvement process are assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Throughout the restructuring process, schools consider a continuous improvement approach for coordination of student services; programs to promote student achievement and involvement; professional development activities; changes in rules, roles, and responsibilities; and integration of curriculum, instruction, technology, and assessment.

In conjunction with this model, the state has initiated a policy to be used strictly at middle grade schools. This policy, known as Maryland Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative (MMGSSPI), identifies five conditions which are required to achieve systemic middle grade school reform:

1. Trust and commitment between and amongst all stakeholders in the education process.
2. Knowledge and information from multiple sources to plan, implement, and evaluate school improvement.
3. Collaboration and recognition of the skills, talents, and contributions of stakeholders to focus on student, school, and community strengths.
4. Resources, including fiscal and human, to support comprehensive school improvement.
5. Time to fully implement and maintain the core areas identified in the reform process.

A School Improvement Team, consisting of representatives from school, community, and parents, helps create and maintain the conditions necessary for successful school improvement. Expectations for all students are high, and the school and school community are empowered to help all of the students achieve to the best of their ability. Planning for the improvement of the school is an ongoing process that is cyclical in nature, contingent upon indicators of progress, and strives continuously toward what is believed to be best.

The underlying values as perceived by one school using this model claim that school improvement is equitable for all students; requires systematic planning; includes members of the entire school community in the planning process; and supports instruction to help all students solve problems, be creative, and work cooperatively. It promotes experiences for all students that go beyond academics to include activities that help build self-esteem, and is supported by all available resources. At this particular site, the school and its teachers view all students as having the potential to be successful, are

empowered to make instructional decisions to help students to achieve the outcomes described in the curriculum, and define visions and develop plans to accomplish those visions.

This school-based decision-making model relies on input from many participants of the learning process which includes various individuals/groups making connections to further the success of student achievement. Joyce (1991) comments: “[U]se the experience and expertise of persons to augment the instructional and curricular approaches” (p. 62).

The two models previously mentioned consist of many components which could be useful for a school developing an improvement strategy. The Ohio Model strives to create a climate that is supportive, challenging, safe, and welcoming by involving all participants of the learning community in a shared decision-making process. The Maryland Model empowers the entire school community in a collaborative decision-making process progressing from assessment to evaluation. It promotes experiences for all students that go beyond academics to include activities that help build self-esteem.

The W Model

The purpose of this model is to advance the school improvement process at the school presented in paper two.

The particular model postulated herein is based on the past four years of course study and research, on a focused review of school improvement literature and communication, and on observation between and amongst staff at one school site.

Several aspects of The Ohio Model and The Maryland Model offer insight to the school improvement process which appear in The W Model. Collaborative decision-making; formulation of goals, assessment, implementation, and evaluation; and the realization that school improvement is a continuous process, are important criteria for any school proceeding through the change process.

The rationale for school improvement at this site aims to provide high quality learning opportunities for students. This may be accomplished when educators create more collaboration and teamwork amongst themselves as

well as with parents and the community. School improvement is a process of change whereby schools attempt to manage this procedure in a successful manner. Fullan and Miles (1991) claim that change is a journey and that schools implement a bewildering array of multiple innovations and policies simultaneously. Due to this vast array of reforms, the model proposed could offer some guidance as schools progress through the adjustment period(s).

The School Improvement Team, consisting of those involved in the process, need to realize exactly where they are in respect to influencing the learning outcomes of students. Individual and group perceptions of the school site need to be accumulated prior to the construction of a “plan of attack.” Fullan and Miles (1991) say that “strategies are based on internal scanning” (p. 15). Perceptions could be attained through a collection of data involving questionnaires sent to past and present members of the learning environment. A school profile and/or assessment would provide useful information as to student achievement in comparison to that achieved or being achieved at other sites. Klausmeier (1985) claims that assessment

information is used to ascertain the extent to which the school's educational goals are being attained.

Following the accumulation of site assessment data, the participants are in a position to identify what they want to achieve. Two areas of concern identified at the research site included student achievement and construction/implementation of a school discipline policy. These conclusions were drawn from brainstorming sessions involving parents, staff, and support staff. According to school board personnel, these are two areas of concern expressed by many schools within the board's jurisdiction. This process of establishing measurable goals could be achieved through small group discussion which proceeds to entire participant consensus.

Realistically, it is necessary to strive for no more than two goals reached by consensus so that attention is focused in minimal workable directions in order to achieve optimal results. The School Improvement Team Training Handbook (1998) for this particular board emphasizes that only two goals be worked towards , especially in schools which are at the preliminary stages in

the process. As commented in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Guide (1992) change is best accomplished in increments based on careful analysis and planning (p.3.).

The role of implementation of improvement strategies rests with all participants in the learning environment. Participants need to accept, believe, and take ownership in the process they are undertaking. As commented by Osborne (1992): “to affect meaningful and lasting change, there must be change in the belief structure of the members of the organization. Processes must be internalized by staff members which will allow change to occur in the way things have been and are being done” (p. 8). The culture of the school must be recognized when designing change initiatives. Discipline policies and student achievement techniques can only be implemented in a disciplined environment where students are expected to achieve. An action oriented goal would involve input from students so that ownership of the policies/techniques could be realized. Action plans to achieve established goals are devised and implemented by small group “action teams.” The action

team(s), through constant communication, identifies when a task is to be accomplished, who is responsible for accomplishing the task, how to attain appropriate resources, and how to report the action plan to the School Improvement Team. The School Improvement Team, in conjunction with teachers, parents, and students, ensures that school improvement initiatives are fulfilling the school mission.

The final phase in this proposed model involves evaluative measures to ascertain the impact of the initiatives. As previously mentioned, school improvement is a process which is on-going and ever-changing; therefore techniques to monitor progress and evaluate results are crucial to the developmental process. Outcomes need to be addressed with respect to student performance, related to a conducive learning environment, as well as teacher learning and the overall strengthening of the school's organizational culture. Possible resources to aid during implementation include school based and devised outline maps to guide the process of improvement. These maps would also encourage collaboration of all participants. Pathways are selected

to aid in achieving expected outcomes; however, adjustments are to be expected and encouraged. Team teaching and think-aloud sessions to offer collegial support could assist in reaching desired outcomes. Regular reviews of literature would also bond thoughts together and offer insight into current techniques attempted by other schools.

Responsibility for possible methods to monitor and evaluate the implementation plan rests with the School Action Team. The School Improvement Team Training Handbook identifies monitoring and evaluation as cyclical in nature whereby monitoring progress is usually a continuous activity and evaluation occurs after implementation strategies are monitored. Following evaluation and review of the implementation strategies, revised action plans are developed to attain desired outcomes. Fullan and Miles (1991) claim that change programs do not run themselves. They require substantial effort on tasks such as monitoring, implementation, keeping everyone informed on what's happening, linking multiple change projects, locating unsolved problems, and taking clear coping action.

Local implementation by everyday teachers, principals, parents and students permits internalization of the process thereby increasing the opportunities for successful school improvement.

Several advantages of local, school based implementation plans include: it results in greater consensus and commitment to goals, it improves information flow and communication, and it produces higher commitment to implement the local decisions.

Conclusion

This paper has presented three school improvement models which could be utilized to enhance learning opportunities for all students and to build on a school's capacity to manage change.

The Ohio Model is based on a statewide funding program whereby individual schools submit well developed school improvement plans including goals, learning strategies, community involvement, evaluation, etc.

The Maryland Model is a school-based decision-making process which promotes quality teaching and high student and school performance through collaboration and partnerships.

The W Model emphasizes student performance through continuous reassurance and reflection on the strategies implemented to reach the desired outcomes. It involves commitment and collegiality by all participants in the improvement process.

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