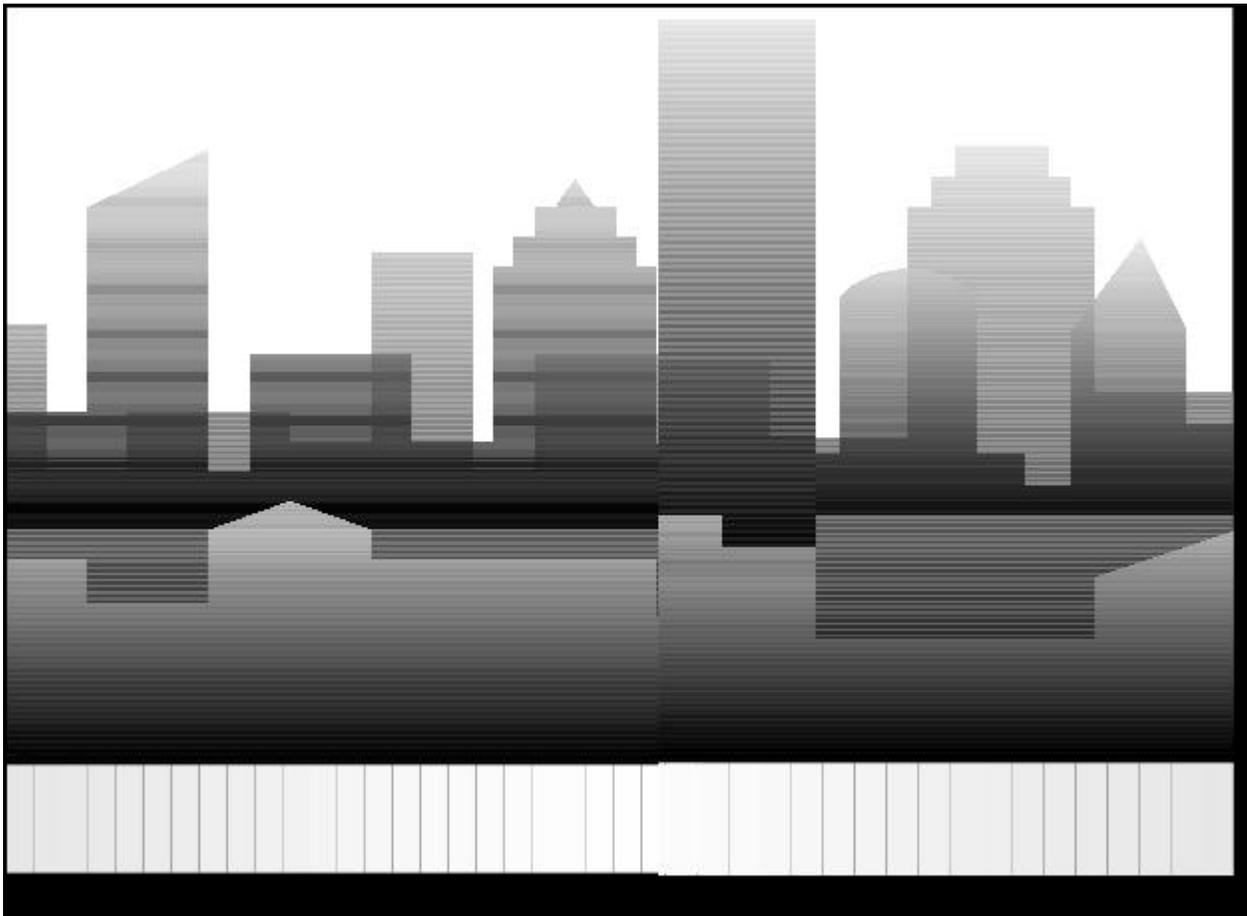# Focus on Results in Urban Schools: Observing School Improvement

A Report on Level Three of

The Urban Initiative

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1
STUDY BACKGROUND AND DESIGN

BACKGROUND: THE URBAN INITIATIVE

The New York State Education Department Office of Regional School and Community Services initiated an Urban Initiative in the spring of 2002 with the purpose of developing a dynamic approach to the issues facing urban schools in four large city school districts in New York State: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers, also known as 'The Big Four'. The initiative was unique for a number of reasons:

⮑ The initial activities of the initiative were undertaken in order to develop a dynamic approach to the issues of urban schools. The initiative did not begin with an answer which the activities were designed to present and foster. Rather, it operated as a professional partnership between the New York State Education Department and the Big Four Urban Districts to set about first to clarify the breadth and depth of the issues and to identify strengths in each of the districts.

⮑ The Initiative was devised to be asset-based, meaning that it did assume that there were positive school improvement activities already operating in these urban districts. Building on the strengths of each district is more complex than 'starting from scratch', but potentially more effective in fostering a context where the adoption and adaptation necessary to yield change for improvement is managed proactively.

⮑ Level Three of the Urban Initiative, *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools*, was designed to support the State Education Department's commitment to collecting clear data on which to base interventions to support the urban districts, in an ongoing design of information gathering and sharing. In addition, the Level Three study sought to contribute to an understanding of change for improvement in these urban schools by documenting activities that triggered changes within selected schools that are believed to be moving towards meeting the challenge to remove barriers to achievement and foster an environment of continuous improvement and achievement of results.

RESEARCH BASE FOR USING THEORY OF CHANGE APPROACH

The effective schools research has provided a good description of the characteristics of those schools that are effective. Those characteristics are important to try to emulate. However, what the effective schools work has failed to do is to describe and help us to understand the procedures, processes, and strategies that it took to achieve effectiveness. In this, evaluation theory can help. Recent work in that field has given rise to an approach to the study of programs, initiatives, systems and processes which is based in theory of change and which focuses on those elements of the context, processes and structures which support results achievement.

The use of programmatic theory in results-based evaluation has led to the development of ways to measure those mechanisms that intervene between the focal activities of a program, process or initiative and the occurrence of any outcomes of interest. The mechanism is the response that these activities generate. Both the triggering activity and the nature and function of the mechanism are critical to understanding how to replicate strategies uncovered in the study of change for improvement. Level Three of the Urban Initiative: *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools* set out to identify *mechanisms of change* operating in the identified schools[1].

This approach is timely. With the 1993 passage of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and the No Child Left Behind reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which incorporates the results based performance measurement mandated by GIPRA, schools and districts must operate in a new results-based paradigm. Any approach to providing support to urban schools has to work within the results-based paradigm in which schools must now operate. *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools* used the growing body of research and evaluation work that establishes ways to study the processes which lead to the achievement of desired results. A perspective growing in dominance focuses attention, not on measuring the components of activities taking place, but on the effects of certain activities as they function to cause or trigger change for improvement processes to begin or continue to operate thus leading to change for

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[1] See Carol H. Weiss, "Theory-Based evaluation: Past, Present, and Future", p. 41 in Debra J. Rog and Deborah Fournier (eds) *Progress and Future Directions in Evaluation: Perspectives on Theory, Practice, and Methods*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, Number 76, Winter 1997, Jossey-Bass.

improvement. These change causing or sustaining activities, structures and relationships are commonly referred to as **triggers of change**. Change is a process, not an event, so that not only the mechanisms which trigger that change process, but also those that sustain and direct change for improvement are important to understand. This study represents the beginning of the collection of information to elucidate the triggers of change operating in urban schools in New York State.

RESEARCH BASED DEFINITION OF EFFECTIVENESS

A study of the mechanisms of change for improvement in schools begins with a number of assumptions. The first is that there is something that needs to be changed in order to improve; something which is not at the level of quality that would be considered optimal. Second, that once that improvement takes place its success will be measurable. And third, that the interpretation of the measurement of the improvement's success could be calibrated against an articulation of the results that the program/school/district were trying to achieve – the best running organization that fails in its primary purpose cannot be judged an effective organization.

In most organizations, the coming together of these three assumptions is expressed by the adjective *effective* – meaning that the organizational entity is able to bring about the results that it intends. For the purposes of this study, there was an initial problem in the use of the term *effective*, due to the use of the term with a narrow connotation in education. Identifying a school as *effective*, especially in New York State, is interpreted by most educators to mean of or having the characteristics of an effective school as identified through the Effective Schools Model. This model has been used for more than thirty years to frame research and to make recommendations about how to alter buildings and districts to enhance effectiveness. It has its origins in the 'variable analysis' type of organizational effectiveness models which were popular in the late 1960's and 1970's. This type of model tries to isolate those variables which are somehow related to its measures of effectiveness. Change for improvement using this model centers on establishing practices that will change the organization to enhance effectiveness, when effectiveness is measured by degrees of the presence or absence of these variables. Thus, this research approach has provided the basis for 'promising practices', 'model programs', and 'programs for improvement'. Perhaps too simple for so complex an undertaking as educating all children to agree upon standards of performance, indeed,

in general most organizational analysts are realizing that effectiveness is a truly multi-faceted and quite complex phenomenon.[2]

If effectiveness were to be measured differently, the strategies to effect change for improvement would also be different. Rather than focusing on ways to change organizations to enhance effectiveness as controlled by effectiveness criteria, the emerging models focus on the ways in which effective organizations address conflicts that enhance effectiveness while remaining fluid and flexible enough to endure.

Educational research provides some compelling arguments for a change in how effectiveness in school organizations is described and measured. Michael Fullan has pointed out that it has become apparent that the study of the characteristics of at risk, improving or high performing environments does little to explain how the process of change and improvement works. As Fink notes, the Effective Schools Research has done a good job of identifying what these characteristics are, it is now important to build on that research to identify the characteristics of successful implementation processes and strategies for enhancing quality at the program, school and district levels. The variable identification effective schools way of looking at organizational effectiveness in schools differs from the research on school improvement which focuses on the implementation of processes and strategies for enhancing the quality and overall effectiveness of classrooms, schools and school districts. For this reason, it could be argued that school improvement brings education into line with the new and emerging understanding of effectiveness coming out of the organizational literature. Level Three of the Urban Initiative was designed to do just that.

RESEARCH BASIS FOR GROUNDED THEORY DESIGN

The Urban Initiative Level Three In-Depth Study to observe school improvement used a grounded theory approach. While grounded theory is probably 'the most widely employed interpretive strategy in the social sciences today'[3], it is seldom used in research in education. The reasons for this are not the subject of this introduction; however, our opinion is that the domination of American educational research by the psychological paradigm has curtailed a rigorous and systematic application of theory generating methodologies to education. This is open to debate, of course, but the inability of educational research in the

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[2] Richard Hall, 1997, *Organizations: Structures, Processes and Outcomes*, Prentice Hall, p. 275.

[3] Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pg. 204

United States to accommodate the need for new theory (including the development of methodologies that will allow for the combination of theory from different disciplines) to identify and explain observed phenomena is widely discussed in the education research literature. This study needed a design methodology that would accommodate the lack of a theory for school improvement. The grounded theory methodology was chosen because it is the most completely developed approach to theory generating research, allowed for the use of qualitative and quantitative data within the same design, and has the rigor to provide the highest possibility of generalizable results.

Punch[4] describes grounded theory as a method or strategy with the purpose of generating theory from data. Since the rationale for doing a grounded theory study is that there is no satisfactory theory on the topic and that there is not enough of an understanding of it to begin theorizing, the approach to the data must be as open-minded as possible. Since a review of the literature prior to collecting the data could influence the data which was collected, the literature review in a grounded theory study is done during data collection and after categories and concepts within the data have already been identified. As Punch says: "That is the key concept in using the literature in grounded theory: the literature is seen as further data to be fed into the analysis, but at a stage in the data analysis when theoretical directions have become clear."[5]

LEVEL THREE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The design of Level Three of the Urban Initiative included the collection of both qualitative and quantitative information from each of sixteen schools, identified by their districts as 'moving towards improvement'.[6] The request was for two elementary level schools, one middle school and one high school from each district. In one case the superintendent chose the schools, in two cases the superintendent's cabinet chose the schools and in the last district an assistant superintendent chose the schools. In the end, one Pre-K – Grade 2 building, five Pre-K/K – Grade 5/6 buildings, four K – Grade 8 buildings, two middle schools (Grades 6 – 8) and four high schools (Grades 9 – 12) were included in the study.

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[4] Keith F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research*, published by Sage in 1998, p. 163 and following.

[5] Ibid., p. 168.

[6] See Appendix I of this report for a full description of the selection process.

Once the buildings were identified, their principals were contacted and interviewed by the senior researcher, in the spring of 2002. The results of the interviews helped to frame the approach taken by site visit teams at each building in the fall of 2002. In addition, a blue ribbon resource using State Education Department and University at Albany experts was constructed to brief site visit team members on: special education, middle level education, planning, leadership. organizational context and pupil support services/the whole child as they relate to change for improvement. Each site visit team member received a handbook containing materials provided by these experts.

In the period between the principal interviews and the site visits one of the districts changed superintendents, and four of the schools changed principals. In the case of one district, three of the four principals were new and the superintendent was new. This meant that four further principal interviews and one further superintendent briefing were necessary. The principal interviews helped to frame the questions for the site visit teams to ask the faculty and staff at the schools. The summary presented here is of the site visit data; however, the reader should be aware that the initial principal interview in each building and the expert recommendations for study were referenced during the visit team's data collection activities.

Only one school was uncooperative with the site visit teams, allowing only four classroom teachers to be interviewed during the visit there. All other schools cooperated with a level of professional courtesy often experienced and always surprising considering the clear disruption to the school's routine which visits such as these cause. Fifteen of the sixteen principals did not participate in any of the on-site group interviews, but were interviewed separately at some point during the visit. Interviewees were assured that their information would be confidential and anonymous. Interviews were not tape recorded, however, all visit teams designated one interviewer and one note taker. Initial findings from each school have been reported to each principal so that they could offer any further observations, elaborations, or explanations for any of the observations made about their buildings. Each building then received a site visit report, which was also shared with the district's superintendent and Urban Liaison. Any site corrections or contributions have been included in this report.

The data summarized and reported in this document were collected during sixteen site visits by teams of from two to four researchers for one full day at each site. Interviewees were asked one question, and responses to that and probe questions related to that single question were recorded. The question asked of all interviewees at each site was:

Your school has been identified by your district as a building where change for improvement is taking place. We know that you may think that you have not yet completed this change process, but you are an excellent source of information for us in trying to understand what it takes to get to the point of having your students achieve those higher learning standards. In particular we are interested in your observation of what I would call 'triggers of change', those things in your building that cause change for improvement to happen. So, here in *building name*, what are the things that cause activity that is the change for improvement, what are your triggers of change?

Probe questions included information from the initial principal interview for each site, and background briefings given to the site visit teams by experts in educational administration/leadership, middle level education, pupil support services, special education issues, and the effects of comprehensive planning on school change.

This report presents information collected during visits to sixteen urban schools in New York State using four broad categories. While the categories are not new: plans and visions, organizational effectiveness, school staff and the principal, the collection of data to identify activities that trigger, focus and sustain change for improvement is.

2
VISIONS AND PLANS TRIGGER CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

David Hopkins'[1] addresses school development and improvement in the United Kingdom, where the results-based paradigm has been operating for some time. He makes the point that a great deal of both practical and research experience in Europe concerning change for improvement in the past three decades support three main conclusions:

1. Achieving change is more a matter of implementation of new practices at the school level than it is of simply deciding to adopt them.

2. School improvement is a carefully planned and managed process that takes place over a period of several years; change is a process, not an event.

3. It is very difficult to change education – even in a single classroom – without changing the school as an organization.

The research teams visiting the schools in the *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools Study* identified changes to these schools as organizations as critical to their success in adapting and adopting innovations to effect improvement. Within that organizational change, the buildings in the study carefully planned and managed the processes of change for improvement, sustaining their focus and the unity of their processes over a period of years. This section of the report focuses on the use of vision, mission and planning to trigger and to manage their school improvement process.

VISION AND MISSION FOCUS CHANGE

Change for improvement implies that some quality criteria, which are considered important, are not present. Vision statements are articulations of the organization's definition of itself at its highest level of quality. Mission statements define what the organization hopes to achieve thus providing their own criteria for effectiveness. Together, vision and mission can be used to express and clarify the organization's purpose. A shared 'meaning' or vision of what the school can be at its

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[1] David Hopkins, 1989. *Evaluation for School Development*, Open University Press: Milton Keynes.

best is thus linked to its 'purpose' or mission, i.e., what it is there to achieve. The buildings that used mission and vision to trigger change went further and saw achieving the vision as a requirement to fulfilling their mission. In these buildings, in the area of change for improvement, purpose matters in education, because it links actions to planned consequences and expected results. Recent writing by education researchers mirrors this finding. As Soltis stated:

> …we have learned that purposeful action regulated by foresight, planning, and the use of past experience, monitoring and tending to novel conditions pays off more often than not in successfully producing consequences that satisfy our initial purposes.[2]

Too many purposes, unclear purposes, or a lack of purpose are counterproductive. This section will describe how the schools visited as part of the *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools Study* established a common purpose, agreed on how that purpose could and should be achieved, and managed the implementation and monitoring of their ongoing change process.

VISION, MISSION AND THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Most of the schools visited for this study indicated that their vision for school improvement was created by the building principal. While interesting, just having the ability to articulate laudable expectations for their schools was of little interest to the site visit teams. Of interest was the complex undertaking by some principals of moving from an individual vision of what a school can be to the organizational capacity to achieve that vision. Interviewees reported that the principal had provided the vision for the school in ten of the sixteen schools visited. The remaining six schools did not seem to have a vision, either shared or individual. What is interesting about the information collected for this study is that the attributes of those ten 'visions' are amazingly similar. These similarities are reported here as articulated in the schools, and presented in two categories:

Children are the Center of Activity: *We are here for the children; the principal established that children are first in this school; we have a student*

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[2] Jonas Soltis, 1994. "The New Teacher" in *Teacher Research and Educational Reform: Ninety-third Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Sandra Hollingsworth and Hugh Sockett (eds), National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, p. 251.

centered commitment – and show them that they have a future; we must address the whole child; the principal set the philosophy that the building is for the children; simply put: it's about the kids; and, we are an organization based on respect for children where all adults are responsible for all children.

Program Focus is Academic: *The program was focused on academics; the principal established a school that is academically student honoring; and, simply put: student learning is our job.*

Visions are, therefore, simple. They focus the school on the importance of the students as their primary client and on academics as the substance of their service. There is little hyperbole in these buildings, what banners are up express clear expectations about the present performance of the students or the future expectations of the organization.

FROM VISION TO PROGRAM: THE ROLES OF PLANNING

Moving from that personal vision to a vision accepted and shared by the faculty and staff is more complicated than it at first might appear to be. Most buildings indicated that the principal used a planning process to get broad agreement on the vision and mission of the building, as well as to have the organization outline the necessary activities for improvement and a timeline for the implementation of those activities. Each of the principals reported that they consider these planning activities as a chance for faculty and staff to study their context, monitor the implementation of innovations and reflect on the effect that their practice and the programs that they deliver have on their students.

PICK A PLANNING PROCESS

The choice of planning process used depended on the school's circumstances. One school went through School under Regulation Review (SURR) identification, which interviewees identified as forcing a review of programs and practices in the building. That process was reported to have 'opened a clear channel of communication between the building and district level staff', which was seen as having had a strong positive effect. The same building, however, reported that it was the Mid-States self-study accreditation framework that gave them a clear idea of what was missing and what must be accomplished to improve their school. Another school also used the SURR identification as an opportunity to study their programs and practices, and has combined the SURR planning process with the America's Choice Five Design Tasks to articulate a plan they feel they can implement. Yet another school noted that their plan had been developed with a very short timeframe, so there had been no time for the planning committee to develop the 'perfect product'. The plan had therefore gone out to the school

community with 'Draft' on it. In the two years since then, the plan has always been treated as a draft, and seems to be a true living document, revisited on a monthly basis as they implement its components. The planning process was reported to have always triggered self-study and reflection, and to have opened up communication across and within levels of the organization.

IMPLEMENTATION AS THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING

All of these ten buildings consider parts of their plans as 'works in progress' and other parts as providing a map, or chart of where they have been and where they are going. This use of the planning process and the purposeful implementation of the strategies developed in the plan which is produced both to trigger and sustain change was a common strategy among the ten principals of these schools. Since the point in these buildings was clearly not to plan, but to plan with the intention of implementing innovation or change, these discussions can be related to the [3]four dynamics associated with high implementation capacity. Thus: maintaining focus while being adaptable and responsive; achieving clarity while tolerating confusion; understanding the reality of the school while imagining other possibilities; and, developing the ability to think systematically while acting specifically are used in the following discussion.

► The first dynamic is maintaining focus while being adaptable and responsive. As noted elsewhere in this report, none of the schools reported implementing even proprietary comprehensive school reform programs without any adaptation. This need to adapt while maintaining a focus on the overall purpose of the implementation of any innovation is facilitated by a shared vision and well articulated plan. In addition, this helps to avoid the pitfall of focusing on the innovation rather than on the effect it is supposed to produce, i.e., how it functions as a trigger of change – often the cause of a failure to innovate.

► The second dynamic is achieving clarity while tolerating confusion. Engaging in continuous improvement means a process of self renewal. This process produces a level of confusion, which can be very disruptive to the organization as a whole. Clarity is derived from the context as it is used to test out concepts, new ideas, and new vocabulary. This tolerance for confusion requires a tolerance for members to surface questions and assumptions, and to discuss them without restraint. During this study, site visit teams often noted the high tolerance for chaos which these ten schools evidenced.   Buildings were very much procedurally 'under

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[3] *Creating High Performing and Equitable Schools, HPLC Project Report*, September 2000, p. 11.

control', but within their organizational context there were also high levels of disruption to the curricular and instructional status quo, interpersonal relationship commonalities, and distributed responsibility for student achievement. In addition, in these buildings there was some pressure for faculty and staff to assume leadership roles in areas in which they were considered to be competent and skilled. Again, the clarity and simplicity of the vision combined with a clearly articulated plan provided clarity of focus for all activities, strategies and processes that contained, rather than controlled, change for improvement.

► The third dynamic understands the reality of the school while imagining other possibilities. In order to do this, the use of data based decision making strategies was common. Principals and faculty/staff reported the use of data during discussions of the plan for the school, so that they had a clear understanding of which students were achieving at which levels and in what areas. This allowed them to understand their equity and achievement challenges. However, within an activity so firmly grounded in the reality of the school, the vision and planning process encouraged the principal and faculty/staff to imagine that things can be otherwise and how to make that so. As one principal observed: "Change should not be based on the popularity of the innovation, but should be dedicated to improving student performance."

► The fourth dynamic is developing the ability to think systemically while acting specifically. This final dynamic was not reported in any of the schools visited as part of this study. This could be because schools are still using planning processes which focus on their own building disassociated from the district system or the real world expectations for students encouraged in the research literature. These buildings show a competence in the use of specific visioning and planning that should allow for a transition to a more systemic planning model with little effort or disruption. Whether their districts have the ability to follow suit is unknown.

MANAGING CHANGE

The ten schools that identified the use of vision, mission and planning strategies as triggers of change also noted that, in addition to those functions already discussed, these mechanisms help the building administrators and staff to manage their change process. The change management function provides the stability needed during the organizational disruption which change for improvement was reported always to generate.

During site visit interviews, five of the ten schools that identified their vision and planning process as triggers and sustainers of change, also outlined a process in their building whereby innovations proposed by the faculty/staff are developed, implemented and their impact is assessed. The most surprising fact may be that the proactive process to

manage change for improvement described in these five buildings from four districts is the same.

This is important. Somehow these buildings, from four school districts, have developed the same process for the adoption of innovations proposed in house. They also report something like this process for monitoring the implementation and measuring the effects of innovations brought in from outside. The process described to the site visit teams has six steps:

1. Faculty or staff, alone or with colleagues, notes a problem and brings it to the attention of the principal. In one building the problem would then be presented to the rest of the faculty/staff in order to ascertain if it is seen as important and if it is a concern in a limited or broad sense.

2. The principal asks those who noted the problem to propose a solution. This can be developed by a single individual, or a group depending on the complexity and breadth of the problem which was identified.

3. The solution is presented, and the principal checks it against the mission or results the building is trying to achieve. Most schools reported that checking things against the 'big picture' is considered to be the principal's job, and if the solution does not pass this scrutiny its rejection is accepted.

4. Two schools then take the approved solution to the whole faculty for discussion and critique. The others move right to implementation of the solution.

5. The success of the solution is monitored, in some schools this becomes the administrative staff's job, in others it is done by the nearest professional to the strategy being implemented.

6. The data collected during this implementation is used to review the success of the solution. It may be decided to refine (improve the quality of) the solution, to expand it if it has proven to be effective, or reject the solution if it is seen not to work well.

In the case of externally developed innovation, when used, these innovations are adapted to their context. This means that the fidelity of implementation with which many of the developers of these programs are concerned is not a concern in the buildings studied for this report. Instead, interviewees noted to the site visit teams that the effectiveness of these external programs is more based in the provision of coordinated

staff development, the use of common vocabulary when referring to curricular and instructional concerns, and money for new materials and resources. One group of teachers expressed the opinion that the actual external program itself makes little difference, as long as the funding provides enough support to purchase these three components. A list of external programs seen in the site visit schools can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

The study found adaptation in all schools visited, but the systematic study of the effects of the implementation of the adapted programs/initiatives was seen in only the five schools that reported using the adoption of innovation process described above. The adaptation itself was devised through purposeful processes using structural and temporal changes such as the provision of common planning time for teachers in all schools visited. The common time is used to consider any adaptations and to report on implementation experiences in all ten schools that use mission, vision and planning to trigger and manage change. The five schools that have formalized the need identification, solution development, implementation and monitoring process use common planning time additionally to propose likely next steps to continuous improvement using the innovation. Adoption and adaptation of innovation to effect change in these five schools is not just happening, it is planned, focused and managed through a combination of structural and procedural elements designed and tailored to this purpose, and generally identical.

IN SUMMARY: PLANS AND VISIONS TRIGGER CHANGE

Moving from an individual vision of what a school can be to the organizational capacity to achieve that vision is a complex task. While many factors influence that capacity, it is necessary to examine individual strands separately, while acknowledging that many other factors are exerting their influence simultaneously. Thus we have focused here on the vision and planning process as a trigger and sustainer of change for improvement. To summarize, interviewees at a majority of the schools visited reported that the principal had provided the vision for the school. The visions were simple and focused the school on the importance of the students as their primary clients and on curriculum delivery as the substance of their service. Most buildings indicated that the principal used a planning process to get broad agreement on the vision, as well as, to outline the necessary activities for improvement and a timeline for the implementation of those activities.

Five of the ten schools mentioned above reported using the same procedures for the adoption of innovations proposed in house and a similar process for innovations brought in from outside. Change in these five schools is planned, focused and managed through a combination of structural and procedural elements designed and tailored to this use.

In the ten schools where the planning process was mentioned as facilitating change and useful in monitoring change for improvement, a plan was developed, part of which was treated as a work in progress that was revisited and reworked following reflection and discussion. Other parts of the plan provided the context of where they had been and clear articulation of the results they are seeking to produce. Further study would help to answer some questions raised about the planning processes operating in these schools. It would seem that the interviewees were referring to building level planning that was comprehensive in nature and was results-based. How that was or was not incorporated into a district plan would be important to know. In depth study at the district and building level in a few of these select schools would help to generate a better understanding of these processes.

3
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS TRIGGER CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Fink[1], among others, has noted that change efforts that fail to consider schools' contexts and teachers' contexts have little chance for success (Cohen, 1995; Elmore, 1995; McLaughlin, 1990). He goes on to say, "Approaches to 'initiation,' 'implementation,' and 'continuation' or 'institutionalization' of change, therefore, depends heavily on the multiple internal and external contexts into which change is introduced."[2] Interviewees in all of the schools visited during the *Focus on Results in Urban Schools Study* told the site visit teams that changes in their buildings' contexts were necessary to ensure successful change for improvement. This finding agrees with reports in the education research literature. Findings from this study could provide a bridge between this necessary attention to the contexts into which change is introduced and an emerging model of effectiveness in respect to school improvement.

The data collected for this study focused on the mechanisms (triggers and sustainers) of managed change for improvement in urban schools in New York State. Effectiveness in this context is defined in measurement terms as a constituent construct of change for improvement, specifically related to achievement of purpose. For reasons explained in the introduction to this report, studying effectiveness as a function of results achievement precludes using the variable identification approach of the *Effective Schools Model*. This is because of the incompatibility of the use of contextual attributes to measure for continuous improvement in the results based environment of the 21st century. While there is no argument that the effective schools criteria are correct, rather than focusing on ways to change organizations to enhance effectiveness as controlled by effectiveness criteria, recent models of effectiveness emerging from organizational research focused on how organizations address normal contradictions in ways that enhance their achievement of purpose (or results).

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[1] Dean Fink, *Good Schools/Real Schools: Why School Reform Doesn't Work*, Teachers' College Columbia University Press, 2000.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

The model used in this analysis is Richard Hall's 'Contradictory Model'[3], where effectiveness is assessed using four dimensions: constraints, goals, constituencies and time frames. This moves the study of effectiveness from a mindset that believes that barriers to effectiveness can be dissolved or eradicated to a belief structure that supports global understanding of effectiveness through localized measurement that builds on the assets of each context relative to its constraints, goals, constituencies and time frames. Effectiveness is judged relative to the organization's success in addressing these contradictions in such a way that the organization's purpose is achieved.

The discussion in this part of the report focuses on the dimensions of constraints and goals, using the following definitions:

⮂ Organizations face multiple and conflicting environmental constraints which may be imposed externally, bargained for, discovered, or self-imposed. The point is not to identify the constraints, but to study how the constraints are addressed and accommodated. Many constraints cannot be removed and must therefore be accommodated in order for the organization to achieve its purpose. Examples of each type of constraint are:

  o Imposed Externally: state standards and assessments.

  o Bargained for: bargaining unit agreements.

  o Discovered: happened upon without warning – existing text goes out of print, influx of ELL students.

  o Self-imposed: building administrator turnover as a policy.

⮂ Organizations have multiple and conflicting goals and these goals are in a constant state of flux. Goals themselves are imposed by what Hall calls the 'dominant coalition'. Changes to goals tend to be set through power coalitions and strategies to address constraints. Again, these are usually just facts of organizational life which have to be accommodated. Examples include:

  o Hidden agendas which envelop the notion of the politics of education.

  o Conflict between public goals and private goals of those in power.

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[3] Richard Hall, *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes,* Prentice Hall, 1997.

Hall notes that performance measures in organizations measure a combination of success in addressing constraints and achieving goals. This is an important point for those trying to codify school improvement. In education at the moment, analysis of educational organizations is almost entirely done using the Goal Attainment Model for measuring effectiveness. However, according to Hall, an organization can be effective without meeting its goals, but can never be effective if it does not address its constraints. Thus, this report uses the definition of effectiveness put forward by Penning and Goodman[4]: "Organizations are effective if relevant constraints can be satisfied and if organizational results approximate or exceed a set of referents for multiple goals."

Change initiatives are introduced into an existing environment or context with the purpose of increasing the likelihood that the organizations will achieve its desired results. Some aspects of the environment can trigger and/or sustain improvement while others can be barriers to successful, sustained positive change. Identification of constraints is less important than developing an understanding of how organizations satisfy relevant constraints and meet or exceed their identified ideal results. The environment in this sense can be the physical space, the use of time as a resource, the organizational structure and climate or the financial supports that are available to fund the improvement efforts. Included within the organizational structure are factors such as policies, procedures, and responsibilities. The organizational climate includes factors such as the extent to which change initiatives are supported by persons or groups with decision-making power within the organization. This section of the report focuses on aspects of the organization into which change has been introduced in the sixteen schools studied, the nature of organizational constraints and the strategies to satisfy them.

COMMUNICATION AND CONTROL

In order for change initiatives to take hold and be sustained, interviewees noted that some operational structures need to be in place that helps the change initiatives to address organizational constraints. These structures can therefore be considered pre-implementation characteristics. Two examples of this are the disciplinary control of the buildings and the construction of information dissemination mechanisms. When operating independently of each other these two structures do not act as mechanisms of change, however, when they are constructed to interact, the results are quite impressive.

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[4] Johannes Pennings and Paul Goodman "Toward a Workable Framework" in *New Perspectives on Organizational Effectiveness*, e. Pennings and Goodman, Jossey Bass published in 1977.

Weiss[5] defines information as "… the range of knowledge and ideas that help people make sense of the current state of affairs, why things happen as they do, and which new initiatives will help or hinder." It, she goes on to say, helps people to figure out where the problems are and which potential solutions hold promise for coping with them effectively. This definition intimates at the relationship between information dissemination and other structural components of the school context. Indeed, the evaluation literature has long identified stakeholder buy-in at all levels of the organization as critical to the effective introduction of innovation for change and links that buy-in to communication of information about the innovation. Weiss goes a bit further in identifying the use of information to trigger buy-in and consensus beginning with the identification of the needs to be addressed and extending to the monitoring and adjustment of the innovation during its implementation. The findings of this study would indicate that this is, indeed, critical and that the dissemination of information to all levels of the system is important regardless of whether those receiving the information are involved in any decisions being made based on the information. It could also be that this need to be informed in order to connect their practice with 'the big picture' increases in parallel with the level of schooling, however, while implied by the data, the study included too few middle schools to enable the study team to draw that conclusion. In schools where change happens easily and relatively smoothly, these structures were found to have been in place for some time or to have been constructed early in the change for improvement process. Their absence, however, creates a barrier to change.

In nine of the sixteen schools visited, factors related to organizational structure were referenced in interviewees' discussions of change processes. In schools where new administrators brought change, their first order of business was reported to have been getting the building under control. Groups at four of the schools shared dramatic tales of how things had spiraled out of control prior to the new administration (principal or principal and team) coming to the building and establishing very clear procedures for students and faculty alike. Merely exerting control did not function, however, as a trigger of change in these schools. Site visit teams focused on other mechanisms which, while rooted in a safe and secure environment, went further to trigger and sustain change for improvement in the buildings studied.

[5] Carol H. Weiss, "The Four 'I's' of School Reform: How Interests, Ideology, Information, and Institution Affect Teachers and Principals", *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 65, No. 4, winter 1995.

The two at first seemingly unrelated factors of disciplinary control and dissemination of information were identified as important by comparing the success of change for improvement in the two middle schools studied. Teachers at the first building, one year into their change for improvement process, spoke of regaining control of the building with the development of a behavior and discipline policy and its introduction to parents and students as well as faculty and staff, along with demonstrated processes and procedures that implemented the policy. This process of control to establish a foundation for change for improvement had been noted at other schools, What caught the attention of the site visit teams was that interviewees at this school also identified an organizational flowchart which the principal prepared showing the responsibilities of administrative staff members as one of the most important and change facilitating things developed by the new administrative staff. Teachers and other curriculum delivery staff reported common planning time, close proximity of classrooms for all 'team teachers', and the principal's commitment to 'keep us in the loop' through faculty briefings on district policies, a weekly memo to all staff, and informal communication as all part of an information dissemination strategy that stabilized their buy-in to the innovations for improvement they were introducing in the school. Informants linked the two as related to create a trigger of change.

This can be contrasted with information collected at the other middle school where the change process, already in its third year, had not yet taken hold. Teachers at the second school reported that some progress had been made in getting the building under control but they needed to do more in that regard. They reported being frustrated in these attempts to 'go further' because they were not told the specific responsibilities of administrative positions in the building and district. Order inducing processes and information, including information regarding the organization's areas of administrative responsibility, might be said to trigger change in the context. It can also provide a way to continue to deliver the curriculum when other issues intervene, as reported at two of the high schools.

At one high school teachers noted that well articulated policies and procedures in general are the "framework for continuance" that provide stability. Operating in an urban district where there has been a great deal of administrative turnover historically, they believed they had to establish the framework so the system can run itself if necessary when leadership changes. Another school referred to the clearly defined expectations and goals of the building as creating a sense of stability and security for students, faculty and staff.

The elementary and middle schools in the study identified the principal as the position in the hierarchy that can effectively make these

changes. Groups at two high schools indicated that change in high schools would come from leadership at the departmental level. Their feeling was that visionary and well-organized departmental leadership would trigger and support change. One teacher said, "…without it even a strong principal leadership will not be successful." This speaks to the differences between elementary schools and high schools experienced throughout this study.

PHYSICAL SPACE AND TIME

Physical space, including the condition of the school building and the community in which it is located, are external environmental constraints. Manipulation of physical space and the use of time as a resource were noted by informants in three buildings as factors that contributed to change. Changes in physical space, such as beautification efforts and making a school neater and cleaner, were mentioned in two schools as triggering additional positive change. Changes to the school building are often part of a broader change to the community in which it is situated. For example, the renovation that occurred in one of these school buildings was part of a neighborhood renovation that was initiated by the then new principal. Parents and other community members were solicited and encouraged to become involved in the reclamation of the school and its surrounding neighborhood. They enlisted help from the police department and were able to change the area immediately surrounding the school from a dangerous place, which included crack houses and drug dealers, discarded drug paraphernalia in the playground and parents afraid to allow their children to walk to school from just a few blocks away, to a safe and hospitable place. As a result new families moved in because it was a neighborhood in which they could safely raise their children. With the revitalized school and neighborhood, these parents and community members reported feeling energized by their ability to effect change and inspired by the tangible results. They described a renewed pride in their school and community that has led them and others to want to continue to be involved in community improvement efforts. As parents told the site visit team, they have discovered their voice and power. This has led to increased involvement of parents in their child's education. The principal recognizes the benefits for students of such involvement and actively encourages it. This involvement and activism is now part of the school culture and was reported to be self-sustaining.

Sometimes physical changes mean a change in how space is utilized. For example, a school acting to "change what you can to effect what you can't" made changes in the use of physical space and scheduling. This large middle school had been organized in the generally typical way, which involves segregating the Sixth Grade students as much as possible from the Seventh and Eighth Grade students. This self-imposed environmental constraint was addressed by adopting a smaller

learning community approach. The school was organized into three smaller houses, each consisting of all three grade levels. When the movement of students between classes was monitored following this change, it was found that there was "too much movement: too much chance for disruption", so the principal recommended that all teachers of students in each 'house' be located in classrooms near to one another. When the reorganization of classroom locations was aligned with the new organizational structure within the building to cut down on class change disruption, some additional and somewhat unanticipated changes were observed. While teachers told the site visit team that they were skeptical at first, after the first month teachers noticed that students spent less time in the halls resulting in a decrease in inappropriate behavior in the halls. By distributing the Eighth Grade students into three teams, their strength in numbers had been reduced. Also teachers and staff reported that they noticed that the eighth grade took on a more nurturing and protective role with the younger students with whom they were grouped. As part of the effort to change what you can control the schedule was also changed eliminating the homeroom period. Attendance is taken in each class. Not only did this increase available time in the schedule, but it also caused a reduction in tardiness. Teachers also reported that their closeness to one another means they talk more and communicate better regarding their students. The space use change was clearly a mechanism by which other changes for improvement were triggered.

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Organizational climate, as it is used here, is an aspect of the broader organizational culture of a building. Culture has been defined as the behavioral norms and the dominant values within an organization, including the feeling or climate conveyed[6]. While there are many aspects of a culture affecting the change process in a school, there were particular references made by interviewees regarding the climate which they viewed as critical. Groups at two elementary schools of the four visited noted that the organizational climate in their building influenced its ability to sustain change. In both schools, teachers consistently referred to a climate of respect among their colleagues and openness to new ideas as sustaining change in their buildings.

Teachers at one high school noted that teachers are the 'culture' of the building, the continuity. It is their belief that positive change will not take place without the support and commitment to it of teachers. Teachers at two elementary schools mentioned teacher support by

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[6] Dean Fink, ibid., p. 9.

building administrators as a necessity for change to take place. These teachers felt that the support of building administrators by district administrators was also extremely important. The Board of Education's policies and actions and those of central administration can encourage or discourage positive change within a building according to teachers at one high school. Teachers at another high school echoed this sentiment. As one teacher noted, "We are only as good as the support we receive from the principal, (s/he) is only as good as the support (s/he) receives from the district. It stands to reason." This notion is supported in the literature. According to Fullan[7], "The role of the district is crucial. Individual schools can become highly innovative…but they cannot stay innovative without the district action to establish the conditions for continuous and long term improvement".

One thing that was reported that is related to this point is the disruption which changes in administration cause at the classroom level. Administrator turnover can be categorized as a self-imposed constraint. The belief that administrator turnover, whether at the building or district level, has little effect on the curriculum delivery in the classroom is widely held in education. All sixteen of the schools visited for this study indicated that this is not the case, and that administrative disruption is indeed felt at the classroom level.

DEALING WITH EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS TRIGGERS CHANGE

External constraints contributing to effectiveness include state mandates and access to and regulation of external funding sources. Site visit teams came away with a strong sense that strategies adopted to satisfy some state mandates have had a strong positive effect on change for improvement. Schools did report, for example, that SURR identification, while emotionally draining, did help to focus the work of the building. "We couldn't ignore things anymore," one teacher told us. "We had to face that we weren't doing our jobs well enough for the kids in the school." Planning was another mandate referred to as a positive influence on change for improvement. Those buildings that have moved beyond instructional planning to a broader results-based self-study approach seem to derive more positive results from their processes.

Financial support can be viewed as an external trigger of change or as tangible evidence of more general support from the District or community. At one school a grant from the M & T Bank was an initial trigger of change. While the grant of $8m over ten years is substantial, much of the money went to refurbishing the physical space within the

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[7] Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Teachers College Press, 1991, p. 209.

building and to renovate the structure of the building. Building beautification was identified as a powerful trigger of change in this school (as noted above). The money itself at this school is not a trigger of change (the site visit teams did see other schools with 'soft money being input as part of their school improvement efforts, which did not have the same net effect of this grant). The M & T Grant requires a Site Management Board to manage the budget from the grant. This is an important aspect of the operations of this school, and should be considered to be one of the (if not the) most important structural mechanisms of change operating there. Community involvement was established through membership on the School Management Team (SMT) which was one of the requirements of the grant. Thus, the grant was not the mechanism that addressed this school's service delivery constraints, but the management structure and its function in the organizational context did trigger change for improvement in this building. Parent and community involvement was identified, by all informant groups, as a trigger of change in this building. An important characteristic of the SMT is that it has power over the portion of the school budget provided by the grant. Here, and elsewhere, the link between some fiscal power and levels of engagement (and thereby effect) among community members on management teams is important to note.

Money from grants was identified in one building as supporting innovation and emerging practices. In reference to the use of CSRD funds to purchase a proprietary program, this school found the materials and the professional development that were provided, as well as, the general support for innovative programs and practices as helpful.

In two schools money had been provided which supported a health clinic within the school. This financial support was seen as vital to change in urban schools as expressed by informants at one of these. This assists the school in meeting the needs of the whole child within a positive youth development model. In the other school, absenteeism had been reduced and special education referrals had gone down. The schools chosen for this study offered the opportunity to compare one building where the clinic seemed to have been integrated into the team approach to the whole child and another where it had not. Again, the presence of an onsite clinic does not function as a trigger of change. This study indicates that the team's ownership of all aspects of the whole child's well being regardless of the professional responsibility for any particular aspect does.

A WORD ABOUT PROPRIETARY PROGRAMS

"Shrink-wrapped", "off the peg", "proprietary" – whatever they are called, the teams saw quite a few of these programs in the schools

that were part of this study[8], especially at the elementary level. The use of this type of programming to address constraints and impact the context was one of the surprises of this work. Staff in schools told the teams that these programs provided common referent language, structured and purposeful professional development and clearly expressed common goals and objectives which allowed for more efficient peer to peer interactions, for example, among teachers. They also told us that the actual program they used was almost unimportant. What the interviewees identified as the triggers of change relative to proprietary programs were the increased communication around curriculum delivery, high quality and systematic professional development offering the same approach to all staff, and an articulation of the results they were all working towards. One school had developed their own coordinated approach, which was also highly effective.

SUMMARY: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS TRIGGER CHANGE

Change initiatives are introduced into an existing environment or context. In order for change initiatives to take hold and be sustained, there need to be certain structures in place that facilitate the implementation. To summarize, the interviewees' responses regarding the influence of context on change initiatives in their buildings fell into four broad categories; Organizational Structure, Physical and Temporal Space, Organizational Climate, and External Factors. Organizational structures, such as a well defined behavior and discipline policy were noted in several discussions as a necessary first step for the change process to take root. At one high school teachers noted that well articulated policies and procedures provided stability or the "framework for continuance", so that following leadership changes the system could run itself if necessary. While this was a coping mechanism established to survive a number of administrative changes, it was clear that frequent administrative turnover had a negative impact on sustained improvement efforts. Teachers could continue to deliver the curriculum, but they admitted losing the 'big picture' that the administrator could provide. From the beginning of this study in the spring of 2002 to the end of the study in the winter of 2002-2003, 31.25% or 5/16 of the principals and 50% or 2/4 of the superintendents in these four districts had changed. An additional principal has changed since the winter. One district alone lost three of the four principals and the superintendent. It was clear that many of these buildings were having a difficult time finding their way. The effect of administrator turnover is an area that merits further study.

Physical space changes such as beautification efforts triggered change in two schools. Physical space and scheduling changes at one

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[8] See Appendix 2 for a list of the proprietary programs encountered.

middle school, which created small learning communities and the abolishment of the homeroom period, triggered better student behavior, less wasted time and less tardiness.

Organizational climate was noted by two elementary schools citing respect among colleagues and openness to new ideas as important influences affecting its ability to sustain change. Also a climate of support, principal's support of teachers and superintendent's support of principals were cited as necessary for change to take place and be sustained.

The external factors cited as contributing to change included State mandates and external funding. Mandates such as SURR identification and planning requirements were referenced as triggers of change for improvement. Financial support, which can be viewed as an external trigger of change or as tangible evidence of more general support from the District or community, was also identified.

FURTHER STUDY

Throughout this work questions arose regarding the relationship between change for improvement at the building level and district support of that change. Often treated as unimportant by administrators, teachers, parents, staff and principals told us that it was critical to their successful implementation of innovations focused on change for improvement. Further study of the district to building connection is important at this time. At one school, teachers recognized pressures the principal had been under and its impact on their ability to do their jobs effectively during a previous superintendent's tenure and were thankful for the support from the current superintendent. Again, a follow up study on the effects of this change, coming into a reportedly very positive and supportive environment, would be informative.

Various of the data collection instruments for this study showed some marked differences in response between middle schools and both elementary schools and high schools. Further study of mechanisms of change in middle level is warranted by the initial findings of this study. For example, physical space and scheduling changes at one middle school, which created small learning communities and the abolishment of the homeroom period, triggered better student behavior, less wasted time and less tardiness. Since these changes were observed in only one school and the changes were noted early in the implementation process, further study of these effects here and in other schools is recommended.

4
SCHOOL STAFF AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Hall notes that the study of organizations is really the study of the people in those organizations. Maintaining the focus of change on the organization, rather than on identified groups of people within the organization, therefore, can prove to be very difficult. Christopher Argyris has written widely on the organization and how it frames the behaviors of the people who work in it. His research indicates that a combination of poor management and poor interpersonal competence leads to apathy, mutual distrust, and resistance to changes in routine. This is especially true in 'rational' organizations which are managed by reducing tasks to specialized routines and establishing a chain of command which prescribes that routine. "As a result, the specialists and departments follow their own ends irrespective of wider interests, and even to each other's detriment."[1] It is a fact that individuals in organizations with weak management and poor interpersonal competence tend to evidence a narrow, task oriented approach to their work that can infuriate their superiors. Often the supervisors concentrate on changing the behaviors of the members of the organization rather than changing the organizational context, which Argyris concludes is a mistake. The *Focus on Results in Urban Schools Study* addressed both the role of school faculty and staff in their change for improvement efforts and the role and relationships of the principal in the change for improvement process to the staff and faculty. This was the subject of a great deal of the responses to the site visit teams by the cooperating schools' faculty, staff and administrators and is reported here in both this section and the next.

Issues regarding school personnel were cited often as contributing factors to the process of change for improvement in the Urban Initiative Level 3 schools. Certain staff characteristics were noteworthy as were issues around staff usage and staff development. Staff characteristics mentioned most often by the interviewees as helping to address the environmental constraints and multiple and conflicting goals operating in the building were the staff's flexibility, resourcefulness and strength of community. Use of ancillary staff, such as social workers, counselors, and psychologists, as part of pro-active teams, with roles and responsibilities that broke down narrowly prescribed duties, were more effective in meeting the needs of the

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[1] Pugh and Hickson, *Writers on Organizations*, p. 190.

'whole child' than other more typical models, and therefore provided more opportunities for teachers to improve their practice. How new teachers, with their new ideas, were accepted and incorporated within the existing staff, as well as, the formal and informal mentoring that occurred with new staff were important practices that facilitated the change process. And finally, staff development opportunities, including the use of common planning time, professional development, voluntary staff sharing time and use of in-house expertise triggered change in some of the schools and helped to sustain change in most of the schools visited.

As with all modern organizations, the schools visited for the *Focus on Results in Urban Schools Study* exhibited the following paradoxes identified by Argyris. People in these buildings are told:

- ➲ Take initiatives but do not violate the rules.

- ➲ Think beyond the present but be rewarded and penalized on present performance.

- ➲ Think of the organization as a whole but be careful not to step on the other organization members' territory.

- ➲ Cooperate with others but compete with them when necessary.

Those schools that seemed to be successfully managing change for improvement developed, supported and/or provided an organizational culture and environment that made the operations of these paradoxes possible.

STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of the staff are influenced by a variety of factors, including consistency of administrative leadership. The ability of staff to adjust to changes in administrative staff and the ability of new principals to support and build on the characteristics of existing staff were recognized by interviewees at all schools, including schools where this was not taking place, as being of consequence. In many of the schools visited, the teachers referred to themselves as a team. At one school that had had several administrators over the past few years, the teachers said they had to learn to work together to ensure the smooth running of the school, regardless of administrative turnover. It makes some sense as a survival strategy in schools where teachers could not count on consistent administrative staffing. However, for the change process to occur, a principal needs to be able to tap the strength of that team, rather than resisting its power and/or influence. When discussing leadership

within the context of the micro-politics of schooling, Fink identifies as important 'formal and informal leaders' that maintain the context yet encourage the types of relationships that foster the capacity of the organization to respond to change.[2] This seems to be the point which informants were making. Teachers at one school reported that they were a team before the new principal arrived, but that the new administration supported and built on the team without marginalizing teachers or creating principal's pets. This was recognized as facilitating change and generally was lauded by staff.

THE LED AND THEIR LEADERS

It is, of course, the formal leadership (of the school and of the district) that decides if power relationships are "power-over" or "power-with". Fink[3] notes that power-with is difficult to maintain in the light of organizational structures that create and expect power-over. This means in practice that regardless of how much a principal wishes to create a power-with environment, district expectations can force power-over practices. This may have been the case in one school, where the site visit team suspected that the new principal was not very successful in this regard and seemed to have divided the faculty. This school was found to have a very loyal inner circle of staff members and a larger group of staff to which the site visit team was denied access. While positive change was evident in this building; one wonders if the few leading the way have the necessary support to sustain the change.

Leadership has emerged as a consistent theme woven throughout this study and is mentioned in this and a number of other sections of this report. The concept of leadership is not simple, as noted by Meindl: "...leadership is a convenient, phenomenologically legitimate social construction which, nonetheless, masks a complex, multi-sourced bundle of influences on organizational outcomes."[4] This "complex, multi-sourced bundle" means that leadership both forms and is impacted by the complexity that is the chaos of change. It is not surprising, therefore, that this study encountered a function of faculty and staff leadership as mechanisms of change. Understanding how they operate is somewhat difficult, partly due to the fact that there is little in the education literature that is useful in interpreting this portion of the data. Teacher leadership has taken on two definitions in education: teacher voice operating as the role of *teacher,* operating in team, management, shared decision making, etc.; or, teachers functioning as

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[2] Dean Fink, 2000. *Good Schools/Real Schools: Why School Reform Doesn't Last*, Teachers' College Press: NY.

[3] Ibid. p. 8.

[4] Meindl, 1995, in K. Leithwood and D. Jantzi, 2000. "Teacher and Principal Leadership Effects: A Replication", *School Leadership,* Vol. 20, No. 4, pp 415-434, p. 428.

managers of the change process. In the first definition, Nicksi's four reasons for including teacher leadership in the change for improvement formula for any school or district certainly hold. They are:

1. Those teachers have a vested interest in the quality of instruction.

2. Teachers have a sense of history of the context, perhaps most importantly that they are aware of the norms of their colleagues.

3. Teachers know the community and its tolerance of the disruptions which change will cause.

4. Teachers can implement change, they are in the position to initiate planned change or block it.[5]

In the second defined role, is the opinion stated by Buchen in his *Education Week* article "The Myth of School Leadership", which states that:

The only leadership that will make a difference is that of teachers. They alone are positioned where all the fulcrams are for change. They alone know what the day to day problems are and what it takes to solve them.[6]

This study found a very different, more symbiotic and collaborative relationship among the faculty and staff (including administrative staff) in the buildings visited. Teachers and other instruction and pupil support staff certainly indicated that they had a clear view of student and at times family needs. In three of the districts, at least one school reported a collaborative relationship with child, youth and family service delivery agencies in their community/neighborhood, and indicated that this improved both the quality of instruction and faculty/staff job satisfaction (see discussion later in this section). However, in all cases, these same interviewees also indicated that the role of the principal was to provide them with overall guidance based on his or her big picture perspective. When asked to explain this relationship, faculty and staff indicated that their focus was on the individual child in the single classroom, where the building administrator's focus was on the whole school program within the

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[5] Nickse (1977) in reference Sylvia Mendez-Morse, *Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change*, 1992. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, page 2
[6] Buchen, *Education Week*, page 2.

context of the district (and at times community) system. In the buildings where this point was raised during the faculty/staff interviews, cross check with the principals indicated that they understood this to also be the case and found this relationship an effective one. Thus, this symbiotic relationship acts as a mechanism of change.

USE OF ANCILLARY STAFF TO FOCUS ON THE WHOLE CHILD

Schools' use of ancillary staff, consisting of social worker, guidance counselor and psychologist, emerged as a key trigger of change. Many elementary schools do not have guidance counselors and many elementary, middle and high schools may have social workers and psychologists available to them on a part-time basis. There is a 'typical' model of ancillary staff use. In it, the school psychologist's time in most schools is often spent testing students who have been referred by a school-based team to the Committee on Special Education. The school psychologist, school social worker and guidance counselor may collaborate, on occasion, but typically these professionals do not often plan and implement strategies together in a pro-active way. Their roles tend to be more reactive or crisis intervening in nature, than pro-active.

In five of the schools visited a different model for the role of ancillary staff activity was operating. In one building, the guidance counselor (full time), psychologist (3 days/wk.) and social worker (3 days/wk.) were part of a pro-active team. Following a trip to Rochester to look at a full inclusion school, the staff decided to follow the lead of that school and change the name of their team from "School Support Team" to "Instructional Support Team". This changed their focus to empowering teachers to help develop strategies in the classroom to address problems with students. The process has reportedly changed the mind-set of the teachers and has resulted in a very low referral rate to the Committee for Special Education. The school psychologist does very little testing compared with her counterparts in other schools. Testing is viewed as a last resort. When they do refer they have a very high rate of referral to classification. The team also does a character education push-in program weekly. A similar model was identified in two other schools where they also had very low referral rates. In one of the elementary schools with this type of pro-active team, the team meets with the parents of every student prior to the start of the school year in an effort to provide for the needs of each child using an individualized or case management-like approach. This meeting includes the principal. Parents are brought into the school as active partners in their child's education right from the start. All schools that were visited that followed this model also had higher than average test scores.

Another school which described their use of this type of individualized approach came to use their process initially to support the school's special education program as part of their implementation of America's Choice programming. Prior to the changes which were

brought about, informants told the site visit team that Special Education was seen as a way to get problem children out of the classroom. Now, the case management approach they are using, along with the Grand Rounds Professional Development Model, which includes class visitation followed by reflection and discussion, has triggered an asset-based professional discussion around the staff's philosophical dissonance between the special education and general education programs in the school. This was identified as a good thing by interviewees, and one which is causing change in the core of the school's program. Thus, changes in the special education program triggered overall change in the school.

In another building, a high school, teachers expressed their belief that true support of the 'whole child' through ancillary staff and support personnel will trigger curricular and instructional change. When expert professional staff members (guidance counselors, medical personnel, career counselors, etc.) are available teachers are free to teach, design instruction, and reflect on curriculum. At that same school, teachers recognized that having a place on site where collaboration of services is managed, but not necessarily by the school, could trigger change because it could provide early intervention and continued follow-up by other than the instructional staff. Teachers know about the wide variety of serious problems of youth in the urban setting, and see collaboration with expert service delivery agencies via services provided through the school as important to student success. This particular High School's Student Support Center combines 14 agencies and is open 8am to 5pm, 12 months per year. Two other schools visited operated full service clinics within the school buildings. A few teachers at one of these schools believe their clinic is responsible for the lowering of special education referrals. While their referral rates have gone down since the clinic began operation in the school building, a direct cause and effect link cannot be made based on the data collected in this study.

ON-SITE CLINICS AND THE WHOLE CHILD

The role and activity of ancillary staff begs the question of how the schools with other on-site facilities might differently address the development of the whole child. Three of the schools visited have on site clinics (one solely a health clinic, the other two combined health and human services in a 'community health center' model). The study site team members approached these schools with what might be characterized as incorrect expectations.

Based on reports such as the one prepared by the Adolescent Project Team of the New York State Partners for Children, it would be fair to state that the traditional human service delivery system is organized on the basis of a specialist model. This report also states that "further improvement in education, social and health outcomes ... is possible by addressing common developmental needs using a strengths-

based model from a cross-system perspective."[7] Upon hearing of the establishment of community health centers in two of the schools and a health clinic in a third, the site visit teams expected that the purpose of the establishment of these facilities would be to facilitate the development of these strength-based models from a cross-system perspective. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Interviewees in these buildings indicated that the clinics' contribution to the students in their buildings was a reduction in absenteeism and, in one school, a perceived impact on special education referrals. In other words, the operation of these on site services were seen as contributing to the efficiency of the school's service delivery mission of curriculum delivery. In the three schools in this study with onsite clinics, none reported the effect of moving educators towards the 'cross-system perspective', nor did any of them indicate that this was the intention. Indeed, one principal emphatically stated that s/he would resist pressure from the United Way, which supported the clinic in his/her school, to open the community clinic up to members of the community without children in the school. Another health clinic is affiliated with one health insurance company, and delivers services to members of that system only. The third clinic has a health component supported through a grant from the NYS Department of Health, which again restricts services to students in the school who sign up for coverage.

For the schools involved in this study, the case management organized proactive services approach described earlier seemed more effective in identifying and addressing common developmental needs and addressing them through a strength-based approach from a cross profession perspective. In addition, the change inducing common characteristic of connection to community based agencies in these case management schools cannot be underemphasized.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development encompasses many aspects of the professional environment, including common planning time, use of in-house expertise, cross-classroom visitation, and professional development in all its various incarnations, voluntary sharing time, and both formal and informal mentoring of new personnel. All schools offer some of these conditions or activities to some extent. As van den Berg notes:

> The efforts of teachers to continue their personal/professional development always occur in interaction with the environment, which means that

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[7] New York State Partners for Children, 2000. *Positive Youth Development*, Partners for Children: Albany, NY, p. 6.

investments must also be made in various forms of interaction.[8]

That they act as a trigger or sustainer of change was noted often during the site visits.

COLLEGIAL INTERACTIONS AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Common planning time was cited in almost every school as absolutely necessary to trigger and sustain change for improvement in their environment. How that time is used is really the indicator that determines what is gained. One teacher at a high school that was visited said that common planning time "…let loose the power of the staff". This school used this time to strategize. At another school one teacher said, "Our common planning time is sacred time." Elementary teachers there used that time for curriculum development. At another school, teachers told the team that this time allowed them to insure consistency of the materials they used. A high school group in another building said the common time allowed them to work together for self-evaluation and reflection and that this encouraged collegiality and cooperation. This time was also used to introduce innovative ideas or practices at one elementary school where common planning time, collegial circles and cluster meetings were all scheduled into the workweek.

Common planning time as professional practice reform was also reported. Teachers described what took place as "adult conversation" which was characterized as a metamorphosis that took place over time from the discussion of discipline and control to how to instruct better. Their description seemed to imply that there is a natural progression that occurs, where the discussions of discipline and control precede the more substantive conversations about instruction.

TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development can take many forms, from one-shot workshops of varying quality to ongoing individualized support. Teachers in all the schools visited were able to recognize that the quality of the professional development they received was a key factor in how effective it was in influencing their practice. Teachers at one school reported that they believe the mode of delivery of professional development is at least as important as the content of the professional development. As one teacher said: "Please, no one time only workshops!"

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[8] Van den Berg, 2002. "Teachers' Meanings Regarding Educational Practice", *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 72, No. 4 p. 612.
[viii] Ibid. p. 615.

At one school, teacher surveys indicated that 100% of teachers responding reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunity provided to participate in different and interesting professional activities from time to time and 98% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with opportunities to extend their abilities through their job. Such professional opportunities seem to breed more professionalism among staff. This school has a voluntary sharing session for teachers once or twice per month on Friday mornings. The teachers reported they are anxious to share what they have learned and eager to hear from others. Teachers at another school noted that effective staff development and in-service training opportunities assist them in change. They also noted that they believe they would do better if they had some input into the topics for professional development.

Treatment as professionals was extended to the aides in two of the buildings visited. Aides were given professional development opportunities so that they became part of the curriculum delivery team. Aides in one of these buildings saw themselves as the arbiters of behavior for many of the students and their role as working with the hard to reach – hard to teach students in the classroom context. This same school provided professional development in such areas as multiculturalism, how to work with parents, reflective practice and teamwork. At one of the schools teaching assistants are now required to attend the same staff development as the faculty and are encouraged to become certified teachers if they demonstrate the potential to do so. All of the schools that reported using this extension of professional development to assistants believe it adds coherence to the environment as instructional delivery faculty and staff share common learning.

THE CAPACITY TO BUILD THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE

Van den berg, among others, sites the successful development of teachers to the presence of transformational leadership[viii] and the use of professional development models that facilitate reflection and feedback on the daily behavior of teachers in the school and in the class. In the case of the schools visited for this study, nine were clear examples of transformational leadership, with four new principals in addition evidencing a proclivity toward that leadership style. Reflection as an organizational strategy is supported by the high levels of embedded professional development in eight of the schools (one high school, one middle school and six elementary schools) including common planning time, inter-class visitation and in classroom follow-up on workshops. One high school building had just 'lost' their common planning time as the site visits took place. Interviewees indicated that this was considered a major setback to their change for improvement efforts. One would have to agree.

The use of a common vocabulary and references among all stakeholders in the buildings was noted as a trigger and sustainer of

change. Two mechanisms that provide this are shared professional development experiences and the adoption of a cross grade level proprietary program. Shared professional development experiences mean that teachers, administrators and other staff come to use the same vocabulary to refer to both core practices and innovations being introduced into their building. In one school, when a group of ancillary staff members spoke of attending professional development with general education and special education teachers (as well as the building principal) they were shocked to be told that this is not common practice in most other schools. The speech therapist from this group summed up the concerns of her colleagues when she asked how the faculty and staff in other buildings then can support student learning, if they do not know what others are doing and for what reasons.

ADOPTING A STANDARD INSTRUCTIONAL VOCABULARY

The importance of the role of the proprietary program in providing a coherent vocabulary both within the instructional process and when faculty and staff are referring to their practice was an unexpected finding of this study. Indeed, in schools where these programs were operating the site teams were often told that the actual content of the program was less important than the enforcement of the consistency that they typically require.

Informants noted two effects of this standardizing of referent vocabulary, triggering change in these two areas:

1. There are often naming arguments among the staff which result from such things as differing staff backgrounds, including different content area backgrounds which use different professional jargon, or multiple programs introduced in a single instructional context, each bringing its own instructional jargon. The system depleting effect of the confusion that these naming arguments can generate is perhaps underestimated. Informants reported that these were reduced when referent vocabulary was standardized. Among other things, the professional conversations around teaching and learning could move on from arguments about lexicon to more important topics.

2. Instructional confusion to students was reduced. As one teacher explained, when speaking about the topic sentence in a paragraph: "In one class it's a topic sentence, in another it's a main idea sentence, in still another it's a theme sentence. The teachers all knew these are different names for the same thing, but we found that our students mostly thought each teacher was referring to something different. How foolish of us not to have realized that."

WEAVING COMMERCIAL PROGRAMS INTO THE CURRICULUM

One staff characteristic that emerged in five of the schools was flexibility and resourcefulness that was evidenced in teachers' ability to 'weave' or 'adapt' commercial programs which they were asked to implement into the existing or dominant curriculum. At one school, teachers related how they had been asked to introduce new program after new program, sometimes at a "moments notice", as one teacher put it. When asked if they found this disruptive or confusing their response was surprising. They said that it was challenging but that they were willing to give the programs a try. Their respect and trust in their principal was one reason why they were willing to try new programs. Another reason was their belief that what may work for one child may not work for another, so they were willing and able to use what worked, weave that into their existing program and discard what didn't work. These teachers do not believe that adopting a commercial program means implementing it without alteration. Weaving is a process whereby the teachers "fill the holes" in commercial programs to meet student needs which was referred to in all four districts.

USING IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE

Several of the schools were very adept at utilizing the talents within the building as their own resource. Two of the schools cited this as a trigger of change within the building. The principal at one school sought faculty input on instruction and administrative issues and if possible, accepted their recommendations. When the Assistant Principal and Staff Developer positions were cut this year, staff volunteered to help where needed to fill the duties of those jobs. One school noted their model of inter-class visitation in the building as helping to build their capacity to change. In a few of the schools visited, teachers do curriculum mapping as a team. This use of in-house capabilities increases ownership of the program and creates an atmosphere of collegiality among staff.

New teachers entering an established school environment present both opportunities and challenges. While new teachers can bring new ideas and new energy into a building, they also bring the need for much professional support. Interviewees at four of the schools visited cited 'new blood' as a factor that contributed to change in their schools. Teachers at one high school said that new teachers bring new ideas and an enthusiasm for developing new courses which are needed by students for employment or future study in college. One school identified the retirement of veteran teachers as a trigger of change citing the following two reasons. Their replacements brought new ideas which helped them to keep their practice current. Also by mentoring the new teachers the experienced teachers have had to make their understanding of their practice explicit. This was reported as having helped them to reflect on that practice and the underlying assumptions of their practice. Mentoring by veteran teachers in the building therefore helped both the

mentors and those being mentored to become more effective teachers, whether occurring informally or formally. In schools where this was not occurring, teachers recognized the role and importance of mentoring.

SUMMARY: SCHOOL STAFF AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

Staff characteristics, staff usage and staff development were important factors leading to change for improvement according to sources at many of the schools visited. Staff characteristics such as flexibility, resourcefulness and strength of community were mentioned most often as contributing to successful change initiatives. Staff usage reconfiguration, such as the pro-active and non-traditional use of ancillary staff and its ability to better meet the needs of the 'whole child', was identified in two schools. Additional research to learn more about how these models operate and how they were developed is warranted because of the profound positive effects they seem to have produced.

Staff development, which includes the use of common planning time, professional development, and voluntary staff sharing time, cross-classroom visitation, both formal and informal mentoring of new personnel and use of in-house expertise, is perhaps the area that could potentially be the most influential in supporting change. While common planning time was cited by teachers repeatedly as a necessity in their environment, it was reportedly used for slightly differing purposes across sites, from curriculum development to self-evaluation and reflection. For all it seemed to encourage collegiality and cooperation.

Professional development, which was inclusive of all faculty and staff, had enormous benefits for implementing positive change throughout the schools where this was practiced. One of the main benefits for across the board professional development, where aides and other non-classroom teachers all attend, is the use of the common lexicon it generates among the entire school community. Students benefit from less confusing terminology. Everyone who supports the child's learning is 'speaking the same language'. This is also one of the main benefits derived from the adoption of proprietary programs, the common referent vocabulary. This was a somewhat surprising finding and one that may require additional study. While many in education spend a good deal of time and effort searching for the 'best' program to use, this study found that it did not seem to matter much what program was adopted. The other benefit noted from the adoption of proprietary programs was the professional development component of such programs.

Professional development was more effective if it was followed by opportunities for reflection and when it included extended support. It was most successful when provided as an integral part of a transformational leadership context. As Van den berg explains, "An important condition for the successful development of teachers is the

presence of transformational leadership…characteristic of this type of leadership is the trust that the school leaders have in the potential of the teachers in the school."[9] This trust is necessary in the creation of "…the conditions needed for the members of the team to reflect on the processes of teaching and learning in a structured and systematic manner" (Coburn, 2001).

FURTHER STUDY

The findings of this study are preliminary and the understanding of the ways in which staff interaction with innovations widely believed to act as change mechanisms in schools is critical to change for improvement. Because this study focused on the input of faculty and staff, this is the strongest set of data available to this report. However, while the study was designed to identify critical factors and interactions that create change mechanisms and cause the trigger of positive change, it was not designed to measure the magnitude of occurrence of these factors and resulting interactions. In order to judge if these findings are significant or merely interesting, some measure of magnitude has to be done.

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[9] Van den Berg, "Teachers Meanings Regarding Educational Practice", *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 72, No. 4, p. 615.

5
THE PRINCIPAL AS A TRIGGER OF CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

When trying to describe the work of the principals in the schools visited for this study, statements such as the following were not uncommon:

> *Schools of the 21st Century will require a new kind of principal who evidences three types of leadership: instructional leadership; community leadership; and visionary leadership. They need Instructional Leadership that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data driven decision-making and accountability. Community Leadership that manifests in a big picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others, and advocacy for schools, capacity building and resource development. Visionary Leadership that demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building.[1]*

While probably correct as statements go, the description of the three types of leadership proved to be mostly useless for the purposes of describing and understanding the complex activity which characterized the principals at the schools that were visited. The data collected in this study clearly indicates that the principals in the schools which were visited played a critically important role in the change for improvement taking place in their buildings.

Few would argue that the job of a principal today is the same as it was five or ten years ago. A report by the Institute for Educational Leadership on reinventing the principalship offers a summary of what they call 'the new job-description' for principals. In the past, the report states, the job of the principal was to comply with district edicts, address personnel issues, order supplies, balance program budgets, keep the school safe, make sure bussing and meal services operated smoothly, and put a good public face forward. The principal of today, the report continues, must do all those things plus know academic content and

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[1]Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship, 2000. Institute for Educational Leadership, page 4

pedagogy, strengthen teacher skills, collect, analyze and use data in ways that fuel excellence, and rally parents, students, business, CBO's, youth development agencies, and all other relevant groups, to take part in the common goal of enhanced student performance. "And they must have the leadership skills and knowledge to exercise the autonomy and authority to pursue these strategies."[2] The report identified two related yet broad issues regarding the principalship in school change for improvement. The first is that the top priority of the principalship in this enviroment must be *leadership for learning*. That being the case, however, as the report notes in its second issue point, the principalship as it is now defined (i.e., as mid-level management with responsibilities for basic building operation) cannot meet this priority, and thus must change. This inconsistency may be the reason that so many buildings drift without a clear vision.[3]

Level Three of the New York State Education Department's Urban Initiative, *Focusing on Results in Urban Schools,* provided a unique opportunity to look at twelve urban principals and their schools. What has emerged from that study is a greater understanding of the relationship of the values, beliefs and behaviors of these principles to the perceptions by faculty and staff in their buildings of the function of those values, beliefs and behaviors in the context of change for improvement. This information may provide the foundation for an operational definition of *leadership for learning*. The critical factor in elaborating that definition may be as simple as the difference between management and leadership, as explained by Bennis and Narrus (1985): "Management controls, arranges, does things right; leadership unleashes energy, sets the vision so we do the right thing."[4] What is presented here are the observations reported by faculty and staff in twelve of the sixteen buildings that were involved in the Urban Initiative Level Three Study of the characteristics, values, beliefs and behaviors of their principals which, in their assessment, support, facilitate or trigger change for improvement in their schools.

For a number of reasons, however, it is difficult to summarize these observations and draw conclusions regarding what was observed. Administrative turnover accounts for some of the researchers' unease: sixteen principals were interviewed in the spring of 2003, four of whom (25%) were no longer in the buildings in the fall of 2003 when the site

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[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Bennis and Narus, 1985, p. 21 in Larry Cuban, September 2001. *Leadership for Student Learning: Urban School Leadership – Different in Kind and Degree,* Institute for Educational Leadership, page 3

visits took place. The original design, to link the principal interviews in the spring with the site visit observations in the fall, was thereby invalidated. What we have done is use the interview and observation data from twelve schools for this section of the report. Those schools do constitute a representative group as far as schooling level is concerned: three high schools, one middle school, three Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade, four elementary and one primary school. They do not constitute a representative group as far as the 'Big Four' are concerned since three of the four schools which changed principals were in Rochester and, while included in other parts of this report, are not discussed in this section. While the principals worked at all levels of schooling and in three very different districts, the similarities in their behavior and their influence with their faculty and staff is uncanny. This report contains initial findings which mean that broad and sweeping generalizations would be inappropriate now, but the potential offered by this initial information to the focus of further study is significant.

POWER, INFLUENCE AND PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

Certainly, leadership has some notion of power associated with it. In organizational terms, power is tied to job or position in the organization. Our literature review made us aware of the two separate constructs of power and influence. We read of some interesting work by Arnold S. Tannenbaum who studied power using trade unions as organizations. As Pugh and Hickson[5] note:

> Tannenbaum found that in trade unions the more effective and active local branches had both more influential officers and more influential members, at first sight impossibility. An impossibility, that is, if control of an organization was thought of as a given quantity, something to be divided so that if someone had more then someone else had less; but not impossible if control of an organization was expandable so that everyone could have more.

Tannenbaum found that through participation management increases its control by giving up some of its authority. Power in this context is not a zero sum.

Influence is different from power, but is related to it. When we asked during our research if people in the schools could tell us the difference between power and influence, to our surprise the majority of them could. They see the power of the position, which supervisors write

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[5] Derek Pugh and Stephen Hickson, *Writers on Organizations, Fourth Edition*, Sage, 1989, p. 163.

up performance reports, have some say in hiring and firing, etc. They also see the interpersonal power that is derived from influence. Power is associated with the job; influence is associated with respect from colleagues for the quality of your work or the extent of your knowledge.

Leadership is important in understanding any organization. Hall defines leadership as: "a special form of power … (that) involves the ability, based on the personal qualities of the leader, to elicit the followers' voluntary compliance in a broad range of matters".[6] The difference between these two concepts is illustrated by Etzioni[7] when he notes that leaders change their subjects' preferences, while power implies only that the preferences are held in abeyance. The widely held depiction of the principal as 'instructional leader' proved to be too narrow for the interpretation of the data collected in this research. While instructional prowess is important to a building principal, other personal and professional traits are of equal or greater importance, perhaps highlighting the use of influence imposed by true leadership.[8]

THE LEADERS' SELF PERCEPTION

In general the site visit teams observed that eleven of these twelve principals see themselves as having a role that is different from the traditional role of the principal. This is perhaps not surprising when considered in the light of the information in the recent education research literature. What was surprising is that some of them seemed not to be aware of this. They were all observed to have put in place processes that add to the control and smooth operations of the school and to have indicated that participation by all constituents was expected. This expansion of the responsibility for control was present in all eleven schools, although to a different extent in each one.

A characteristic of these principals was their willingness to give up some of their authority thus allowing all authority in the building to expand. An extension of this behavior was reported by their staff in

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[6] Hall, p. 139.

[7] Etzioni, 1965, p. 691.

[8] Also of interest to the study of power, influence and leadership in education are Hall's points regarding leadership at different organizational levels. He notes that most studies of leadership have been done at the lower levels of organizations on 'first-line supervisors'. As he says: "It is critical to remember that what might contribute to leadership at one level might be totally inappropriate at another level. Leadership at the top level of an organization … involves behaviors and actions very different from those taken by leaders at the first-line supervisor position." (p. 140)

reference to sharing of ideas in these buildings. All eleven principals welcomed discussion and the sharing of opinions and most had processes in place that allowed them to take up suggestions. This had two results: the principal behavior generated buy-in among the staff for innovations introduced to effect change for improvement, and overall control of the building was tightened and increased. These principals were all characterized by their staff as the building's link with the bigger picture – usually meaning the overall district system. In this capacity they acted somewhat as insulators of their staff from some of the characteristics of the system that might interfere with the delivery of instruction to the students in the building. In short, we observed eleven principals that evidence the characteristics of leadership which the research in education is now identifying as "distributive" and which: "… reaches far beyond including the voices and opinions of others. Nor is it a matter of assigning tasks to people which often results in responsibility without authority."[9]

While knowing that leadership is a combination of power and influence added to our understanding of how these two interpersonal traits worked to trigger change it did not help to completely understand how a building principal applies this to school improvement. Two behavior based management models described by Schon and Argyris[10] as Model I and Model II managers clarified how this can be used to understand how the process actually works.

According to their charactistics, a Model II manager might find it easier to take over an existing professional staff than a Model I manager would. The site visit teams found that leadership characteristics obviated by principals in each of the schools were effected (perhaps dictated) by contextual characteristics operating in the buildings prior to their being hired. In these buildings the staff was cooperative because the principal shared their ethic. Teachers and other staff members told the site visit teams that they felt that the principal was responsible for turning the school around because s/he came to the school and supported the mission of the staff. Even in schools where the principal was not considered a 'friend' to some of the more influential or powerful members of the staff (long-term teaching staff, union representatives on the staff), all did agree that s/he did support the efforts of the staff to deliver high quality instruction to all students, and for that had to be

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[9] Mary Neuman and Warren Simmons, 2000. "Leadership for Student Learning", *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2000, page 10.

[10] Argyris and Schon have worked together in the field of organizational studies for some time. A basic text of their work is *Organizational Learning: A theory of action perspective*, published by Addison-Wesley in 1978.

respected. Teachers told the site visit teams that they could not do it alone, that they needed the help and support of a high quality principal who defined his/her role in other than power/leadership terms. The researchers began to develop and refine a theory of influence-based leadership for school improvement, to replace power-based leadership models based on the work of Schon and Argyris outlined below.

	MODEL I MANAGERS	**Model II Managers**
Organizational Atmosphere	Creates a suppressed atmosphere of mistrust and rigidity.	Expands the definition of 'all who are competent' in the organization.
Decisions and Direction Setting of the Organization	Design goals unilaterally and try to achieve them through the help of their staff. Control all tasks; restrict them to include as few individuals as possible.	Take action after free and informed choice with all who are competent taking part.
Personal Characteristics	Keeps own thoughts and feeling a mystery so no negative feelings in public. Suppress opinion by being rational and objective; do not therefore face important issues.	Not defensive, look for contributions of others to confront own basic assumptions and test them in public through a public process. Monitors implementation of decision choices and demonstrates a willingness to make mid-course corrections.
Organizational Learning	Single-loop learning which is learning how to comply.	Double-loop learning, which fits the general term of a 'learning organization'.

Model I managers would have a difficult time developing an influence-based leadership style and Model II managers would have a difficult time operating without one. This seemed to reflect what we had been observing. In general, we have only seen true change for improvement under Model II managers.

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

The role of the principal within a model of **leadership for learning** is an extension of the Effective Schools construct of the 'principal <u>as</u> *instructional leader*'. As long ago as 1992, Sylvia Mendez-Morse, noted: "*Instructional leadership* is a multidimensional construct which includes high expectations of students and teachers; an emphasis on instruction; provision of professional development; and the use of data to evaluate student progress."[11] Over the years since Mendez-Morse wrote this, the construct of leadership has moved towards her definition, with a change in the lexicon. Instead of seeing the relationship as passive on the part of teachers (which the term "instructional leader" originally implied), the more equally active label of **leadership for learning** has begun to be used. This terminology attempts to reflect the more complex role of the building principal now understood to exist. Indeed, as Michael Apple has said: "Good leadership is not delegating the principal to be the instructional leader in the sense we were talking about back in the 1980's. That's sheer nonsense. First of all, principals aren't necessarily picked because they were good teachers ... it's a weak model."[12] Marc Tucker addressed the limitations of the '*instructional leader*' model from another perspective: "I don't think that principals ought to be 'super teachers', in the sense that they know everything good teachers in all the disciplines know. What the principal really has to understand is what it takes to improve achievement in the core disciplines."[13]

According to Richard Elmore, this change in the role of the principal means that to do the job well principals " ... need to learn, not just different ways of doing things, but very different ways of thinking about the purposes of their work, and the skills and knowledge that go with those purposes."[14] Add to this Cuban's confounding aspects of the reality of urban schools to this need for principals to develop different ways of thinking about the purpose of their work, and one begins to understand the characteristics of leadership observed in this study. As Cuban says, "Our nation's urban schools, particularly those in most need, are poorly matched to current popular reforms and leadership

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[11] Sylvia Mendez-Morse, *Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change*, 1992. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, p. 1.

[12] John I. Goodlad, Professor, University of Washington, quoted in Lynn Olson, "New Thinking on What Makes a Leader", *Education Week*, January 19, 2000.

[13] Marc S. Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, in Ibid. p. 2.

[14] Richard Elmore, *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*, 2000. Albert Shanker Institute, Winter 2000, page 35

formulas … For those who lead urban schools, different expectations, different obligations, and different city histories require far more moxie, skills, and political finesse than for their colleagues in middle and upper-class, racially isolated suburbs."[15] The findings of this study would certainly agree. It also offers the hopeful finding that these modes of leadership may exist at the principal level in urban districts (at least here in New York) more often than one might think.

The findings from this study, then, represent a first look at a very sophisticated professional practice embedded in a complex context. The following is a presentation of the interview data which concerned itself with the values, beliefs and behaviors of the principals in these twelve buildings that support, facilitate or trigger change.

USE OF DATA BASED INFORMATION AS A TRIGGER OF CHANGE

The literature reviewed for this report applied 'use of data' to two separate situations in education. One is the application of 'data' to instructional planning and delivery; the other is the application of 'data' to organizational planning and change management in addition to its application to instructional planning and delivery. In the eleven schools discussed here, the latter was the case. Data driven decision-making can operate as part of the use of planning in a ***leadership for learning*** strategy, perhaps especially in New York State where shared decision-making and school level planning are required under a regulation of the Commissioner of Education. In addition, many of the schools visited as part of this study are Title I School-wide Program Schools, which necessitates a School Improvement Plan authored by a cross-section of stakeholders in the school. Finally, two of the schools had been identified by New York State as Schools under Regulation Review (SURR), an identification process of schools which are in need of improvement. Part of the SURR process is the development of a School Improvement Plan by the faculty and staff at the school. The school condition of goals and purposes is part of planning, visioning, and creating a shared vision for the school. "Planning processes contribute to school effectiveness, for example, to the extent that they bring together local needs and district goals into a shared school vision."[16]

Mendez-Morse among others identified the processes of effective leaders and reported that they begin with a vision, and from there

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[15]Larry Cuban, September 2001. *Leadership for Student Learning: Urban School Leadership – Different in Kind and Degree*, Institute for Educational Leadership, page 2.

[16] Philip Hallinger and Ronald Heck, 1998. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, page 418

develop a shared vision for the school. The schools which took part in Level Three of the Urban Initiative often reported that the development of the shared vision was critical to their improvement process, and that that development had taken place within the context of planning for improvement. All informants attributed the vision in some way to the building principal, and many noted the effectiveness of the principal's communication of that vision to the school community at large was an early indicator of their success or failure in triggering change in the school. The actual planning process was important, but not limited to one or the other type. Two schools reported that the planning process was part of the SURR process, one identified the planning and self-study required for Mid-States Accreditation, four used the planning processes for comprehensive planning and one had a planning and shared management requirement attached to a private foundation grant.

In this context, as in a number of others, communication was noted as an important ingredient in any change for improvement. Here teachers, staff and parents identified the need for clear channels of communication 'both up and down the system' from district, to building, to staff. The communication functions receptively here. Faculty and staff noted the function of the administrator as keeping teachers in the loop.

A CULTURE THAT STIMULATES CHANGE

Organizational culture is defined as the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape members' decisions and practices. The contribution of culture to effectiveness depends on the content of these (for example, that the school is student centered), to what extent they are shared and whether they foster collaborative work. A widely held belief, expressed by Mendez-Morse is that "Leaders of change provide the needed stimulus for change … They guide and provoke the staff to explore options that more adequately address the needs of their students and provide the environment that makes risk-taking safer."[17] This is not what this study found. The relationship between the principal/administrators and the faculty in the schools which were visited as part of this study is less of the type where one group guides and provokes the other than of the type where the two levels of the organization guide and provoke one another. Involving teachers and other staff in planning and decision making, for example, means that there is a high level of ownership and thus a high level of interest in innovations being introduced into these schools. It also means that the design of the innovations is achieved through a collaborative process, described in more detail earlier in this report. In addition, teachers discussed the practice among most of these principals that allows

[17] Sylvia Mendez-Morse, *Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change*, 1992. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, page 11

teachers to make decisions regarding instruction. This identifies the ability of these principles to differentiate between curriculum (what is taught, not negotiable) and instruction (how it is taught, i.e., how the curriculum is delivered, which is negotiable). This could be interpreted to represent a sophisticated level of understanding of curriculum and instruction which has been identified as necessary for the modern principal.

THE LEADER AND THE LED

Once again, to understand how these organizations operate the people who work there and their relationships with one another must be studied. The principal, the argument goes, must establish a condition of structure and social networks with which to exert influence over their context. Hallinger and Heck call this "the nature of the relationship established among people and groups in the school and between the school and its external constituents". Interviewees often told us that the principal is responsive, meaning that s/he treats the teachers as *professional equals*. Indeed, in three of the buildings teachers told us that the principal feels s/he is answerable to teachers, so that changes or innovations introduced have to be explained to the teachers as a matter of professional courtesy. The process here includes a demonstration that they as the chief building administrator value the organization's personnel. "Leaders of change recognize that the people in the organization are its greatest resource."

There are three dimensions to this: the leader values the professional contributions of the staff; the leader has the ability to relate to people; and the leader fosters collaborative relationships. "Leaders of change trust the strength of others and value their efforts and contributions in the realization of the organizations vision."[18] " … (they) practice distributive leadership, know the people in their school and community recruit the best person to take the lead in a particular situation."

The uncovering of the function of professional courtesy is an interesting artifact of other discussions during these interviews. Parents, faculty and staff often commented on the courtesy of these principals, their personal courtesy, professional courtesy and modeling of that courtesy to all stakeholders, including the students. In these buildings we were told that the principal not only seeks staff input through committees, discussions at staff meetings, surveys, and informal exchanges, the principals were also reported to 'accept staff recommendations' and 'listen to staff input' thus 'respecting the opinions of the staff'. In more than one building the teachers noted that the

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[18] Ibid., page 7

principal 'listens to teachers as equals'. According to interviewees at a majority of these schools, this engenders a greater willingness by staff to suggest and implement support services, new curriculum activities and other innovations in the school.

Professional development, both its form and content, is an important factor in school change for improvement. For example, teachers in one school identified the availability of professional development as a form of support for everything they were asked to do in the school, as a form of admission that their work was complex and sophisticated and necessitated high quality professional development as a support strategy.

THE PRINCIPAL IN THE COMMUNITY AS A TRIGGER OF CHANGE

Community Leadership was seldom referred to by the informants in this study as a characteristic of their principal. This may be because the perspective of the informants does not give them a view of their principal operating outside of the school as a community leader, which manifests in a big picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others, and advocacy for schools, capacity building and resource development.

Certainly, all elementary buildings (including K-8) except one noted the relationship between the principal and the parents as important. One principal was the stuff of legend, having accompanied police as they raided crack houses around the school's vicinity, met with local drug lords to negotiate the limits of their territory in reference to the school, and brought in a City Councilman to discuss neighborhood renovation and support for loans to allow parents to purchase their homes in the community. In another district, one elementary school's student support services staff work closely with Community Based Organizations, a relationship negotiated by the building staff which is not common across all buildings in the district. In another, the community based organization relationship is negotiated by the district. There, the student support services staff also work closely with the community service delivery agencies but do so in all buildings. One high school has fifteen community based organizations on campus to offer services to the students and their parents. Thus, the community connection is clearly evident in these buildings. The role of the principal was not so clearly articulated.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP AS A TRIGGER OF CHANGE

Some of the attributes of Visionary Leadership, especially the values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building were noted. Indeed, identified as 'consistency' by those interviewed, this was

a generally agreed upon leadership characteristic that acts as a trigger of change for improvement in these buildings. Consistent expectations of students was identified during interviews in eight of the schools, consistent expectations of teachers was identified in interviews in five of the schools, and consistent expectations of parents in four schools. The process by which these expectations are communicated was also standard across schools. The principal clearly communicates his/her expectations of teachers, students and/or parents to the faculty and staff often, and using a variety of mechanisms. That clear and consistent message is repeated at staff meetings, parent evenings, and student assemblies, in newsletters, memos home and a variety of other communication strategies, including different languages where necessary. Two principals reported that they use an early year exchange conference with all teachers to discuss expectations for all students and for the teacher's performance during that academic year. We were told that this increases feelings of stability and support, and provides the mechanism for building on the assets already in the faculty, staff and student population to strengthen and improve teaching and learning.

IN SUMMARY

This study focused on twelve out of sixteen principals because four were new to the buildings at the time of this study. Of those twelve, eleven evidenced the characteristics of distributive leadership. Preliminary findings are that when those characteristics are operationalized in urban schools they act as triggers of change for improvement. These organizations then collectively manage change for improvement in a results-focused and imperative way. While there is no argument with the belief that "Collective responsibility breed's ownership," the practices of leadership described here go beyond encouragement of participation. In addition, the leaders of change for improvement studied here took a proactive stance relative to the need for change and were often risk-takers.

Our findings indicate initially that effective leaders of school change are proactive. They initiate action, anticipate and recognize changes in their environment that will affect their school. They also challenge the status quo, i.e., the established ways of operating. They periodically rethink the vision: "They anticipate the changing needs of their students and take the initiative to identify the appropriate course of action."[19] Principals in this study seem to go one better and use the input of their staff to help them to 'stay ahead of the curve'. The staff and faculty identified this behavior as empowering, the principal involves teachers in the collaborative process for decision-making, for example,

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[19] Sylvia Mendez-Morse, *Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change*, 1992. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, page 10

and their involvement in the process means that their knowledge and understanding of the context and the needs of the students also becomes part of that collaboration.

Here the processes pivot on the flexibility with which these leaders perceive their work environment. Leaders who trigger change, we were told by their staff, anticipated changes in needs and when necessary changed their vision and the shared vision accordingly.[20] Where the findings of this study differ from those of Mendez-Morse in 1992 is in the source of the information on which principals based their anticipation of changes to student needs. One artifact of the reported ability of these principals to listen to the faculty and staff and to fit their observations into a 'whole picture' understanding of what was happening and probably going to happen, to their students, was their synthesizing information from these multiple informants and perspectives to anticipate needs and planning interventions.

One notable characteristic of the schools in which this revisiting and reworking of the shared vision was taking place was the level of comfort with the unstable environment caused by change which was in evidence. The interviewees cited the presence of an effective and exhaustive communication system which centered on the principal and provided a means by which information and opinion flowed within the building. Indeed, one characteristic of the principal that triggers change, repeatedly referenced at these sites, was their openness to new ideas.

A characteristic which we did not find in any of the literature, but which was identified by interviewees at a majority of the schools visited, is that of 'follow-through' by principals and other administrators in the schools. Identification of follow-through on issues raised by faculty and staff as a major trigger of change for improvement in these schools was almost universal among the schools in the study. Leadership is subject to the constraints imposed by the interpretation of the follower. These *Implicit Leadership Beliefs* operate as moderator variables, and seem to exert a great deal of influence on **leadership for learning**. Certainly more study is necessary, but the context of the Big Four offers the promise of substantial and definitive information on the characteristics, practices and attitudes/beliefs of these building level leaders.

FUTURE STUDY

The potential for the study of the practices of principals who effectively trigger and manage change for improvement is significant.

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[20] Sylvia Mendez-Morse, *Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change*, 1992. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, p. 1.

Future study could include the collection of further information on the behaviors uncovered as part of this study including a broader sample of principals on which to base results. In addition, the initial findings reported here also beg the question of how administrators can and should be prepared for their positions in order to ensure that they are comfortable with the 'new job description' which the research literature identifies and this study has validated. Indeed, one middle school principal had been mentored by one of the high school principals studied, and the shared influence between these two outstanding building principals was obvious.

In addition, the study as a whole generated the question of the impact of high levels of administrator turnover on the delivery of curriculum in the urban schools which were studied and in urban schools in general. This study identified sixteen schools for participation, one year later only ten of the original principals remained. As we send this report to the participating buildings and ask for feedback on its findings, less than two-thirds of the original principals will be able to respond. Turnover and stability are critical factors which should be studied in any extension of the Urban Initiative.

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IN CONCLUSION

There is a difference between change and improvement. The purpose of school change is to replace some structures, programs, and/or practices with 'better ones' that more effectively accomplish their equity and achievement of goals. Of course, in order to judge if this is happening, one has to have identified what constitutes the desired equity and to have articulated the goals. It is this notion of only counting change that produces positive effect that moves the focus from school change to school change for improvement. Herein, however, lays the issue. As Elmore noted:

> The pathology of American schools is that they know how to change …What schools do not know how to do is to improve, to engage in sustained and continuous progress toward a performance goal over time.[1]

One has only to read the literature on innovations, promising practices, effective programs, emerging instructional strategies, and related topics to understand what Elmore meant. Change is not the issue; change that will lead to improvements that will then positively influence student learning outcomes is an issue because so little is known about how that process is structured. Indeed, effective schools identified factors that separate schools which are effective from those which are not. However, as Hopkins[2] notes, while effectiveness research has continued to refine the factors of the effective school, it has largely ignored the process that gives rise to such factors. Fink[3] refers to his own experience as an effective schools manager in Canada when he notes that it became obvious over time that just knowing what made a school effective was not sufficient to facilitate positive change in schools. Building on the effective schools work, studies such as the one reported here hope to clarify the process that gives rise to those factors.

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[1] Richard F. Elmore, 2002. "The Limits of 'Change'", *Harvard Education Letter*, January/February 2002, p. 2.

[2] David Hopkins, 1989. *Evaluation for School Development*, Open University Press: Milton Keynes.

[3] Dean Fink, 2000. *Good Schools/Real Schools: Why School Reform Doesn't Last*, Teachers' College Press: NY.

The study depended on the honesty and candor of many teachers, support staff members, parents and principals. The data collected and information reported here speaks to both. When asked about the Effective Schools criteria, most interviewees knew what they were and dismissed them as unhelpful to their day-to-day delivery of the curriculum. This is important to remember. It is not only the research literature which tells us that the effective perspective is unhelpful when the purpose of our activities is to trigger and sustain change, but also the professionals trying to bring about that necessary improvement.

The system, even the system as it exists in our urban schools, has many of the resources necessary to trigger and sustain change for improvement. Those working in the system certainly have the desire and the will to deliver high quality education to all children in all schools. What may be missing is the ability of the actors in this enterprise to proactively ignite the process of change for improvement and sustain it once it begins. The study uncovered the competing contexts within the districts studied, and the coping strategies adopted to enable the delivery of the curriculum. For example, this report tells of teachers who 'weave' innovative strategies into ongoing curriculum delivery, thus providing the opportunity for it to take effect before they are ordered to abandon them for another new idea. The study reports on principals and teachers working in a symbiotic relationship where both lead and follow simultaneously. The site visit teams noted highly professional environments where everyone is someone, as the motto of Lincoln High School says, and where there is a glimmer, a sliver, a promise of increasing quality, confirmation of commitment and achievement of results.

The study teams would like to thank the teachers, staff, principals and administrators, parents and students at:

- ⮑ Lincoln High School, Emerson Middle School, School 24, and School 17 in Yonkers, New York.

- ⮑ Nottingham High School, Frazer School, Webster Elementary School and Delaware Academy in Syracuse, New York.

- ⮑ South Park High School, School 68, School 80 and School 54 in Buffalo, New York.

- ⮑ East High School, Douglass Middle School, Nathaniel Rochester Elementary School and School 45 in Rochester, New York.

Thank you for allowing the study teams to visit your schools and witness your excellence and for sharing your knowledge and insight with them.

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