SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
(IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND CULTURE)

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INTRODUCTION

> School Improvement focuses on doing the same things better with the intent of changing and enhancing the performance of individuals within the educational setting (Schlechty, 1993, p.46).

Why examine School Improvement? If we aim to improve the education system in which we work, we must seek new and innovative alternatives, whether it be site-based management, shared decision making, the implementation of the learning organization, or any other school improvement project. School improvement has relevance for all teachers in Newfoundland who are interested in enhancing their abilities and ensuring that Newfoundland schools continue to thrive.

Regardless of whether attempts at school improvement have been formal or informal, success is far from guaranteed; as Evans (1996, p.11) tells us, "after all, the futility of school change is legendary". However, those who make no attempt to develop better schools are condemned to be left behind. It is with this in mind, therefore that conscientious educators attempt beneficial school improvement initiatives.

This paper will examine in some detail and in a critical fashion the implementation of school improvement initiatives, the evaluation of such initiatives, and the effects of culture on school improvement, with more reference to Newfoundland schools.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

"Change; though we exalt it in principle. we oppose it in practice".

Robert Evans (1996, p.25)

Implementation

Like many other initiatives, attempts at school improvement require considerable effort if they are to succeed, for they face significant obstacles. Teacher attitudes. for example. are often hurdles in the way to school improvement. First, teachers tend to value, even guard their autonomy. Many teachers seem to assume that once the classroom door closes behind them. they become the ultimate authority. As Rozenholtz (1984, p.74) notes,

> In isolated settings, teachers come to believe that they alone are responsible for running their classrooms and that to seek advice or assistance from their colleagues constitutes an open admission of incompetence.

Furthermore, teachers resist change because change tends to bring situations with which they are unfamiliar: "So much is at stake as present circumstances. norms, and ways of operation are threatened." (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.280) In addition scepticism is prevalent among those involved in change programs because participants have experienced failed initiatives previously. They often feel rather, that change is not needed and that it is sometimes attempted just made for the sake of change. Given such barriers the principal's leadership plays a pivotal role in the initiation and successful completion of school improvement efforts.

Possible impediments to the implementation of school improvement initiatives may include a lack of funding, or unwilling participants. However, the one person almost always

directly involved in a school's improvement or lack thereof, is the principal. It is for this reason that the principal's role will figure prominently in this paper and will be addressed first.

The Principal

The significance of the principal in the implementation of the school improvement process is acknowledged by Sergiovanni (1987, p.51) who states:

> Principals are important! Indeed no other school position has greater potential for maintaining and improving quality schools.

Leadership within a school is almost always provided by the principal and any change that is to be successful must, if not initiated, at least be led by the principal. In fulfilling such an obligation, however, principals may face a variety of obstacles and challenges. Some obstacles discussed below, include discrepancies in costs and rewards, the need to involve stakeholders, the necessity of collaboration.

Although principals have the major responsibility for implementing changes necessary for school improvement, they often are not the author of such initiatives. Most often, directives for changes in how the school operates originate at the school board. This can be a precarious situation for the principals for even though they are responsible for the implementation of these changes they may have not had any input into their design or content. As Evans (1996, p.21) notes, "The key factor in change is what it means to those who have to implement it". Implementing changes mandated from above can be awkward for principals for their philosophies and practices may fly in the face of such proposals. In the end the principal may be the recipient of praise if the planned changes in the school are successful but most often the

architect of the changes will receive the glory, the architect being someone at the school board office. This discrepancy can prove to be a major obstacle to change, as Evans (1996, p.39) suggests:

> Although designers of change reap more rewards than costs, for the implementer the reverse is true, and this is a major source of resistance.

It is essential, then, that principals have input into any school level changes that may affect them and the way their schools are run.

Just as the principal is to be included in any discussion concerning school reform so too must all other stakeholders be included in such initiatives. Stakeholders in addition to the principal would include teachers, parents, students, support staff and community interest groups. As Sergiovanni observes, "Rarely does the principal accomplish much without empowering others to act" (1987, p.7). Principals cannot effect any significant change without the help of those who surround them and who are to be affected by the proposed changes. (Dufour, 1995; Roesener, 1995; Manatt, 1987) Principals in their leadership capacity must not simply delegate tasks but instead assign meaningful decision-making responsibilities to teachers and, perhaps to a lesser extent, to other stakeholders.

It is argued indeed, that an educational institution cannot be effective if it is run like a factory where workers are expected to perform efficiently and repetitively and to obtain rewards solely on the basis of their outputs.

> For truly practical, effective approaches to school improvement to develop, the rational-structural paradigm must give way. In its place we need a conceptual framework that acknowledges the real world of people, institutions and change. (Evans, 1996, p.9)

From this perspective, schools should become places of continual learning by both students and teachers. They should be learning organizations,

> in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create. (Senge, 1995, p. 20)

In their attempts to create learning organizations, principals need to incorporate all involved as participants rather than spectators. The ultimate goal for principals and teachers as professionals who wish to bring about school improvement would be to "engage in lifelong commitment to self-improvement" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.157).

Yet another challenge facing principals is that of developing a collaborative climate in the schools. Collaboration is, indeed, an important element in good leadership:

> In well-led organizations people feel that they make a significant contribution, that what they do has meaning, that they are part of a team or a family, that mastery and competence matter, and that their work is exciting and challenging. (Evans, 1996, p.146)

Teachers also appreciate the many rewards associated with teaching. They often feel that they are making significant contribution when they observe a student exhibit that "eureka" look. All teachers revel in those moments but how often do teachers get those "feel good" moments from working with other staff members. Collaboration in Newfoundland schools is very limited unless someone has initiated some program such as cooperative education and then only if teachers willingly participate in such efforts. If principals hope to create real change, they must put in place programs that get the staff working together. (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996; Grier, 1996) As Larose (1988, p.34) states, "Teachers benefit from peer feedback, clinical supervision and opportunities to share" and these are all vital elements in any school improvement plan.

One element of the principals role as leader is to give credibility to the work the teacher performs. Most people no matter where they work feel that their work has to have some meaning or purpose. It is up to the individual, however, to interpret what that meaning is. In a school setting, meaning usually takes the form of worthwhile work that benefits a community and its inhabitants. There well may be varying level of worthwhileness within the school but on a whole the endeavour is seen as beneficial and meaningful.

Teachers also need to feel they are part of a team. As Senge (1997, p.82) suggests, teamwork involves two dimensions:

> One is creating a reflective environment and a degree of safety where individuals can rediscover what they really care about. And the second dimension is to bring these people together in such a way that their individual visions can start to interact.

Teaching certainly involves the first dimension of teamwork, for it is inherently reflective and teachers do ponder upon their teaching throughout the year and maybe more specifically at test time. However, as Caldwell and Marshall (1982, p.29) suggest, reflection should take upon a much greater role and occur in a more collective setting. As well, Larose (1988, p.33) goes so far as to

> advocate compensation (by stipend or release time) of school-based people for participation in planning and the employment of a full time program co-ordinator at the school level.

Teachers should not be wholly responsible for finding time to collaborate with colleagues, alternatively time should be allotted during the work day when they can meet and discuss how, using a team approach, they can improve the learning environment in which they work.

Unfortunately in Newfoundland the resources (time and money) allotted present a prohibitive obstacle to this collaboration taking place.

Meeting the challenges: Principals and Teachers

To convert teachers to participants, it is not enough for the principal to tell them that school improvement is necessary and that they must be believers. The individual needs of the teachers, as well as the those of the institution must be met. The principal has to use various means by which to persuade teachers to become involved. Cantwell and Marshall (1982, p.29) suggest an approach that

> involves a school staff participating in the identification of institutional goals then individuals identifying their own goals within the context of the institutional goals.

This strategy is advantageous because it invites and encourages evolvement by all parties, giving all participants a chance to have their opinions heard and to gain some form of ownership. It is necessary however, that the opportunity to voice ideas be accompanied by a safe environment, a forum that is open to suggestion and constructive ideas and free of hostility and destructive criticism. This is possible with the proper school climate, the appropriate leader, and sufficient time to cultivate the right atmosphere. The leadership should ultimately be a collaborative effort between the principal and the school board. This should provide clear direction and indicate that there is a joint effort being made by others involved. (Clark and Clark, 1996; Vonvillas, 1996)

As mentioned above, Caldwell and Marshall (1982, p.31) also advocate compensation for those who are to become involved in school improvement initiatives. They suggest compensation in the form of a stipend or release time. The likelihood that stipends may be

offered to teachers in Newfoundland who are willing to undertake new initiatives is remote considering the depressed economy that this province perpetually finds itself in. Remote too is the idea that release time be provided, considering the elimination of professional development opportunities during the past couple of years. However there has been of late some softening on this issue on the part of government as is evidenced by the three days of leave provided during the 1997-1998 school year. In contrast to these three days of leave provided by the Provincial government Evans (1996, p.137) tells us that

> in the United States, corporate America spends 5 per cent of its managers time on professional development and training. In education this would amount to 9 or 10 days per teacher per year.

It really is difficult for teachers to keep abreast of new developments in methodology and technology when there is so little emphasizes put on professional development and so little professional development time made available.

A more comprehensive strategy for promoting school improvement is that advanced by Wood, Thompson and Russell (1981, p.46) who identify five steps that in their view can lead to successful change. These steps are outlined and discussed below.

1. Readiness: In this phase, attention is paid to setting the scene for change by building a positive climate through open communication and trust.

Wood, Thompson and Russell (1981, p.47) suggest this will encompass a 4 or 5 year plan in which teachers become involved in decision-making and solution generation. Other stakeholders are also to be involved so as to create a broad-based support for the intended changes. Changes are planned and implemented by the school in collaboration with the school board. The idea that all stakeholders be given sufficient time to build trust and open communications is critical. The

suggested time frame of 4 or 5 years to create readiness is the minimum required in most cases. As well, the inclusion of all interested parties throughout the planning process should greatly improve the chances of school improvement succeeding.

2. Planning: During this stage goals are refined into objectives; sequential specific activities and actions are decided upon; and a detailed long-range plan is plotted. (Wood, Thompson, and Russell, 1981, p.49)

A description of major workshops including identification of necessary resources and the source of budgetary requirements should also be identified. The planning phase as outlined by Wood, Thompson, and Russell appears to incorporate the major components required for change. Objectives or goals need to be mutually agreed upon and workshop activities selected and held in a sequential order, all as part of a long-range plan. It is with the detail that problems may arise. Will the government and school boards of Newfoundland fund such initiatives? Will they feel that the way to a better education system lies in these school improvement initiatives that may carry considerable cost? If recent actions by the government are any indication, the necessary financial resources will not be forthcoming. It is ironic that, when convenient, politicians and others lament the poor performance of our students on selected testing, yet cutbacks in the budget for education seem to be a regular occurrence. Without the finances to support such planning as suggested by Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981. P.49) school improvement would probably face a insurmountable obstacle.

3. Training: All in-service sessions include orientation (expectations and relevance), opportunities for choice, experimental learning, small group activities, situational leadership support, and a commitment to implementation and evaluation. (Wood, Thompson, and Russell, 1981, p.50)

Assuming that in our school improvement initiatives we can get past step #2, and secure the necessary funding, the training suggested by Wood and his co-workers seems reasonably comprehensive. Orientation at each inservice to provide cohesion and continuity, allowing choice small groups using hands-on practices to improve the support level, and a continued commitment to the stated goals should help ensure that the school improvement process succeeds.

4. Implementation: This stage requires a supportive environment for making the transition from in-service activities to daily use. (Wood, Thompson, and Russell, 1981, p.54)

As well in this stage, teachers should benefit from peer feedback, opportunities to share experiences, and the expert supervision and suggestions of those directly involved from the school board. It is suggested also that there be on-call assistance available from peers, administration, and personnel from central services. Time must be made available as well for teachers to share with one another what they have learned and to discuss their future plans with the principal. Last but not least, the principal should be able to monitor and support each person individually. This can prove to be very time consuming but with time teachers should require less direct supervision, which will make the work load of the principal more manageable.

If teachers are allotted adequate time and have access to peer feedback as well as to the suggestions of experts from the school board, the fourth step recommended by Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981, p.54) may be highly productive. The idea that on-call assistance be available is appropriate as well. However, the term "on-call" suggests that help is available on demand, which is not realistic considering that colleagues, administrators, and those providing help at the school board will have other duties and responsibilities. Teachers taking time to share

their plans and experiences with the administration is an excellent idea, which can create a forum for the sharing of alternative ideas. Time of course, could be a constraining factor here as well. However, it should not be a major problem since the process would only take a few minutes on a occasional basis. Lastly, Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981, p.52) promote the principle of monitoring and supporting each teacher individually. Depending on the competence and willingness of staff this could be a relatively easily task or it could be one of daunting proportions requiring too much time to implement.

5. Maintenance: Continued use of the new strategies is supported and monitored through teachers self-observation (video, audio), teacher interviews and questionnaires, peer observation (with training in clinical supervision), and continuous review. (Wood, Thompson, and Russell, 1981, p.55)

It is in the maintenance of school improvement initiatives that the proposals of Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981, p.55) might find the most resistance in Newfoundland. The continued use of new strategies or follow through is essential if we are to determine whether or not the school improvement idea will work, and problems will almost certainly arise with Wood and his colleagues suggested methods. The suggestion of setting up cameras to record the teacher's presentation will no doubt be unsettling to some students and may alter the normal procedure of the classroom. For most students the novelty of the camera recording each move in the classroom will eventually wear off. However, it will always affect in varying degrees how some students participate. The real problem with this suggestion, and it seems to come up again and again in schools in Newfoundland, is that of funding to support such technologies. If a school is fortunate enough to have the required equipment it usually consists of only one camera. One camera is not sufficient for all the teachers in one school? Other problems may present

themselves as well such as a lack of technical advice, time to set up equipment when moving the camera from one classroom to another and the very real possibility that equipment may break? Such monitoring could prove to be a real asset contingent upon the appropriate equipment and sufficient time is made available. Teacher interviews and questionnaires could contribute valuable information provided they are appropriate in both a general sense and also for specific subject applications. Newfoundland's relatively small population base does not always afford it the opportunity to develop its own guidelines for local teacher interviews or for pertinent questionnaires, so if generic ones are to be used cultural bias must be guarded against. As for the idea of peer observation, with training in clinical supervision being provided for teachers, there again may be a problem with the finances required. Even if the training as suggested takes a only a short period it might not be sufficient to give peer observation credibility.

The underlying assumption in the five step plan devised by Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981, p.46) is that school improvement initiatives will target the school as the primary unit of change. This is quite appropriate, for if change were only to occur with the teacher's instructional methods there would be too many other forces acting to hinder real change. There are too many stakeholders involved to effect real change by targeting just one group. However, the adoption of these initiatives wherever they are feasible and appropriate should help start school improvement with teachers, being in the best position to implement meaningful change.

With regard to in-service, identified by Wood, Thompson, and Russell (1981, p.50) as fundamental to the achievement of school improvement, Joyce and Showers (1983, p.115) elaborate on components that would help enhance the training effectiveness. These are:

> THEORY: A presentation of the theoretical basis or rational for the teaching strategy.
>
> DEMONSTRATION: The teaching strategy must be demonstrated by someone relatively expert in its use. (This is preferably done not just once but several times.)
>
> PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK: Participants need to practise the strategy in relative protected conditions, that is, in simulations with each other and/or students relatively easy to teach followed by feedback from participants or the trainer.
>
> COACHING: This is the critical component for ensuring effectiveness, that is, coaching each other to help incorporate the new strategy into their repertoires .

This is an excellent guide for inservice activity, including as it does the same components teachers often incorporate into instructional lessons, these being (1) providing a rational, (2) giving a hands-on demonstration, (3) allowing time to practice and receive feedback and, (4) continuing coaching and encouraging throughout the activity.

While Wood, Thompson and Russell (1981, p. 51) have laid out a framework for pursuing school improvement, they do not address the topic of motivation. It seems important to discuss how teachers might be motivated to participate. In connection with this Sergiovanni (1987, p.241), one of the most respected and widely read scholars in the area of school improvement, suggests that:

> High teacher motivation to work and strong commitment to work are essential requirements for effective schooling.

Unless teachers realize some benefit from the whole idea of school improvement, participation is likely to be limited and results far from what is desired. One means that the principal can use to increase motivation, suggests Sergiovanni, is to decrease the amount of bureaucracy present in the school and the classroom. Bureaucracy takes away from the time on task and is most often

viewed with contempt by teachers. An endless array of administrative duties can be a continual source of irritation. Reducing these activities is a good idea. Of course the "intent is not to give up bureaucratic features but to avoid bureaucratic abuses" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.319). Teachers do not mind doing some administrative duties, such as marking the registrar and monthly returns because they realize these are necessary evils. The irritation arises in chores they perceive as having no tangible benefit. The principal in his position may be able to intercept and eliminate a portion of these unpleasant tasks thus alleviating some of the irritation.

Another way principals can improve motivation, according to Sergiovanni (1987, p.242). is to decrease the amount of teacher isolation, since

> Teacher isolation is perhaps the greatest impediment to learning to teach, or to improve one's existing skills, because most learning by necessity occurs through trial and error.

This is especially true for younger teachers just starting out who have not been exposed to, or gained the practical experiences of, more seasoned veterans. This situation provides an excellent opportunity for the principal to reduce the level of isolation by implementing mentor programs, a practice that matches senior teachers with those who are just starting their teaching careers. The mentor need not only help the new teacher with his teaching practices, which of course would be the primary function, but can also act as a guide to the ways of the school and help integrate the new teacher into the community which is very important as well.

The financial circumstances of this province dictate that monetary incentives as a source of motivation for improved teaching practices is not a reality. The desire to become a teacher does not find its origins in the wealth one is to attain but comes instead from the desire to work with youth and share in their progress towards becoming productive citizens. One obstacle

teachers have to overcome and put aside for the benefit of improving schools is the conflict that occurs every three or four years during the time of contract negotiations concerning teacher compensation. Emotions are sometimes hard to keep in check and threats of withdrawal of voluntary services are routinely made however, cooler heads usually prevail and school life returns to normal in short order.

Other proposals have been advanced for motivating teachers to make the work place more appealing while also improving the teaching methods of teachers. Brown and Sheppard (1997, p.9), for example, expand upon a variety of strategies identified by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon. (1995, p. 34-42) Those initiatives are as follows:

1. Mentoring Programs: An experienced teacher is assigned to a novice for the purpose of providing individualized, ongoing professional support. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.9)

The obvious reason behind such an arrangement is the acclimatization of the new teacher. There may, however be hidden benefits found in this arrangement in that the new graduate can rejuvenate the senior teacher and keep him/her up to date by sharing the latest knowledge about instruction obtained at university.

2. Skill-Development Programs: This strategy involves several workshops as well as classroom coaching between workshops to assist teachers to transfer knew skills to their daily teaching. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.9)

If the school and the school board are committed to school improvement there will be sufficient funds made available to provide such workshops. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) do not state whether the classroom coaching is to be conducted by those trained to perform such tasks or by peers who will comment wholly on the basis of their observations and their own experiences. Either way, this should provide some beneficial insight.

3. Teacher Centres: Teachers can meet at a central location to engage in professional dialogue, develop skills, plan innovations, and gather or create instructional materials. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.10)

Teacher centres, where teachers can meet and grow through collaboration with each other, is an excellent idea. It may be better suited to larger centres where teachers from different schools within a city can easily congregate as opposed to smaller communities around the province where some teachers have to travel considerable distances to meet in a central location. The sharing of ideas to create innovative approaches to teaching, the sharing of resources to broaden the amount of resources available to individual teachers, and the collective development of instructional materials are all progressive ideas. Unfortunately, without adequate backing in the form of financial resources and more progressive policies on the part of the government and school boards little change will occur.

4. Teacher Institutes: Teachers participate in intensive learning experiences on single, complex topics over a period of consecutive days or weeks. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.11)

This is again an excellent idea that most teachers would find helpful provided the release time was made available. The idea of an intensive workshop on a single topic lasting consecutive days or longer is more realistic then expecting a one day workshop, with no follow up to provide teachers with tangible skills.

5. Collegial Support Groups: Teachers within the same school engage in group inquiry, address common problems, jointly implement instructional innovations, and provide mutual support. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.11)

Teachers taking part in these groups need not be limited to the same subject areas at the same grade level as this would all but eliminate most small schools in the province. There should, however, be plenty of opportunity for teachers of different subject areas, like English and Social

Studies, to examine the common problems that are arising and the areas in which students are lacking. Teachers must also be given time to implement innovations that can alleviate existing or potential problems.

6. Networks: Teachers from different schools share information, concerns, and accomplishments and engage in common learning through computer links, newsletters, fax machines, and occasional conferences. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.12)

For the most part, all the resources for this to happen are in place. Most schools have fax machines and the equipment to go on-line to communicate with their counterparts. The suggestion that teachers can take part in occasional conferences is good because it gives people a chance to see whom they are dealing with and involves direct conversation in which ideas can be exchanged. It appears, though, that Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) are operating in an environment that is much better off financially than Newfoundland or one in which teachers are probably expected to attend conferences, institutes, and teacher centers on their own time, possibly during the summer months.

7. Teacher Leadership: Teachers participate in leadership preparation programs and assist other teachers by assuming one or more leadership roles (workshop presenter, cooperating teacher, mentor, expert coach, instructional team leader, curriculum developer). The teacher-leader not only assists other teachers but also experiences professional growth as a result of being involved in leadership activities. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.12)

The whole idea behind teacher leadership is that people who are asked to take on a leadership role do so with the commitment to themselves and others that they will be well versed in whatever endeavor they become involved in. The confidence that there is somebody on staff who has a degree of expertise in a certain field can be a considerable asset to a school.

8. Teacher as a Writer: This increasingly popular format has teachers reflect on and write about their students, teaching, and professional growth. Such writing can be in the form

> of private journals, essays, or reaction papers to share with colleagues, or formal articles for publication in educational journals. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.12)

Many teachers are uncomfortable being open to the scrutiny that the teacher as a writer would provide. For teachers to engage in this type of activity it would involve considerable commitment to school improvement. In addition the teacher would have to find the time to do such writing.

9. Individually Planned Staff Development: Teachers set individual goals and objectives, plan and carry out activities, and assess results. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.13)

Experienced teachers should find little difficulty in this assignment. New teachers, not having experienced the obstructions that can hinder the presentation of course material, could manage as long as they realize that not everything is likely to go exactly as planned. Some guidance for all would help in setting realistic pertinent goals.

10. Partnerships: Partnerships between schools and universities, or businesses, in which both partners are considered equal, have mutual rights and responsibilities, make contributions, and receive benefits. (Brown and Sheppard, 1997, p.13)

There are numerous resources that different institutions could share with each other that might be mutually beneficial to all involved. Some outside the school community may argue that schools (not including post-secondary) have the least to offer in these partnerships. However, such a claim would be misleading, for it is in high school that future employees begin training for the workforce. High schools might not all prepare individuals for specific jobs - for example, as welders, draftspersons, or lawyers - but they do provide that broad-based education that is required to enter into training for such occupations.

In effect Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) have developed a comprehensive guideline to establish a format for successful staff development that could, for the most part, be implemented here in Newfoundland.

The Principal and Other Stakeholders

There has been considerable discussion concerning the role of the principal and teachers in the implementation of school improvement. There is, however, another party, parents, who are no less important and undoubtedly have just as keen an interest as teachers and the principal in school improvement projects. Parents have a vested interest in school and the educational opportunities it has to offer their children:

> Educational goals typically espoused by parents include developing a love of learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, aesthetic appreciation, curiosity and creativity, and interpersonal competence. Parents want a complete education for their children. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.31)

In the past it was common for parents to state that all they wanted from the school was that their children to do well academically. Just getting good grades will not suffice any more, for parents now want their children to be well rounded individuals and expect the school to play a much larger role in that part of their child's development. Parents also want to contribute, and the provincial government in a publication by the Department of Education titled *Working Together for Educational Excellence: A Handbook for School Councils* (not dated) has suggested indeed that parents should and can become more involved with their children's education. It is stated in this recent booklet, that

> The powerful effects that families and communities can play in promoting student success in school is clearly supported in the education literature (p.8).

It observes furthermore, that

> Strategies that increase parental and community involvement in the school can result in improved school achievement. (Department of Education. n.d., p.9)

Some strategies as suggested by Stephanie Marston (1994, p.7-11) to increase parent involvement include identifying parent leaders. Those who emerge as leaders in the community. and there are parent leaders in every community, play a major role in helping to build partnerships between the home and the school. Parent leaders can provide leadership in organizing seminars, social gatherings, support groups, and phone trees at their own schools. A steering committee Marston suggests "to provide input and serve as a sounding board" can also be established. (1994, p.9) There are numerous concerned parents in every community who could participate on a steering committee which would guide schools in the direction that the community would like the school to follow. This steering committee would work with leaders in the school to make involvement of all parents and the community in general a priority. Any meetings between school leaders and groups formed by parent leaders should be "social" in nature. Marston suggests: People feel more comfortable with tea and cookies. Indeed meetings in which a formal air prevails most certainly will serve to alienate some parents.

Perhaps the most ambitious of Marston's suggestions. but one certainly attainable, is the idea of a parent university. To create such an institution, parent leaders might want to seek support from the school district, community college, and/or corporate sponsors. The cost of a parent university should be kept as low as possible to encourage participation, and perhaps a free lunch can be provided as well. A parent university would include a few well-known outside experts for keynote speeches in addition to

> local residents including school counsellors, mental health professionals, child guidance experts and others who could be asked to provide workshops on a variety of topics. (Marston, 1994, p.10)

Topics, Marston indicates, might include

> hassle-free homework, discipline, violence conflict resolution, communicating your message, building coalitions, and teambuilding. (Marston, 1994, p.10)

Marston's ideas are practical and, assuming some speakers would provide their services free of charge, might be implemented at minimal cost.

With the creation of school councils throughout Newfoundland as part of the educational reforms in this province the opportunities for involvement by parents have increased significantly. Parents not only have more chances to become active but they now have a much stronger voice. The following are some of the rights of parents listed in *Working Together for Educational Excellence: A Handbook for School Councils,* a publication of the Department of Education of Newfoundland:

> Parents have the right to be involved in meaningful decisions related to their child's education.
> Parents have the right to contribute to decisions about the school's environment, programs and practices.
> Parents have the right to hold the teachers, school administration and the education system accountable for the quality of education in the school.
> Parents have the right to expect that all children will receive the best possible education in a safe and friendly environment. (Department of Education, n.d., p.12)

The material also lists parents' responsibilities, some of them being as follows:

> Parents have the responsibility to support the principal, teachers and support staff.
> Parents have the responsibility to work for change where needed and to help the school provide a safe and friendly environment for their child's education.
> Parents have the responsibility to keep informed about and respond to education issues at the school level, board level, and provincial.

> Parents have the responsibility to accept accountability for their child as a learner and their role in their child's learning. (Department of Education, n.d., p.13)

These responsibilities as outlined may require a significant change in practices for some parents whereas other parents will have to change little if they were to adopt to these suggestions. Obviously not all parents are going to feel compelled to follow suit and become increasingly involved in their child's education. Many parents may feel that do not have the time for such an undertaking, not realizing that they can ill afford not to find time for their child's education. Parental involvement, research has shown, is a very important component in a child's education (Templeman-Barnes, 1996; Kellaghan, 1993; Shakiba-Nejad, 1984) and thus educational authorities should make all parents aware that they have equal responsibilities and should be involved in their children's education.

Conclusion

The one person with the most influence over the success of any school improvement is the principal. In the principals attempt to implement school improvement he/she must display integrity, and consistency between values, stated goals and any action taken. The principal must show character in action. Actions speak louder than words and if the principal is not willing to put in the required effort and lead by example the chances of success will in all likelihood be severely hampered. If the principal is not authentic and doesn't display commitment, personal ethics, and a belief in others, their leadership will always be questioned and their effectiveness diminished. (Evans, 1996 p.187) The principal must be a good leader and a good administrator

because both qualities are required to get other stakeholders involved, leading to some measure of success:

> Leadership without management can lead to mere rhetoric and disappointment. Management without leadership rarely results in sustained changes in teaching and learning practices. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.276)

The principal also must display a certain amount of "savvy". "Savvy", Evans (1996, p.190) tells us,

> a practical, problem solving wisdom that enables leaders to make things happen. Savvy also includes native strengths, basic aspects of temperament, personality and intelligence that are reflected in qualities like common sense and empathic sensitivity, courage, assertiveness and resilience.

"Savvy" pretty well describes the characteristics a successful principal would require. He/she should be a well rounded individual who is not easily flustered and possesses a level headed approach to the dilemmas that will be encountered on a regular basis.

Parents must also play a major role in school improvement. Their involvement in the running of schools and the amount of new found responsibility bestowed upon them with regards to decision-making must not be taken lightly. They have to become involved in their child's education. They must be assertive rather than passive when they observe practices and materials they feel are irrelevant or incorrect. With recent educational reforms in Newfoundland parents have an opportunity for a much greater say and they should take advantage of it.

The implementation of school improvement is no simple task. It is made even more daunting in a weak economic setting such as is found in Newfoundland. However, by using creative approaches and available human resources and not allowing financial restrictions to limit us, we can vastly improve our chances of succeeding in our school improvement efforts.

EVALUATION

A Historical View

Evaluation is the endeavour to gauge the worth and merit of a particular activity. Merit is measured against the professional standards of a certain field while worth can be measured against the needs of society as well as the requirements of a specific institution. Schools should be genuinely concerned about both merit and worth and continuously strive to attain both. There are many aspects of school improvement that need to be continually evaluated, including the principals' leadership, programs being presented, stakeholder participation, and pedagogy of the teacher.

The nature of the evaluation process has evolved through various stages. As Gillies (1995, p.77) informs us,

> the field of evaluation has evolved through three distinct periods and is now entering a fourth generation.

The very first period originated at the beginning of the twentieth century when evaluation was largely characterized as technical and the evaluator was a technician. Measurements were gathered through intelligence and aptitude testing. Students were evaluated using normative standards to compare their performance to that of other groups of students. The conceptual framework for this period was derived from the industrial age and the use of scientific thought.

During the second generation the evaluator acted as a describer who determined whether specific objectives were achieved. The evaluation involved the development of descriptions that communicated the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The third generation of evaluation followed the launch of Sputnik in the Soviet Union. in response to severe criticisms of education. This type of evaluation involved a judgement about the merit of particular programs by using external standards.

The phase in which we now are, the fourth generation, is regarded as " responsive evaluation" in which substantial weight is given to the claims. concerns, and issues advanced by various stakeholders. According to Gillies (1995, p.78), this approach to evaluation

> leads to understanding that conflicting judgements are quite likely, even in the face of factual evidence. The likelihood of conflict puts the evaluator in the position of being a mediator, negotiator, or change agent as opposed to a judge.

This description certainly seems applicable to the education system at the present time. There are competing groups which sometimes, despite the lack of evidence to support their cause, still demand that their concerns be met. In a school setting, the evaluator would appear to be the principal and it is accurate to describe him/her as being a mediator, negotiator, and a change agent. In addition, the principal is further burdened with the task of overseeing school improvement as well as teacher evaluation as an on-going requirement in school improvement.

The Problems of Assessing Progress in School Improvement

The reasons for evaluation are manifold. The principal and teachers need some feedback to ensure that the new initiatives they are using are producing the desired results. They want to know if they are implementing the initiatives in the correct fashion or if there is some other reason why perhaps the expected goals are not being met. School boards are using scarce resources to promote such programs and they need to know the level of success so as to determine whether they will continue to fund particular activities or channel these funds

elsewhere. Parents who are concerned about their child's education want to know how their school compares with other schools, if their school is initiating improvements and how these improvements are progressing. To be more concise, performance indicators are used by all stakeholders to legitimize or condemn the practices being used and to decide on the future of particular programs. It is generally agreed that evaluation is a necessary component of the whole process of school improvement.

If the implementation of school improvement measures is difficult to achieve, measuring their success may prove even more arduous. How exactly do we measure the success of school improvement initiatives. Percell and Renzulli (1995, p.46), for example, state:

> Many argue that success is based on gains in test scores, skills mastery, and additional data collected on variables such as attendance, attitude toward school, and dropout and high school graduation rates.

These criteria cover a wide spectrum of factors. However, they may not suffice in all situations. So many factors influence a school at any given time that a particular combination of evaluators may not reveal the true sources of change. What is needed is not necessarily a concrete measurement but instead something that can be interpreted as a fairly accurate indicator of how things are changing, something to indicate the school is headed in the right direction. It goes without saying that a primary targeted goal is increased student achievement in all areas.

For Percell and Renzulli (1995, p.46),

> Student success is defined as opportunities to participate in a continuum of high-level learning experiences and to demonstrate advanced-level performance in various modes of expression.

From this perspective student success lies in their excelling not merely in the regular prescribed curriculum but also in higher-level learning experiences. Increased math and language marks are

not enough, they suggest. Students must be challenged with more complex intellectual tasks. It is difficult however, to measure the learning outcomes of such a program.

School Improvement: Evaluating the Principal

Given their central role in the school improvement process, principals must of necessity be evaluated. One dimension along which their performance in the school improvement process may be assessed relates to the principle of shared-decision making. Principals in their leadership capacity must enable others play out their role in school improvement. They need to create an environment in which teachers are comfortable with making changes and deviating from the norm if they envision a method which they feel may be more productive. Teachers should be allowed this freedom in a system of shared decision-making because inherent in shared decision-making is increased commitment. (Clark, 1996; Kannapel et al., 1995)

At times this may be difficult for the principal because, despite shared decision-making, the principal still remains the person ultimately responsible for the successful operation of the school. How can there be true shared decision-making if there is not shared responsibility as well? How then in the whole scheme of evaluation is the principal to be evaluated when despite shared decision-making he/she still remains the one ultimately responsible for all occurrences within the school? These questions can provide a dilemma for the principal.

While it is not prescribed as an important strategy in school improvement there remains other ways in which the principal can be evaluated. Sergiovanni (1987) lists six different leadership roles played by good principals, all of which can easily be evaluated. These roles are described below.

1. Statesperson leadership: Statespersons must shape broad policies on behalf of the general welfare of their organizations without regard to narrow interests or partisanship. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.17)

This type of leadership role defines the

> school's overall mission, philosophy, working assumptions, values, and beliefs as well as with the quality and relevance of the schools broad goals and objectives. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.17)

Principal's must move to the forefront when the school's broad philosophy and mission are being promoted. They must not only make them widely known but must also promote them to staff, parents, students, and to the community in general. The extent to which the philosophy and mission are recognized in the community can be used as one tool in the evaluation of the principal.

2. Educational leadership: This role is concerned with the actual development and articulation of educational programs and encompasses such concerns as specific curricular and teaching objectives and formats; subject-matter content organization; teaching style methods and procedures; classroom learning climates; and teacher, student and program evaluation. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.17)

While it is desirable that principals discharge such a role, circumstances in Newfoundland may impose limits on what can be accomplished. For instance, the principal's role in the actual "development and articulation" of programs is quite limited. Indeed most programs, be they broad or specific, are dictated to principals and schools in a top-down manner. Teaching objectives and format are given to teachers in courses outlines, so that neither principals nor teachers have much input. Subject-matter content is provided for teachers as well. However, there is now some grey area that teachers can exploit to alter the content slightly. This grey area is available because of the abandonment of standardized testing. Just a few years ago public examinations were conducted province wide. These exams were based on specific course

material that usually took the entire school year to cover. Because of the time required to cover this material, there was little time for teachers to initiate other topics that they thought important. Department of education guidelines still provide outlines of required topics but, without standardized testing, it is much easier for new subject matter to be injected. If a teacher intends to teach material outside the prescribed curriculum, the principal must be informed of the change and its implications discussed. Principals may therefore be evaluated in terms of their success in working with teachers in these less regulated areas of instruction.

3. Supervisory Leadership: is expressed when principals work with teachers, singly or in groups, in a manner that obtains their commitment to agreed upon goals that facilitates their ability to work more effectively in pursuit of these goals. The supervisory leadership role encompasses such concerns as staff development and clinical supervision. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.17)

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for change to be effective in an atmosphere of distrust or dislike. Supervisory leadership once implied a hierarchical structure but in terms of school improvement should involve principals who are leaders in the support of teachers, encouraging their initiatives and providing means by which they are enabled to develop their own skills and become leaders themselves.

4. Organizational leadership: Without attention to this important role, schools can quickly become comfortable bureaucracies, content to maintain themselves as orderly and unnoticed, albeit unimaginative and uninspiring entities. Effective principals express strong organizational leadership to ensure that school purposes, objectives, and work requirements are what determine school organizational structure patterns. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 17)

It seems that comfortable bureaucracies is what many schools have become. Maintaining order seems to be the bottom line, regardless of how predictable and boring the routine may have become. A good leader has the ability to organize in a manner that establishes order and purpose

yet does not require a large proportion of their time to maintain this order. The organization of the school reflects the atmosphere and operation of the school on a daily basis and is a direct result of the principal's organizational leadership. (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996; Roesener. 1995)

5. Administrative leadership: Seeks to provide the necessary support systems and arrangements intended not only to facilitate, but also to free teachers to devote increased time and energy to teaching and learning. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.17)

A survey of teachers regarding the amount of time they spend on administrative responsibilities and the irritation it causes them is probably a good indicator or evaluation of the administrative skills of their principal. Administrative duties are a necessary evil which teachers accept. One aspect of a good administrator is how he/she handles the questionable, trivial administrative nuisances. Time spent on administrative duties is time taken away from teaching and learning, the main concerns of schools.

6. Team leadership: As team leader the principal helps develop mutual support and trust among teachers, and between teachers and administrators as they work in concert to build an effective school. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 17)

Principals are in a position to act as facilitator for all involved parties. Their leadership ability can be enhanced because of frequent contact with school board personnel, daily contact with teachers, and hopefully regular interaction with parents. Principals require skill in dealing with people and must be good communicators. They must be capable of bringing different teachers and/or other interested parties together and creating an environment that fosters trust and promotes shared goals. Prolonged or regular visits to a particular school can reveal to what degree the principal has succeeded in building progressive teams within that school. One time visits will not likely expose diverse factions that may have developed. All of these tools can be

used independently to evaluate a principal. None of these tools, however, is all encompassing but used collectively they can provide a fairly accurate profile of a principal.

With regard to building a team approach, various scholars have listed indicators that may serve as a basis for evaluating principals success at this task. Evans (1996, p.242) suggests that schools in which a strong team approach has been established, and in which staff genuinely share decision-making and responsibility, have the following characteristics:

1. An unusual combination of easiness and intensity.
2. Style is informal but staff and students are highly involved in their work.
3. Classrooms and hallways seem to be busy with activity-purposeful not frantic activity.
4. At meetings there seems to be more humour and candour than administrivia.
5. The overall tone is upbeat.
6. There is always a powerful principal, someone with passion and presence.

Sergiovanni, (1987, p.297) also, notes the following earmarks of a well managed school:

1. A certain calm permeates the school environment. Teachers and students are relaxed and behave with certainly.
2. Hindrance among teachers is low. Hindrance refers to the teachers' perceptions that the principal or the school burdens them with unnecessary 'busywork' such as routine duties, paperwork, and committee assignments.
3. Things seem to work. People go about their business smoothly. Water faucets work, schedules can be depended upon, books arrive on time, projectors have bulbs in place, and the supply of paper next to the ditto machine seems inexhaustible.
4. The building and grounds are well maintained. Teachers and students are proud of their school and take care of it .
5. The school is a safe and cheerful place within which to live and work.

6. Rules and regulations are known, perceived to be fair, and obeyed by teachers and students.

These are all indicators that are easily observable and may constitute criteria in the evaluation of principals in terms of their contribution to school improvement.

Evans (1996, p. 242) also offers clues about dimensions along which principal's efforts at school improvement may be evaluated when the team approach advocated in many school improvement initiatives is employed. Principals, he suggests, should be very clear with teachers about what is expected of them in shared decision-making and shared responsibility taking. It may not be a good idea to empower teachers right from the onset of shared decision-making but instead gradually introduce responsibility. Principals need to use informal structures to introduce leadership roles and provide flexibility during the implementation stages of improvement plans. It might also be a good idea for the principal to provide a period of non-evaluation for teachers during the implementation of school improvement. This would diminish the pressure felt by teachers and increase the chances of success. Last but probably most important, principals need to acknowledge and deal with in an acceptable manner the inevitable conflict that will occur. Resistance will occur for different reasons. Teacher indifference and incompetence are just two reasons that may result in sabotage. Resistance is not undesirable, however, because without resistance there are no safety checks, no one questioning the value of proposed changes, and no one offering alternatives that may prove even more worthwhile.

Further to the resistance and ensuing conflict many principals will encounter during school improvement, Evans (1996, p. 282-284) recognized four essential aspects of confrontation that the principal has to deal with. First, the principal must not aim to convert the truly negative

but instead limit their behaviour and concentrate on those who are truly committed. The principal cannot become preoccupied with an all out attempt to convert all staff. This is simply very unlikely to happen. If the principal instead focuses his energies on positive things that are occurring within the change process it may further enhance the desired results and provide reinforcement and encouragement for teachers who could become committed to the cause. More importantly, it should stifle any chance of sabotage. The principal's success at limiting the effect of the truly non-committed can be evaluated in terms of his/her ability to restrain the hostile faction and limit the damage that can be inflicted, and also in his/her capacity to promote change among those who are already committed.

Evans (1996, p. 232) suggests, secondly, that in the evaluation of principals it must be observed that during times of conflict they adhere to issues of substance and not become involved in personality conflicts. Any conflicts or arguments that occur must be handled in a professional manner by the principal. Argument must be based on the changes being implemented and not on reasons for noncompliance by the individual. Personal attacks must be avoided to limit hostility but the opposing party must realize that they are expected to act in a professional manner and that open defiance or sabotage will not be tolerated.

Thirdly, the principal must accept the necessity of initiating confrontation. The principal has to take a stand on what he believes to be important, or his/her convictions. In doing so he/she communicates a message to all on staff that he/she is committed to change and this in turn strengthens others' resolve that this is not just another fad that will pass with time. By not accepting the unprofessional ways of a few opponents the principal can create a shift in the climate of a school and improve the chances of future initiatives succeeding. Principals must

meet attempts at sabotage head on and deal with them in a straight forward manner. Anything less will be seen as a sign of weakness. One thing to keep in mind is "the most common form of avoidance is not pure denial but compromise" (Evans, 1996, p. 277). There may be some difficulty for the principal initially in distinguishing between conflict and attempts at sabotage but the intentions (be it truly constructive or destructive) of the perpetrator should become apparent with time.

Finally, Evans (1996, p. 233), in considering evaluation of principals, suggests that the principal must not make confrontation a regular event. Regular confrontation serves to further divide. Confrontation can be so profound that it can provide a turning point in the history of a school or it can become a defining moment in the principal's career. Confrontation is unavoidable when attempting to create change and the true test of the principal's character will be in how he/she handles this resistance.

Evaluation of the Teacher

Teacher evaluation is very important in the whole school improvement process. A school system with teachers who can not adequately present the school curriculum is like a chain with a weak link. Evaluation of the teaching methods of teachers is a major component in the process of ensuring that schools are operating as they should. Horn (1996, p.5) tells us:

> Teacher-proof programs cannot be designed. Competent teachers can make almost anything work while incompetent ones can ruin even the most brilliant instructional design.

Horn (1996, p. 6) observes nevertheless, that

> Most education funding and efforts for innovations over the past twenty years have touched only on the fringes of the classroom. None of the more highly touted innovations, such as teacher empowerment, site-based management. restructuring, or merit pay, have focused on improving teachers instructional skills. Even though mandated by every state, personnel evaluation remains greatly lacking.

Why then is so little attention given to the evaluation and development of the most important link in the school system, that being teachers? Tenured teachers in Newfoundland are evaluated approximately every 5 years or so. That evaluation usually involves a pre-conference in which the evaluator (some member of the administration) informs the teacher of the criteria for the evaluation and they mutually agree upon a time for the evaluator to observe the teacher at work. Secondly, the evaluator visits the teacher in the classroom for the two or three predetermined visits at which time the evaluator attempts to sit discreetly at the back of the classroom as an observer. Finally, the administrator and teacher meet in a post-conference where the administrator offers compliments, suggestions, and occasionally criticisms. No follow up is done and the teacher is relieved because he/she knows it will be at least five years before another evaluation occurs.

There are many faults with this procedure. What special training has the administrator undergone to be competent in evaluating the ability of the teacher? How can two or three visits within a five year time frame possibly be sufficient to properly evaluate a teacher. During these two or three visits that the administrator makes to the classroom it seems naive to think that his/her presence may not alter the regular classroom routine. If the administrator is highly visible and a frequent visitor to classrooms, as Sergiovanni (1987, p.263) suggests, he/she would be a lot less obtrusive mingling with students, asking questions of them while at the same time making

his/her observations of how the class appears to be running. Observation of this variety need not be done without the teacher's knowledge as the administrator could clearly explain beforehand to the teacher what his/her intentions are.

In the post-observation conference the usually untrained evaluator offers observations and suggestions to the teacher who unless blatantly incompetent is then placed back in the classroom to continue practising his/her traditional pedagogy. How much value do these evaluations really have? That depends on the point of view from which they are seen. The school district is satisfied that the teacher in question is competent and so his/her employment is continued and the the teacher is happy because he/she is viewed in a favourable manner. These evaluations have no influence on the teacher's salary, or his/her ability to continue teaching (except in extreme instances). Indeed we might well question the worth of such evaluations. As Horn (1996, p. 6) notes of one school district in Texas, "60 percent of teachers were rated as 'Clearly Outstanding' and 90 percent were rated 'More than satisfactory' in a state-mandated evaluation system." The inflated nature of the evaluations may severely limit their credibility.

In fact, Horn (1996, p. 6) indicates four problem areas in current education personnel evaluation practices that limit their value. First, evaluation ratings are inflated beyond reality. Second, teachers and principals receive little substantive feedback for improvement from evaluations. Third, professional growth plans are not aligned with personnel evaluation findings and fourth, evaluators fail to assume responsibility for teacher evaluations. An acceptable or satisfactory rating as the end result is a "safe" evaluation. The teacher is content because the status quo remains and the evaluator has not left himself/herself open to criticism.

Personnel evaluation of school staff must take upon a much greater importance with the paramount aim being to improve student achievement. Horn (1996, p.8) states:

> The personnel evaluation system must be geared to an integral part of general school improvement with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of educational experience of students. How and what is done with the information obtained from an evaluation of personnel is critical. One may choose to use the results to identify strengths and weaknesses of the school's personnel, to direct them towards ways to improve, to define the expectations of teachers and others, to make the most appropriate assignment of duties, and to convey a message that effective performance in one's duties is important and expected in this school.

Attaining the best from students is not possible, however, unless we fully utilize all that teachers and other staff members have to offer. Improvement should be a major theme of all schools and serve as a guide in thinking for all staff. Failure to recognize and correct inadequacies in the methodology of teachers may have a long lasting and deleterious effect on students. The importance of continuous evaluation of teachers for the improvement of student achievement must therefore be recognized by educational personnel.

The premise behind teacher evaluation is, as Horn (1996, p. 8) suggests, "not to prove but to improve". Poorly done personnel evaluation can be a waste if time, irritating to all involved, and an obstacle in the pursuit of better educational practices.

At present there is little evidence of any "linkage between personnel evaluations and efforts to improve schools, and effects on students are scarcely considered" (Horn, 1996, p. 7). When all these facts are considered it is clearly apparent that the evaluation procedures presently being used in Newfoundland are woefully inadequate, since they display all the inadequacies outlined above.

Stakeholder Participation

There are many participants in the education field, including students, teachers, administration, parents, school council members, central office personnel, and community residents, all of whom can be classified as stakeholders. One goal of school improvement is to include as many stakeholders as possible in school improvement initiatives. In this connection, Gilles (1995, p. 78) tells us in a study that

> Stakeholder participation in the formal evaluation process may be fostered through individual interviews, group meetings, questionnaires, and open-ended feedback.

Gillies (1995, p.78-79) proposes the following five steps for involving stakeholders successfully in the evaluation process. Though based on research on a youth employment program, these steps may easily be applied to the school improvement process. The five steps are as follows:

1. Planning phase: Involved diverse group of 15 stakeholders in several rounds of dialogue and discussion about evaluation procedures.

2. Data collection phase: Interviews were conducted with individuals and groups. All stakeholders were informed about the evaluation process through written updates.

3. Results: Evaluator developed non-technical narratives that were shared with stakeholders and discussed in meetings; dialogue provided direction for continued data collection. Reports did not include conclusions or recommendations. The stakeholder discussion of results provided increased understanding of key issues.

4. Final evaluation report: Report that was distributed to stakeholders contained all the participant recommendations.

5. Follow-up: Evaluator works with program coordinator and selected stakeholders to develop scenarios that represent alternative implementation suggestions, timelines, and cost estimates.

The critical conclusion of the study is the need to keep all parties involved and to value all input.

During the planning phase the inclusion of a diverse group of stakeholders is desirable but what qualifications were required for a group or individual to become a stakeholder and what was the minimal level of interest required? There must be checks provided to prevent groups who legitimately had only self serving-interests from participating.

Gillies (1995, p. 80) suggests that, in the data collection phase, interviews should be conducted with stakeholders to ascertain what different groups and individual interests needed to be addressed. As well, all parties would be informed in print during this stage about the evaluation process. It is not indicated who would be conducting these interviews or who in fact is overseeing the whole process. Coordinating interviews for all the different parties, scheduling several rounds of dialogue, and compilation and sorting of all the collected information would be a daunting task. In addition to these duties the stakeholders are to be kept informed with written reports. This could prove to be a considerable barrier since the time required to perform such duties could constitute a full time job. Funding for such a position in Newfoundland may be very difficult to locate.

Some might argue that if such potential barriers were overcome, step 3 could be the key to this five-step plan. Continued dialogue using non-technical terminology could keep all parties informed and in tune with one another's needs and desires and thus facilitate a clear understanding of what is being discussed or requested. Also very important is the omission of conclusions or recommendations at this time. The only way any conclusions or recommendations could be made at this point in the exercise is if the evaluator or coordinator were to make them. If they were to do this unilaterally they would be defeating the whole idea behind the evaluation process, that being the continued participation of all parties. The final

evaluation report or step 4 contains all of the participants' recommendations. Gillies does not specify if this includes every recommendation made by every interest group. If so this would surely prove much too cumbersome to deal with effectively. A more attainable goal may be for participants to discuss recommendations and debate the merits of each, and in doing so effectively bring the numbers of recommendations down to a workable total.

The follow-up stage is a critical component in this five- step plan. It is the lack of follow-up that has condemned so many school improvement initiatives in the past to failure. Gillies (1995, p. 82) suggests that in this, the fifth-step, a program coordinator be added. He does not specify who is to play this role. The logical person to fulfil this role in a school setting would be the principal. However, this should not eliminate any number of suitable candidates who may be present in the community and who would be willing to accept this challenge. Gillies proposes that during the follow-up stage the number of participants be reduced. Criteria for inclusion in the follow-up group are not provided but the issue of the possible alienation of some stakeholders must be considered by those choosing the follow-up participants. This group is then to develop a plan that includes alternatives, timelines, and cost estimates. However, missing from the follow-up is one very important component, that being a means of feedback. An avenue for feedback must be provided and follow-up is the logical place. Feedback is a necessary element in successful evaluation in spite of how it is sometimes perceived:

> All too often administrators view stakeholder input as criticism, particularly when it comes from parents, but stakeholder participation can facilitate two-way communication. Providing the opportunity to participate improves the organizational culture and feedback provides the road map for change. (Gillies, 1995, p. 79)

Principals should actively seek to involve in the evaluation procedure all parties with a stake in the educational process. Principals who include as many stakeholders as possible show they have confidence in themselves and others to promote the best interests of the students.

Conclusion

This author is of the opinion that there exists, at all levels of education in Newfoundland, insufficient regard for the evaluation process. In this province genuine concern is too often exhibited only when there appears to be a serious problem with a teacher or an administrator and sufficient complaints and concerns have been raised by parents. Only when documented evaluation becomes essential for the termination of employment does the importance of evaluation take front and center. At such times, according to one local school district, "Specific attention should be given to careful documentation of all meetings and conferences with the teacher" (Lewisporte/Gander School District, 1997, p. 12). Evaluation is, at this point, being used primarily as a tool to dismiss the teacher and not to rehabilitate the teacher so that he/she may again be a contributing member of the school community. The law courts have also made it known that before people are dismissed from their teaching positions there must be authentic attempts made at rehabilitation, which reinforces the premise behind evaluation: to provide opportunities for improvement for the person being evaluated. This more enlightened view is reflected, for instance, in the same school board's draft proposal on teacher evaluation policy:

> No teacher's contract should be terminated until it is determined that every reasonable effort has been made to correct the problem and there is no point in continuing with the process. (Lewisporte/Gander School District, 1997, p. 14)

It can only be hoped that teacher evaluation is conducted for the improvement of teacher pedagogy and not solely for the purposes of teacher dismissal.

Program and personnel evaluation are potentially two of the most effective tools available to administrators in their quest for school improvement. Horn (1996, p.8) states:

> Strategic plans, mission statements, and school improvement are important documents for defining priorities and goals, but they are not sufficient by themselves. No school or program is better than the people who deliver its services.

It is for this reason that evaluation must play a major role in any school improvement plan.

CULTURE

"Culture serves as a compass setting to steer people in a common direction"

(Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 59).

Organizational Culture and School Improvement

Organizational culture may be a significant factor in school improvement. The resistance that the principal or change agent encounters in the school improvement process, for instance, is often a direct result of the culture of the organization.

Many factors work against change, not the least of which is the attitude of people working within an organization who may operate in a sort of vacuum and may not be aware that there are shortcomings within the organization. Trying to change people's beliefs and behaviours under such circumstances can be very difficult. Also, fear of change or the unknown is a major obstacle to a staff embracing change. To the individual teacher, change is often viewed with fear, because "So much is at stake as present circumstances, norms and ways of operation are threatened" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 280).

It has been suggested by Sergiovanni (1987, p.280-281), for example, that there are four basic needs that may lead teachers to feel threatened when change is proposed. The first is the "need for clear expectations." Teachers become accustomed to a particular routine and know what to expect in most situations and what is expected of them. There is a certain degree of familiarity which makes them feel comfortable. The second is the "need for future certainty." People need to feel a certain level of security. If teachers are unable to see how they fit in the

scheme of things, other concerns such as steady income and the welfare of families become more prominent and they may be unable to apply themselves fully to their job. The third is the "need for social interaction." Part of the need for social interaction includes acknowledgment and endorsement from co-workers. Change sometimes is perceived as a threat to these important social interactions and the thought of the establishing new social interactions can be discouraging. The fourth is the "need for control over our work environment and work events." Most people like to have some measure of control over any situation in which they find themselves involved. Control in this sense does not mean to have power over others but instead the power or ability to control one's own destiny.

If all or part of these four basic needs are threatened then resistance to change is likely to present itself. How the principal or change agent addresses these issues will in large part determine his/her level of success in altering the culture of a school and achieving school improvement.

The Nature of Organizational Culture

Evans (1996, p.17) describes organizational culture as "the deep, implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions that shape perception and govern behaviour." Sergiovanni (1987, p.262) tells us that school culture

> is a reflection of the shared values, beliefs, and commitments of school members across an array of dimensions that include but extend beyond interpersonal life.

Dimmock (1993, p. 106), too, states that

> The culture of a school is the revelation and demonstration of the school community's 'conception of the desirable' the practice. The school culture reflects value preferences and priorities, influences and differences.

But perhaps a simpler definition is found in Evans' work (1996, p. 41) in which organizational culture is defined as

> the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization. Whether called school culture, organizational culture, or just plain culture, culture can, at the risk of being simplistic, be summarized by saying "it's just the way we do things around here."

The culture of any organization is not easily altered. As Evans (1996, p. 45) notes. "Healthy, positive cultures are almost never flexible and are typically quite resistant to change- and so too are supposedly weak negative cultures". The norms present in a specific culture are deeply embedded and are being reinforced everyday. Change to the culture of any organization can occur, but it is a more difficult task than people expect and it also involves more time than most people are willing to commit. The simplistic idea of bringing in a new principal with the intention of changing the culture of an under achieving school is doomed if that leader is not committed to staying for the long run.

This is a very important area where past practices have had a great influence on the culture of a school and where new concepts of decision-making are in the forefront of new school improvement initiatives. Regardless of how much decision-making authority is ultimately left to the project team, it is very important that team members know from the start what their role is. Even though team members may not like or agree with the level of authority they are granted, a clear statement of roles by the leader at the very beginning goes a long way towards building a strong culture with open communication.

Project teams are a variation of the familiar committee so prevalent in all schools. However, there are some distinguishing components that can be utilized to create an even stronger culture in schools. Emphasis on systemic thinking and the delegation of decision-making authority are but two of the vehicles that can be utilized in school improvement. In spite of the difficult nature of the task, however, school culture can be changed. This is evident from a study by Roesener (1995) which shows how one school, Beacon Hill, has freed itself of conventional authoritarian practices and bureaucratic norms. This liberation from authoritarian practices is illustrated by the way the school deals with discipline problems. Typically, a student who has been sent to the principal for a serious discipline problem is punished in any number of ways ranging from a scolding to suspension. More often than not there is a core of repeat offenders who do not seem to respond regardless of the punishment they are dealt. The traditional approach to serious discipline problems is reactive. If one commits an offence, there are definite consequences that follow, and these consequences are determined by the school. Beacon Hill however seeks to have students take a reflective approach to limit or eliminate future occurrence of such serious discipline problems. Roesener (1996, p. 29) describes what happens if a serious breach of discipline has occurred:

> When students are referred to the principal for serious discipline problems- fighting, racial slurs, or disrespect towards an adult, for instance- they are required to complete a narrative in which they answer questions: What happened? Why is this behaviour unacceptable at school? What will you do the next time to avoid this problem? After proofreading for spelling and editing for clarity, the 'practically perfect' final draft is signed by the principal and the student as well as the classroom teacher and the parent. In many cases, the principal detains students until family members can come in to discuss the incident.

This method of addressing serious discipline problems has been very successful for Beacon Hill with Unacceptable Behaviour Reports being only about 25% of what they were before these methods were instituted. This reflective strategy gives students time to contemplate what they have done and what effect their actions have had on themselves and others. This approach presents logic to the offending student that will hopefully be employed the next time a similar circumstance presents itself. The principal and staff in their attempt to create a child-centered approach to behaviour problems at the school insist on working though the incident so that the child will begin to take ownership of the problem, whatever it might be. It creates an opportunity for the student think and hopefully choose a more appropriate alternative to the actions that were taken previously. In this culture, students are involved in solving their own discipline problems.

A changing school culture, one in which a relaxation of conventional bureaucratic practices occurs, is also evident in the case of Beacon Hill. The importance of parental involvement in a child's education is well documented (Templeman-Barnes, 1996; Kellaghan. 1993). As Roesener (1995, p. 30) states, "Research shows a correlation between parent involvement in a child's education and the child's academic success". Many Newfoundland schools send forms home with students at the beginning of each school year in an attempt to involve and also solicit help from parents. Usually this form includes a list of insignificant jobs for the parent to choose from that are at best boring and repetitive. Few parents return these forms.

Beacon Hill takes a completely different approach to involving parents in the day to day workings of their child's education. "At the beginning of the year, parents complete a form indicating how they will be involved in their children's education" (Roesener 1995, p. 30). With

some prompting from a part-time Parent Volunteer Coordinator every family responded. The Beacon Hill form implies and assumes that all parents will be active in their child's education instead of simply asking for volunteers as we do in Newfoundland schools.

Perhaps the marked difference in the response between Newfoundland and Beacon Hill is due partly to prompting by a Parent Volunteer Coordinator and to the wording of the form that is sent home each year from Beacon Hill, but the real source of the difference can probably be attributed to the nature of parent's involvement in the school. The culture at Beacon Hill is such that both teachers and parents are comfortable with the presence of family members in the classroom. Roesener (1995, p. 31) tells us that

> It is typical, on any given day, to see parents or other family members lingering at the back of a class, waiting to pick up a child, or perhaps just observing. Teachers seem comfortable with the presence of parents in the classroom, and more and more parents are offering assistance to the teacher.

Roesener (1995, p. 30) attributes this easy feeling between teachers and parents to the open-door policy the school has instituted where

> Parents or community members can visit the school at any time; they are simply asked to check in with the secretary to receive a visitors badge before heading back to the classroom.

Basic Principles of Culture

Sergiovanni (1987, p.317) suggests there are basic principles inherent within all organizations that determine their culture. The culture prevalent in a particular school is based upon the interpretation of these principles and how the members of the school react to each principle. Sergiovanni (1987, p. 317) suggests a number of principles that should guide the

decisions of principals and staff as culture is changed or created. One such principle is the "principle of cooperation":

> Cooperative teaching arrangements facilitate teaching and enhance learning. Further they help overcome the debilitating effects of isolation that presently characterizes teaching. In successful schools, organizational structures enhance cooperation among teachers. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 317)

One very important aspect of culture in a school is the level of cooperation among all stakeholders (Evans, 1996; Roesener, 1995). Cooperation is a very important ingredient in any type of organization. Schools are no exception. Teachers who are using a cooperative approach extol its benefits. Cooperation between teachers and among students result in positive outcomes. Many schools in Newfoundland are relatively small and are found in outport communities. As a result the opportunity to discuss course content and possible problems with colleagues who teach the same subject area are limited. Despite the increased level of access to modern technologies teacher isolation remains very much a problem among outport schools. The level of isolation, however, can be lessened if the culture of a school is one in which cooperation is high and teachers help each other in a meaningful way. The principle of cooperation therefore is of special relevance to Newfoundland.

Another principle is that of "empowerment":

> Feelings of empowerment among teachers contribute to ownership and increase commitment and motivation to work. When teachers feel more like Pawns than Origins of their own behaviour, they respond with reduced commitment, mechanical behaviour, indifference, and, in extreme cases dissatisfaction and alienation. In successful schools, organizational structures enhance empowerment among teachers. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 317)

The type of culture in a school is perhaps no more evident than in the amount of empowerment entrusted to its teachers. Schools in which teachers are given increased control demonstrate that

administration has confidence in the teachers who are employed there and in the work they do (Clark & Clark, 1996; Seltzer & Himley, 1995). Teachers often respond with renewed vigour and new initiatives. Empowerment permits the teacher to place more emphasis on what he/she views to be important and interesting. It provides the teacher with more autonomy and increased incentive to excel. Successful schools do not limit teachers with rigid top down control but instead provide teachers with a certain amount of freedom to govern themselves without getting caught up in the bureaucracy associated with so many organizations.

Rural Newfoundland teachers, because of the geography and relatively small population of this province, may already enjoy a higher level of empowerment than their counterparts in other parts of Canada. In schools with much larger student populations and thus larger teaching staffs there are often department heads and perhaps multiple vice-principals who, while carrying out there own duties. may limit the authority of the classroom teacher, particularly when compared to the empowerment bestowed upon the Newfoundland teacher who works in an isolated community.

A third principle is that of "responsibility":

> Most teachers and other school professionals want responsibility. Responsibility upgrades the importance and significance of their work and provides a basis for recognition of their success. In successful schools, organizational structure encourages teacher responsibility. (Sergiovanni,1987, p.317)

People need responsibility because it gives them a feeling of worth and importance. They feel that they are worthy if confidence is show in them and as a result their job becomes more meaningful to them. The principal and the culture of a specific school directly determines the level of responsibility teachers receive.

A fourth principle is that of "accountability":

> Accountability is related to empowerment and responsibility. It provides the healthy measure of excitement, challenge, and importance that raises the stakes just enough so that achievement means something. In successful schools, organizational structures allow teachers to be accountable for their decisions and achievements. (Sergiovanni,1987, p.317)

With empowerment must come accountability. (Roesener,1995, p.35) If teachers are not held accountable for the decisions they are entitled to make with increased decision-making authority, then principals would be foolhardy to relinquish this control to teachers. Without accountability teachers are free to do whatever they desire without regard for curriculum or the wishes of other stakeholders in the education field. In schools with a culture that allows empowerment to become a strong factor, teachers readily accept and understand that there is also a certain amount of accountability. Accountability however, can often be associated with the undesirable. Sergiovanni (1987, p. 319) tells us that teachers in addition to being accountable for their actions should also be acknowledged for their accomplishments.

Another vital principle according to Sergiovanni (1987, p.317) is the "principle of meaningfulness":

> When teachers find their jobs to be meaningful, jobs not only take on a special significance but also provides teachers with feelings of intrinsic satisfaction. In successful schools, organizational structures provide for meaningful work.

Meaningful work in a school where a positive culture exists often has much more significance for teachers than receiving a pay cheque every two weeks. Teachers whose work has meaning find it easier to accommodate the student who is having difficulty after school, to travel with sports teams and to become more involved in after school activities (Evans, 1996; Roesener, 1995). Teachers who find meaning in their work do the little extra things not because they are rewarded

in a monetary fashion but because they genuinely enjoy working where they do and with young people. Their work has personal meaning for them.

Yet another principle is that of "ability-authority":

> This principle seeks to place those who have ability to act in the forefront of the decision-making arena. In successful schools, organizational structures promote authority based on ability. In schools and school districts where it is necessary for authority to be formally linked to one's position in the organizational hierarchy, day-by-day practice is characterized by formal and informal delegation of this authority to those with ability. (Sergiovanni, 1987, p.317)

Schools that do not adhere to the principle of ability in the delegation of authority may encounter difficulties on a number of fronts. If a school is attempting to institute team building as a means of shared decision-making it would likely prove disastrous to place someone as team leader who has no experience in that topic area while someone else in the group who has considerable knowledge is overlooked. On another level, if members of the administration demonstrate ineptitude in their position it will likely lead to little respect for those persons, and the performing of their duties will become even more difficult. A strong culture is built upon the rewarding of individuals who have attained a certain level of competence with positions of authority.

All these principles are characteristic of culture within any organization. The level to which each principle is developed is a deciding factor in the type of culture, be it strong or weak, that an organization exhibits. Organizations with strong and desirable cultures are able to cultivate each principle to work to the advantage of the organization. The fostering and development of desirable cultural characteristics will aid greatly in the school improvement process.

Project Teams

Culture is so deeply ingrained in the fabric that is the school organization that one can never change it completely. However, through introduction of new initiatives, the culture of a school may be altered to better suit the needs of a community that is attempting school improvement.

One initiative as proposed by Terry Grier (1996) is the formation of project teams. Sticking with the idea that culture cannot be changed completely (Roesener, 1995), project teams are a new and hopefully improved alternative to the many different committees so often present in schools. Project teams are also an extension of the popular shared decision-making projects that are being used widely throughout the education community. The idea of committees composed only of people directly involved in the school deciding matters pertaining to the school has become outdated. There is a need to involve more stakeholders in the education process:

> Many school principals have been accused of maintaining top-down, control-oriented management. School superintendents, teacher unions, staff members, and parents are calling for strategies to democratize perceived school bureaucracies. (Grier, 1996, p. 96)

Highly structured management techniques are no longer the desired method of running many organizations and schools are no different (Clark & Clark, 1996; Reaves & Larmer, 1995). There are many stakeholders who want to have input into the operation of schools, including parents and teachers, and it is generally accepted that they are so entitled. Problems arise when the principal is ill equipped to lead or work with this cross section of people who have an interest in the educational system.

The point behind project teams is not to deprive the principal of all decision making responsibility. As Grier (1996, p. 96) reminds us,

> Principals do not need to form a project team or committee to handle every problem; principals make hundreds of independent decisions every day.

Rather the purpose of project teams is to promote the culture participation of the different stakeholders. The characteristics of project teams most closely related to culture are discussed below starting with the principal, who has a most important role to play in project teams. Grier designates that role as that of champion:

> Each project team must have a champion-a role usually filled by the principal. The champion provides leadership and direction. In the early stages of development, champions must set the stage with the team by conducting an orientation session. The role of champions is to get the team excited about the project, explains their role, and model the standards of participation. In the role of champion, the principal is responsible for determining and communicating what the project team must accomplish. (1996, p. 97)

Depending on how many project teams are to be established in a particular school the principal may not be the best choice for champion in all cases. If there are 8 to 10 project teams being created and the principal is expected to be champion in each team he/she obviously will be spreading himself/herself too thinly. The principal will not have the time or the necessary expertise to champion each team in the manner required to get the desired results. He/she may be better off organizing each individual team by selecting the team members, setting an original meeting time and place, attending that initial meeting and overseeing the placement of a champion for that particular project team. The champion preferably is a person who has some expertise or interest in the project team's subject area. If the principal as champion has limited knowledge or little genuine interest in the subject area of the project team this may have a

disastrous effect on the efforts of the group. The principal will, however, still be expected to explain the role of team members, to show an interest in their progress and through attendance at each meeting model the standards of participation that are expected. The principal in conjunction with the champion of each project team could then still accept responsibility for determining and communicating what exactly it is that the team is attempting to accomplish. There is no reason, however, why the principal could not and should not be the champion of one or more project teams. Being champion of one or more project teams as well as attending the meetings of all other project teams is a good way of modelling participation and keeping a finger on the pulse of what is happening in the school.

The champion, whether it is the principal, a teacher, or someone else in the school community, must understand, says Grier (1996, p. 97), that

> there is usually a period of conflict as team members begin working together. During this time, they are responsible for restating goals, managing conflicts, and reassuring members of the team.

Later in the process other members of the group, as they find their knowledge of the subject increasing, may want to assume more responsibility. The champions should avail themselves of this opportunity to lessen their own workload and give added responsibility to team members. Eventually, the team enters what Grier (1996, p. 97) calls a "maturity stage," in which the group working as a team is "accomplishing well-defined tasks that everyone agrees upon". Lastly, the team enters "closing-down" stage where the desired goals have been accomplished and the team will disband after a team celebration.

Grier (1996, p.97-100) supplies the following outline for establishing or chartering a project team. In a condensed form the process includes the following elements:

1. Project team name: The first task in completing a charter document is to give the project team a name. Usually this means considering what the champion wants the team to accomplish and naming the team accordingly. A clear, concise name establishes a clear project team focus. (Grier, 1996, p.97)

Since this is a team effort by a group known as a project team, naming the project should be a collective effort. A small chore but the significance of starting right from the beginning as a team could have a lasting effect.

2. District Goal: The champion must identify the district goal that will drive the work of the project team. Many principals use committees to work on problems that have little or no connection to the goals of the school system, which can result in providing the right answers to the wrong questions. By connecting the work of a project team to a district goal, the principal ensures that the school is involved in systemic school improvement efforts. (Grier, 1996, p.98)

Identifying a suitable goal is important. Enticing people to work on projects that have no significance is difficult at the best of times and next to impossible when people know beforehand that upon completion there is no reward, monetary or otherwise.

School goals and district goals need to be parallel. The importance of school improvement efforts being systemic or "systems thinking" as Peter Senge calls it cannot be stressed enough. Senge (1990) endeavours to explain systems thinking with reference to a rain storm:

> A cloud masses, the sky darkens, leaves twist upwards, and we know that it will rain. We also know that after the storm, the run off will feed into the ground water miles away, and the sky will grow clear by tomorrow. All these events are distant in time and space, and yet they are all connected within the same pattern. Each has an influence on the rest, an influence that is hidden from view. You can only understand the system of a rainstorm by contemplating the whole, not any individual part of the pattern. (Senge, 1990, p. 6)

Senge's analogy makes it very clear that we do not operate within a vacuum and there are many other forces that affect our efforts at school improvement. All concerned groups need to work together. Changing the isolated fashion in which we think about education is a difficult task.

3. Desired Outcome: Everyone has been on at least one team whose first job was to figure the reason for its existence. This component of the charter document lets the project team members know exactly what the champion expects the team to accomplish. It is very important for the champion to communicate whether or not the project team should develop and implement solutions to a problem. (Grier, 1996, p.98)

All too often committees are struck for little or no reason. When committee members are questioning the reason for their existence, clearly, the extra work required of them as a member of the committee will be viewed with contempt. Stating clearly the desired outcomes can eliminate confusion and uncertainty that may occur as a result of unclear goals. It is also very important that the team know its role when it is time to implement its suggestions. Many hours of work on a committee that has little or no influence is frustrating and serves to discourage involvement in the future.

4. Critical Variables: Critical variables describe the project teams parameters. In completing the critical variables section of the charter, the champion describes how the output should correct or improve the situation. Critical variables are things the team should consider, who team members should be talking to, and where the process should begin and possibly end. The critical variables help allow the champion to shape the direction of the project team. (Grier, 1996, p.99)

Critical variables should help narrow the direction of the project team so that they concentrate on the means to achieving the desired outcome. Grier suggests that the champion describes how the output should correct or improve the situation (1996, p. 99). In keeping with the group effort theme, it should be a joint effort among team members to suggest how the output should affect

the situation. This ensures that the team members help shape the team as a group exercise and adhere to shared decision-making.

5. Time Frame: The time frame component of the charter establishes a beginning and end for the project team. The time frame should include target dates for the team to complete certain portions of their project and checkpoints for project team representatives to make progress reports. In most circumstances, the champion takes a strong directing role during the first team meeting, behaves more like a consultant during the second meeting, and simply monitors the teams progress during regular scheduled update meetings. Regular communication is a key to team success. (Grier, 1996, p.99)

Project teams need definite dates of commencement to establish when people should have resources gathered and be prepared to start work. Dates for completion also need to be established as well so that there is a target date and so that the committees work does not drag on which could lead to dwindling interest. Check points provide a means for the team to monitor their progress. There may, however, be the need for some flexibility should circumstances beyond the team's control intercede to move back checkpoints or the completion date.

6. Decision-Making Authority: The champion should be very clear in communicating how much decision-making authority the team will have. The team should know whether or not it will have complete decision-making authority, partial decision-making authority, or simply serve in an advisory capacity. Up-front communications will go a long way in preventing project team members from becoming upset if their ideas are not fully accepted by the champion or the champion's supervisor. (Grier, 1996, p.100)

The Learning Organization

The concept of the "learning organization" is highly relevant to the problem of effecting change in school organizational culture. The most prominent proponent of the notion of the learning organization, which has its origins in the business world, is Peter Senge who in an

interview with John O'Neil (1995, p. 20) gives us the following definition of a learning organization:

> A learning organization is an organization in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create.

To create a learning organization the values and beliefs of most in the education enterprise have to be altered significantly or, as Edward Simon states, "we have to move through the barriers that are keeping us from being truly vision-led and capable of learning" (cited in Senge 1990, p. 5). Senge (1990, p. 18) describes the common perception people have of their occupations:

> When asked what they do for a living most people describe the tasks they perform each day, not the purpose of the greater enterprise in which they take part.

The shift in perception needed is called an

> 'instrumental' view of work, where work was a means to an end, to a more 'sacred' view, where people seek the 'intrinsic' benefits of work. (Senge, 1990, p. 5)[1]

It is instructive, next, to examine the five components of the learning organization as described by Senge (1990, p.7-10) and analyse how they pertain to school culture and school improvement. Each component - and its link to school culture and school improvement - is discussed below.

1. Systems thinking: Business and other human endeavours are also systems. They, too, are bound by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions, which often take years to fully play out their effects on each other. Since we are part of that lacework

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[1] In a recent informal survey this author asked seventeen of his co-workers what they did for a living. All answered that they were teachers or that they taught for a living. No one said they work every day to prepare young people to live full productive lives as contributing members of society. This informal poll can be interpreted as indicative of the level of change required to alter culture and to substitute ambitious school improvement initiatives like the learning organization.

> ourselves, it is doubly hard to see the whole pattern of change. Instead, we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system, and wonder why our deepest problems never seem to get solved. (Senge, 1990, p.7)

There are many levels in the education system ranging from the teacher at the grassroots level in the classroom to the minister of education at the very top. In the least complicated scenario this chain includes, from bottom to top, the teacher, a principal, a district director, and the minister of education. In some cases a department head, a vice-principal, a coordinator at the district level, and a deputy minister might be added. It is possible that there may be up to eight bureaucratic levels that all have to be thinking and working on the same wavelength to achieve systems thinking. The difficulty in coordinating so many individuals can be staggering.

It may be more appropriate to attempt to achieve systems thinking starting on a smaller scale. If the principal were to discuss with the school district director the direction he/she has been given by the minister of education, the principal could then return to his/her school and relate this plan to the teachers there. This is obviously simplistic but it could provide some common direction for all to grasp and hopefully have all parties at least thinking along the same lines and headed in the same direction.

2. Personal Mastery: Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. As such, it is an essential cornerstone of the learning organization- the learning organization's spiritual foundation. An organization's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of it's members. (Senge, 1990, p. 7)

Most would say that personal mastery is the most difficult of Senge's five disciplines to accomplish when taking into account all the other distractions present in the education field. Cutbacks, educational reform, contract negotiations that seemingly never end and questions

about the health of pensions are major distractions to teachers. This, Senge tells us, should not be our focus. Our focus should be on resolving issues that are really important to us.

To obtain personal mastery would require a significant change in the traditional culture of the school staff. Most people, when asked what they would like to change about their lives, pinpoint the removal of something they perceive as being negative as opposed to addressing matters that are truly important to them, such as their family or their aspirations. From an educational and school perspective it is to be hoped that the aspirations of teachers include improving upon their teaching methods.

A learning organization should promote personal mastery by people within the organization. Few schools in Newfoundland really promote the idea of personal mastery. This may be a result of underfunding and lack of initatives on behalf of the government, a result of the leadership provided in individual schools, a lack of personal vision by teachers or a combination of any of these factors. As a result many schools leave dormant a vastly under exploited resource . Senge (1990, p. 7) states:

> People enter business as bright, well-educated, high-energy people, full of energy and desire to make a difference. By the time they are thirty, a few are on the 'fast track' and the rest put in their time' to do what matters to them on the weekend.

This is also so sadly true in education.

3. Mental Models: 'Mental models' are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. (Senge, 1990, p. 8)

All too often we allow our mental models to assume things about other people that may not be true. A student who passes in a paper that is not very well organized may be perceived to have little interest in school when in fact that student may just lack organizational skills or perhaps

may have difficulty in some other area such as with motor skills. For school improvement to succeed it is very important that both teachers and administration recognize and overcome mental models that they may have. Mental models provide pivotal obstacles to the acceptance and implication of new school improvement initiatives. The presence of mental models without their existence being known, makes it very difficult for people to overcome them and as such they are formidable opponents.

4. Building Shared Vision: The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared "pictures of the future" that foster genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance. In mastering this discipline, leaders learn the counterproductiveness of trying to dictate a vision, no matter how heartfelt. (Senge, 1990, p. 9)

A good example of shared vision is how sports teams that win championships manage to put aside individual goals for the goals of the team. Teams with individuals who place more emphasis on personal glory seldom win. Schools as a whole do not compete for trophies or championships but, if a shared vision can be created and acted upon, that school would certainly be considered a winner.

A number of problems may arise in the building of this shared vision. First, groups and individuals often have varying priorities, a normal occurrence in a setting where so many have differing interests. Priorities should not, however, prevent the development of an overriding common goal or shared vision among the stakeholders in a school.

Second, the very process of creating a shared vision in the form, for example, of a mission statement may be problematic. The usual procedure is that principals with a few selected individuals, study other mission statements and make additions or deletions to create a mission statement for the school. What they tend to overlook is the premise that this mission

statement or shared vision is exactly that, a shared vision, adhered to and supported by everyone in the school. Failing to include all groups and individuals is simply missing the point. The challenge to the school principal, or leader, is to expose this shared vision to participants and to encourage others to excel and learn, not because they are told to but because they want to.

5. Team Learning: When teams are truly learning, not only are they producing extraordinary results but the individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise. The discipline of team learning starts with 'dialogue,' the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'. (Senge, 1990, p. 10)

Team learning presents a problem because the education system in Newfoundland is now, and has traditionally been, geared towards individual learning. Most teachers in Newfoundland have graduated from this system and gone on to university where again the individual is responsible for his or her education. Changing people to create 'dialogue' and to learn as a group as opposed to individually goes against everything their culture has stressed.

There are, however, examples of team learning in our society that build upon what individuals have already learned. As it was with building a shared vision, team sports provide one such example. This activity takes individuals who have already learned existing skills and then stresses the concept of team learning. This example could easily be used to illustrate the success of team learning to a group of educators.

The creation of dialogue among staff is perhaps the most difficult aspect of achieving team learning. To do this, individual visions are not to be altered but instead the individuals come to perceive the shared vision as an extension of their own vision. By doing this individuals have not had their vision discredited but instead see it as being reinforced because others share a like vision.

Even though the implementation of the learning organization in schools may seem like an almost impossible task it is not. In fact Brown and Sheppard (1997), on the basis of one learning organization project that was conducted right here in Newfoundland, reveal that, after only one year in one school, a comprehensive analysis (teacher surveys, observations and interviews) of this approach to school growth and professional development displayed remarkable success relating to both teacher growth and changes in the classroom practices.

Conclusion

Projects to change completely the culture of any school inevitably face difficulty. Those brave enough to attempt to alter the culture of a school must expect the process to be a long one. As Evans (1996, p. 17) states, "Culture is conservative: it works to preserve the status quo." Although school boards may put in place a new lead actor (the principal) in an attempt to alter the culture of a school the task remains difficult at best because the cast remains the same.

If a culture targeted for change is deeply entrenched, change may be even more difficult. Evans, for example, stresses that "any organization that sets out to change its own culture remains powerfully influenced by that culture even as it attempts the change." (1996, p. 49) Altering a culture requires the cooperation of all stakeholders. A principal with the best of intentions and with the best game plan in the world cannot readily change the culture of a school if most teachers do not agree with and accept this plan. Participants need to feel that change is important and necessary and that they have an important role in both the change process and afterwards.

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