

Growing Lilies in the Desert

The Eight Processes of Educational Reform

For fifteen years a group of us (Research for Better Teaching) now numbering fourteen full-time and four part-time consultants has worked with schools districts in a systemic way to facilitate instructional improvement. Despite ostensible success and a growing reputation for excellence, we began several years ago to question the very nature of what we do.

We had been willing to work only in districts where key leaders were committed to multi-year projects and willing to work on the culture of their organizations as well as specific projects for improving teaching, improving curriculum, and improving school structures. In some of our districts we had a history of ten years or more. In many of our over 100 sites we had helped individual schools and sometimes whole districts make changes associated with the best thinking in school improvement, planned with an eye on modern knowledge about long-term change. Yet despite this enviable track record we were feeling an angst that goes beyond mid-life crisis. Far too often we had the feeling that our work and that of the many dedicated teachers and administrators we supported went up in smoke when the superintendent left, three key leaders got jobs elsewhere, and the School Board turned over in an election.

At one level, of course, we knew this was not true. What individual teachers and administrators have learned and added to their capacity for improving student learning outlives changes in leadership. As staff developers we did recognize that our success is partially measured by the growth in capacity of individuals with whom we work. It was disheartening, nevertheless, to see programs and structures dissolve that had succeeded in bringing educators together for powerful learning. Similarly, we imagine many readers will be able to think of curricular innovations they implemented or powerful teaming arrangements in which they participated—successful and innovative approaches which faded, sometimes slowly from neglect or fatigue, other times with a rapidity that was startling.

At one of our sites, one of the largest districts in the United States, we saw this happen in stark and sudden fashion after eight years of work. In this district where the project had high marks from a prestigious outside evaluator, thirty new in-district staff developers of high calibre were active in carrying on the study of teaching, facilitating study groups, cultivating teacher leaders at the building level, teaching courses, and coaching administrators on classroom feedback skills. Administrators and teachers alike were involved in training and self-study. Then a turnover in leadership brought in people with different philosophies and the program ended abruptly.

While no program is perfect, this one was well on its way to changing organizational culture and improving student achievement and had the enthusiastic involvement of legions of educators. Then it evaporated.



This stark case in gentler, kinder, and slower versions has happened elsewhere—sometimes more like a slow tire leak than a blowout, but with the same results: a flat tire. These deflating experiences have caused us to ask a new question: what factors surrounding the local sites at which we work could support long term structural and systemic changes that now seem so fragile and so susceptible to undoing? If true change takes place at the school and district level, there must be regularities surrounding those schools and districts that come into play when the few visionary, committed leaders move on—regularities that exert powerful backpressure to recreate things as they were. How can we move beyond this story to facilitate changes that will stick?

Michael Fullan (1991) and others have moved our collective knowledge forward by quantum leaps in recent years with regard to implementing long term change. I think an additional perspective is needed, however, to understand and deal with a larger issue of school improvement. This is a perspective that focuses on *the capacity of teachers and the processes that influence that capacity*, processes that are interactive and that are both within and without a school district.

In Reengineering the Corporation (1993), Hammer and Champy make the point that efforts for improvement classically focus on tasks, jobs, people, and structures, but not on processes, and that as a result reform programs often fail or matter little. This has been true in 20th Century Educational Reform efforts as well.

It is the proposition of this paper that we need a new approach to break the cycle of failed and frustrated reform efforts. We have points of light all over the country—individual schools like Deborah Meier’s Central Park East—whose vision and whose innovations have proven themselves in student results and yet have failed to spread. We have leagues and coalitions with wonderful ideas like Ted Sizer’s Coalition of Essential Schools which have taken root in only a few places and failed to influence the practices of most educators. We have sophisticated instructional strategies like Cooperative Learning and Joyce and Weils’ Models of Teaching that can be seen in action at model sites and yet which elude the repertoires of most teachers.

Good models are needed but they are not enough. The path to getting all the good individual reforms we have conjured in our collective history to take and stick instead of routinely fading away is to focus on the underlying processes that influence the capacity of teachers....not only focus on these processes but *align them with one another*. These underlying processes are:

1. Process for Teacher Education
2. Process for Teacher Certification in each state
3. Process for Teacher Induction in a teacher’s first district
4. Process for Teacher Development and continuing increase in professional knowledge and skill
5. Process for Determining and Meeting Standards of Teacher Performance (Teacher Evaluation Systems)
6. Process for Teacher Advancement
7. The Process of Structuring the Workplace for professional working conditions
8. The Process of Building a Growth Oriented Culture in the Workplace



for adults

What matters most for good schooling is what individual teachers know, believe, and can do. The primacy of individual teacher capacity over curriculum, physical plant, instructional materials, per pupil expenditure, and even community support diminishes none of those other vital elements. It's just that without good teaching none of the others will matter. And when the others are weak, committed and high capacity teachers still can matter.

To emphasize the preceding point: imagine that your child is in a school with beautiful and bountiful physical resources, well developed curriculum documents, supportive parents and plenty of money, but her teacher has poor skills and low motivation to reach children. What kind of a year will your child have?

Imagine another scenario where your child's school is run-down, no developed curriculum exists, parent involvement is spotty and there is no money for learning materials, but your child's teacher is skilled, resourceful, committed, caring, persistent, and motivates every child to believe in the meaningfulness of learning and their own capacity to do it well. What are the odds of your child having a good year?

Of course, in a non-supportive environment, one won't find many such teachers; that is why the culture of the school for adults is, indeed, one of the eight important processes we are highlighting. The main point I am underlining, however, is the primacy of the teacher and the classroom at the center of everything we hope to do to improve schools and improve student learning.

The eight processes above have great influence over teacher learning, teacher capacity and teacher efficacy. What we need to do is *tie these eight processes together, align them with one another* if we wish to wind up with high capacity teachers for all our nation's children. This is to say that the formula for success in improving schools is to approach all eight processes for increasing teacher capacity together and simultaneously with an integrated cohesive plan so that each system or process reinforces the effectiveness of the others.

The smallest unit in which this kind of integrated change effort can take place is the state. The geographical state, not the individual school and not the district will be the operational unit of enduring change—emphasize *enduring*—in American education. I am not talking narrowly about the State Department of Education here, but the state as a *geographical unit and a system of districts operating* within certain structures a few of which are, indeed, primarily influenced and controlled by the State Department of Education.

It is, of course, true that the school and the district is where the action takes place. That's where improvement is visible and only there do we see effects on children. The argument of this paper is that school and district change does not *endure* unless it is supported by elements in the larger system that surround it; and the smallest viable unit size in which to build the supports for enduring change is the geographical state.



I will argue that the proposition above is true because the changes that affect teacher learning and knowledge in an enduring way are rooted in statewide practices and systems and also in State regulations. They *could* also be rooted in statewide collaboratives with strong ties and commitments between districts—somewhat antithetical to the individualistic ways American school districts participate in collaboratives now. Instead of interacting like trading partners at the rural outpost, an ethos I would propose guides the relationships between districts in today’s collaboratives (and between districts and universities too), districts need to be more strongly interdependent... ..actually dependent on one another. They need to operate from the understanding that they are part of a larger “system” that influences what teachers know, believe, and can do through the eight processes.¹

Successful changes are, indeed, actualized through districts and schools. They often originate there, but history has shown that they rarely can be preserved there. The rotation of school boards and the career moves of key leaders in the ranks of teachers and administrators make restructuring and improvement efforts at the school and district level vulnerable to the gigantic back pressure that the “eight processes” currently exert *against* reform, not in behalf of it. The way we have been going about educational reform in this century is tantamount to trying to grow lilies in the desert: the ecosystem doesn’t support the garden, even if we get a few plants to live for a while with intensive tending.

Because we have failed to see the significance of the state as a system that includes districts, universities, and collaboratives as well as the regulatory Department of Education, we have doomed wonderful school and district improvement programs to short lives. It is time to “reengineer” our concept of reform and focus on the state as the unit of change and the eight processes as the instrumentalities of enduring reform.

1. Teacher Certification

The process of teacher licensing, certification, and recertification is well on the way to change in the U.S. — and it’s about time. The licensing process for any profession establishes standards for knowledge based practice upon which public trust is ultimately based. Doctors must be board certified; lawyers must pass the bar; but teachers don’t need to demonstrate specific knowledge or skills to practice. Teacher licensing and certification in the U.S. has been based on passive criteria throughout this century — meaning one doesn’t have to prove one can do *anything* at the performance level to get a license. One has only to passively survive seat time and finish courses. The national movement for professionalization is seeing the creation of independent state licensing boards², national standards for beginning teachers (Interstate New Teacher

¹ This might be accomplished through State sponsored collaboratives such as the B.O.C.E.S. structure in New York State.

² 11 states now have independent licensing boards: California, Oregon, Minnesota, Nevada, Iowa, Kentucky, Georgia, Indiana, Wyoming, N. Dakota, W. Virginia. Source: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, Washington, D.C..



Assessment and Support Consortium—INTASC) and accomplished teachers (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards—NBPTS.) We are also seeing legislated state performance standards that all districts must apply in their teacher evaluation systems (Massachusetts.) Of the eight processes described in this paper, this one is receiving the most attention and making slow but steady progress.

2. Teacher Education

The curriculum and assessments within teacher education institutions need to be congruent with the standards for knowledge based practiced referenced above. Currently they are not. There is no agreement across teacher education institutions about what graduates should know or be able to do to enter classrooms as competent novices. Hence there is no consistency across teacher education institutions about the experience candidates have. Upgraded certification for teacher training institutions (National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education—NCATE) is a force in this direction, but is meeting strong opposition from many institutions that wrongly see the teacher standards movement as a threat to their autonomy. The time has come for this to end. The voice of the state legislature can be brought to bear through the higher education approval process by which each teacher training institutions' charters are renewed. Teacher training institutions can be required to make their programs reflect the common knowledge base and be performance based.

3. Teacher Induction

Quality induction programs for new teachers are rare in the United States. We still plunge novice teachers into the water without adequate preparation or adequate support. Thus we lose 50 to 60% of new people within five years (Grissmer and Kirby 1987, 93, 94) and an even high percentage of entering teachers under the age of 24. Results from the California Beginning Teacher Program show that retention can go above 90% and student learning is positively impacted immediately when induction programs are thoughtful and long term (Garmston and Gless 1993). Elements to attend to in a complete teacher induction program would include screening and hiring procedures (Haberman, 1995), rigorous mentor training, and placement of newly hired teachers in high functioning teams where the newcomers become enculturated to professional norms of collegiality, collaboration, accountability, and constant learning (Saphier 1994.)

4. Teacher Development

Teacher development is random, individualistic, and sadly inequitable across the country. Adequate and equitable teacher development would be based in part on a common map of professional knowledge (Saphier, 1994), held in common by licensing boards, institutions of higher learning, and school districts. Using this map as an organizer, Regional Collaboratives or Centers would make available to teachers and administrators the resources for professional study and individual skill development that individual districts, especially small and poor districts, cannot and do not offer



today. They would offer inviting centers for teachers to share their Personal Practical Knowledge (see section 8 on Culture of the Workplace.)

Creating regional networks or accessible resources — ideas, things, and people — is absolutely essential and sadly missing. With some notable local exceptions most areas of the country are barren of coordinated and networked resources for teacher learning that approach equity.

5. Standards for Teacher and Administrator Performance

The development of standards is well underway and has been profiled under the “Teacher Certification” section above. The process I want to consider here is teacher and administrator evaluation as performed in school districts. These processes can be designed to either foster or impede learning and capacity building for professional educators. In many districts they are at best neutral, that is, they have no great effect either positive or negative on teacher and administrator learning: they are pro forma processes that absorb time and consume forest products. In some districts teacher evaluation systems clearly obstruct teacher learning by 1) devaluing teaching by paying scant attention to evaluation 2) attempting to quantify teaching with checklists and scores 3) putting teachers in competition with one another through merit pay schemes 4) creating a culture of inspection and mistrust by poorly designed evaluation systems.

But evaluation systems can be constructed to actively sponsor teacher (and administrator) learning; and they can do so in a way that does not dodge the need for organizations to be able to identify and respond decisively to unsatisfactory performance. Such processes emphasize multiple year Professional Growth Cycles (Saphier 93) where traditional “evaluation” is done only once every three or four years (though an administrator can put a particular teacher into the evaluation year at any time if there are concerns.) In off-cycle years teachers are required to choose from a menu of options for professional growth, do goal setting, plan projects, and report on their learning progress at the end of the year. In some districts these reports go to panels of peers, not to administrators. In other districts frequent peer observation is required in one of the off-cycle years.

During the evaluation year itself, a growth oriented process produces detailed data oriented observation notes and narrative write-ups, no ratings, rankings, or points that add up to a teacher “grade.” And administrators, who have far fewer teachers to evaluate in a given year, can observe more frequently and use good Cognitive Coaching skills where appropriate—which is most of the time—to assist teachers in analyzing their lessons and making plans based on data about how the lessons went (Costa and Garmston 1994.) All the same principles should be applied to processes for evaluation of administrators.

6. Teacher Advancement

In a fully aligned system, the process for moving up the ladder in teaching would give incentive for educators to learn new skills. We are some distance from being able to set this redesigned process in motion. The first part of the process, the development of



performance assessments for teachers and administrators, is on the action agenda in many states at the current time. And precedents exist already for such assessments as the Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI) and the National Principals' Assessment Centers. (Hersey.)

“Skill-based pay” is already an operating process in certain industries (Firestone, 1994) and is being piloted in a few school districts (“Excellent Teachers Rewarded,” 1995). In skill-based pay, people get raises when they show evidence they have acquired new skills or capacities. As opposed to evaluation based merit pay, which pits educators against each other to beat out their peers in competition for a limited pot of “merit” money, skill-based pay is tied to authentic performance assessments and gives teachers incentives for increasing their capacity; and it does so from a level playing field where all have equal opportunity to be rewarded for investing in their own efficacy. Skill based pay is not a zero sum game where only a few can win at the expense of others.

But “advancement” should mean more than pay raises. The absence of positions to aspire toward in teaching, i.e. positions of increased responsibility requiring experience, judgment and high levels of specialized skills saps the initiative of many senior people in education and causes others to leave. This is the place to bring back creative proposals of the 80s (Devaney, 1986) for positions such as Lead Teacher and to add others: for example Mentors with high levels of training and significant responsibility in new teacher induction programs; or Team Leaders who have superior skills in curriculum design and development. In this role individuals would be responsible for curriculum integration efforts across grade level teams, within middle school teams, and for high school teachers who share common courses. With the great wave of new teachers coming into the business over the next decade and the attendant cost savings as 2/3 of our high salary teachers retire, *the money is already in school district budgets to create these positions.*

7. Workplace Structure -- particularly schedules and groupings of teachers and students

Teachers' opportunity for learning is significantly influenced by working closely and collaboratively with colleagues to deliver daily instruction. Physical proximity doesn't do it; doing joint work with colleagues does (Little 88). This joint work can take the form of side by side team teaching (the best form of teaming in my opinion) It can take the form of co-development of assessment tasks and rubrics to use in common with students. It can take the form of designing and implementing integrated curriculum for a joint group of students. But for any of this to happen, the organization of time and the grouping of students and teachers into teams jointly responsible for the progress of the youngsters is essential.



8. Culture of the Workplace

The Personal Practical Knowledge of Teachers

Edwards' point of view on teacher development is that "It is thoughtful lived experience that gets one to expert performance.....You learn by studying yourself, what you do and think.....You become self-aware, and then you work on improving." (Edwards 95)

Edwards (1994) and Butler (1994) christen this knowledge born of lived experience and reflection on that experience one's "Personal Practical Knowledge (PPK).....It is unique to you.....It is largely implicit and difficult to articulate.....and it is very resistant to change."

"Trainers or staff developers who desire to promote reflection..... will also value what teachers know in addition to scientific evidence [i.e., research based findings about teaching,] and will communicate in such a way that teachers will be encouraged to reveal their private worlds of teaching..... Thus, the relationship between trainer and teacher is one of reciprocity where the goal is personal growth rather than compliance." (Wildman and Niles 1987.) In this way of thinking, teacher development will proceed optimally if we "put people in touch with their personal power and convey utmost respect for their lived experiences." (Edwards 1995.)

These authors convey a potent message. They argue for acknowledging the huge reservoir of knowledge that resides in the experience of teachers and remains untapped by virtue of the isolation in which they typically work. They argue further that unless the Personal Practical Knowledge of teachers is acknowledged and surfaced as part of the development process, teachers cannot and will not truly change, will not integrate ideas from outside into their practice. Though there is evidence that change and even attitude and belief shifts can occur as a consequence rather than a forerunner of behavioral change (Guskey,) we agree with the authors cited above: respecting teachers' lived experience and using teachers' Personal Practical Knowledge as a base is essential to building powerful and long-lived staff development cultures.

Over a career each person in teaching is continually filling a personal treasure chest with knowledge about children, knowledge about content, and knowledge about how to teach that content. This knowledge is Personal Practical Knowledge derived from one's own reactions to challenges, one's own discoveries, one's own experiments. It comes at different rates to different people depending on how reflective and resourceful they are. It also contains items of knowledge that have been discovered and rediscovered by many others, but not entered the public knowledge base; thus these items get reinvented through personal practice in random places over and over again through thousands of career histories.

In workplaces that optimize conditions for teacher learning, teachers have access to their own personal practical knowledge and that of their colleagues through a variety of channels—perhaps study groups, grade or department meetings, observations of one another's classes, demonstrations by others in their own classrooms. In this way, what



was private and idiosyncratic knowledge before can be articulated, shared and multiply the collective power of a faculty.

Elsewhere Matt King and I (1985) extracted from the literature and from interviews with colleagues twelve norms of school culture at the building and department level which were associated with high performing schools. Since that date a total of eight major studies (see Appendix A) have confirmed in all kinds of schools and communities, rural and urban, rich and poor, that there is a connection between strong school cultures and effective learning for children. As Roland Barth says, “the nature of the relationships among the adults who inhabit a school has more to do with a school’s quality and character, with the accomplishments of its pupils and the professionalism of its teachers than any other factor,” (1985). These norms are related directly to teacher learning and to supporting the exertion of energy both towards one’s personal growth in effectiveness with children and also toward starting initiatives for the good of the whole school. When leaders consider it a part of their job to support the growth of collegiality, experimentation, and reaching out to the knowledge base as elements of their building culture, they increase the rate of growth of their faculty’s cumulative power to reach children. When teachers consider it part of their job description to strengthen the twelve norms themselves³ and contribute as a good team member to the good of the whole school, children benefit hugely. When we take this process seriously as an influence on teacher capacity and teacher efficacy, we will insist that administrators be trained and then evaluated annually on their ability to nurture such a culture in the workplace.

Alignment

It is easy to conjure a vision of these eight systems operating in alignment with one another. It is yet another thing to design a change process to *get* them in alignment. Let’s look at the vision first.

The vision:

Teacher Certification and Teacher Education

State teacher certification requirements, administered through the Department of Education, are knowledge based and granted through performance assessment keyed to the INTASC standards. The performance assessments are complex, multifaceted, and demanding. Teacher education programs have aligned themselves with the requirements so their graduates are prepared for meeting entry level standards. Part of teachers’ assessed knowledge includes how to act as a positive force for school culture building.

³ The twelve norms of healthy school culture in Saphier and King (1985): Collegiality; Experimentation; Reaching Out to the Knowledge Base; Appreciation & Recognition; Caring, Celebration & Humor; High Expectations; Traditions; Tangible Support; Protecting What’s Important; Trust & confidence; Involvement in Decision Making; Honest Open Communication;



The scenario above contains three aligned processes: Certification; University education; Culture of the workplace.

Teacher Induction

High quality three year induction programs are available for new teachers in all districts. Large districts train their own mentors. Small districts have equally well trained mentors who are educated and supported through regional collaboratives, perhaps subsidized by the state (and in a future life, by the federal government.) New teachers are placed for one to three years in special induction schools. These induction schools are organized with the attributes described below under “Workplace Structure.” Continuous learning experiences are provided to new teachers formally and informally through district resources and the Regional Center for Professional Teaching Knowledge.

The scenario above contains four aligned processes: Induction; Culture of the workplace; Teacher and Administrator Development; Workplace Structures

Teacher and Administrator Development

The state department of education has provided startup funding and organizational resources for Regional Centers for Professional Teaching Knowledge. These electronically networked Regional Centers for Professional Teaching Knowledge make available on-line to every teacher (and administrator) in the region two kinds of downloadable resources: 1) lessons, materials, analogies, tasks, rubrics, samples of student work for teaching specific concepts or areas of content; 2) digitized video segments illustrating the items in (1) as well as illustrating trans-disciplinary teaching techniques (e.g., classroom management moves; instructional strategies like how to do “reciprocal teaching,” etc....) 3) an index of human resources within the region, i.e., names of people with times and places where workshops, study groups, or seminars are being offered; names of people who are willing to offer other kinds of learning experiences (e.g., teaching a demonstration lesson in your class or having you visit to witness a demo lesson in their class.)

The map of professional knowledge from which the “Center” operates is congruent with the framework of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and actively represents a view of professional knowledge as “repertoire” and “matching,” not “effective behaviors” (Saphier, 1994.) This more professional view of teaching knowledge acts to support the culture of collegiality, collaboration and constant learning that ground the healthy workplace culture described below.

The scenario above contains two aligned processes: Teacher and Administrator Development and Culture of the workplace.

Teacher Advancement

Salary raises are tied to two processes: 1) demonstrated mastery through performance assessment of new knowledge based teaching skills 2) extra pay for extra responsibility in a differentiated position such as Mentor Teacher, Team Leader, Curriculum Leader....



The scenario above contains four aligned processes: Teacher and Administrator Development; Teacher Standards; Teacher Advancement; Workplace Structure.

Teacher and Administrator Standards

Individual district teacher evaluation systems are nested in a Professional Growth Cycle where the emphasis is on professional growth; yet a clear, decisive, fair performance based accountability system exists for identifying and dealing with sub-standard teaching. Administrators are trained through the state Leadership Academy, and accountable in their districts for implementing this evaluation system. Teachers are active and responsible for implementing the professional growth cycle. The state standards for administrators support these practices and the state Leadership Academy offers annual training in supervision and evaluation keyed to the state standards for teacher performance.

The scenario above contains two aligned processes: Teacher Development and Teacher Standards.

Workplace Structure

Schools are small enough for personal caring and knowledge of students. Teachers are organized into teams that consider themselves jointly accountable for student results. Differentiated staffing gives senior, qualified teachers curriculum leadership and mentor responsibilities. Block scheduling and longer more flexible school days and years make possible more motivating integrated curriculum, student apprenticeships, and “reteaching loops” for students who need extra time to master rigorous material at high standards. These changes are supported by recommendations recently made by the Massachusetts State Commission on Time in Learning (1995,) and the Federal Report “Prisoners of Time” (1994.)

The scenario above contains three aligned processes: Induction; Teacher Advancement; Workplace Structure.

Workplace Culture

School leaders are trained and evaluated on their ability to nurture conditions of collegiality, experimentation, and reaching out to the knowledge base by faculty. Administrators are also evaluated on their ability to support teachers taking initiative to do things for the good of the school. “Culture building” is in the state standards for administrators, built into the training delivered by the state Leadership Academy and into Degree Programs in Educational Leadership offered by universities.

The scenario above contains four aligned systems: Teacher and Administrator Standards; Workplace Culture; University Programs; Teacher and Administrator Development.

With the eight processes above aligned as described, enduring and increasing teacher capacity would impact the achievement of all learners. How do we get these eight systems aligned in congruence with the vision above? Clearly no single agency has the clout to accomplish this kind of integrated change by itself.



The vision above can only be accomplished with coordinated movement across a common front by such players as a State Licensing Board, University degree programs, Regional collaboratives, the state legislature, local school boards, and decision makers in individual districts. Forging such an alliance is a political task based on constant discussion, networking, and bringing people together from these different constituencies. Each of the eight processes has primary players and physical sites. These players need to see that their cause is common and their relationship needs to be one of interdependence and reinforcement in the way they operate.

While individual schools and districts can begin to influence the processes that are district based, i. e., 1) Induction Programs for new teachers and 2) leadership for improved School Structure and Culture, what is needed is a broader based conversation among policy makers and opinion leaders through any and all forums available to us as educators. We need to talk explicitly about the interdependence and need for integration of these eight processes. Avenues include local school board information sessions; state school board meetings; state conventions of discipline based associations; state conventions of leadership and teacher associations; university colloquia; radio talk shows; Chambers of Commerce; newspapers; Rotary and other business clubs; church groups; legislative lobbying groups. Ultimately the power of state law and the authority of state licensing boards must be in alignment with the standards for teacher and administrator performance. What we have to do is get the actors in each of the eight systems to be aware of the other systems in which they don't directly participate and cause them to see themselves as interdependent with those other systems.

The Future

School improvement is a combination of resources, insight, strategy and will. We have arguably been weak on all four.

Resources

The first premise of this paper has been that we have been dividing, even scattering our resources for educational improvement instead of focusing on the most important lever for change — people, and increasing their capacity through knowledge. Let's focus our resources on our people, our professional educators.

Insight

Second, let us use the insight that the geographical state will be the enduring unit of change; and the state is a system of players and agencies whose efforts need to be aligned in purpose and coordinated in design to influence teacher learning.

Strategy

Third, let us use the strategy of networking and persuasive argumentation to have key players and agencies come to first understand and then contribute to and *own* a new vision of educational improvement through the eight processes.

And that leaves "will."



Do we have the will as a state (as a nation) to commit the time, energy, and resources it takes to reengineer the eight processes?

Will

There is significant evidence that the American public believes 1) our educational system is in poor shape, 2) getting worse, 3) and that no efforts at reform are really making much difference.

Our public ignores demographic shifts, increased enrollment and graduation rates, and actual standardized test scores that counter the conventional wisdom of school decline (Koretz 1986, 92; Linn and Dunbar 1990; Bracey, 1994). They lump the problems of schools with the problems of society, and become accusatory and non-supportive.

They think the productivity problems of schools are due to a combination of incompetence and mediocrity that is remediable through merit pay, competition between schools (schools of choice) and better management. “Just get some good people in there, for God sake, and put some capitalistic competition in the education market and good schools will start to emerge,” goes the thinking. They believe at bottom that teaching is easy work that any literate and reasonably decent person can do well.

If we do not change this image of teaching as easy work, we will have a hard time mobilizing the public will and public commitment we need as pressure to change the eight systems. Elsewhere (Saphier, 1994) I have made the case that many of us educators need to seek out skilled media partners and educate the public about the complexities of good professional teaching. We need furthermore to show convincingly the concrete difference it makes in people’s daily lives — including senior citizens and people with no children in school⁴ — if today’s youngsters are working with high capacity teachers on a daily basis.

The gist of this paper is to suggest a role shift for educators who up until now have been devoting their careers to learning how to teach and administer better, and then trying to apply their new learnings with students in their own schools and districts. I myself have been such a person up until now.

We can’t stop working with children or cease working to improve our own institutions. But a great many of us need immediately to begin looking for forums to address our communities, our public, and our legislators to reeducate them about the importance and complexity of good teaching. Otherwise even the most successful of us will each end our careers with individual accomplishments that do not impact the systems in which we worked— individual trophies, as it were, for teams that have ceased to exist or be cared about. We could do better. Instead we could have our names on plaques commemorating the creation of new integrated processes for teacher learning that endured many generations and ultimately moved an entire country.

⁴ In 1970 there were 4 million more children than adults in this country. In 1995 there were 33 million more adults than children. Source: James Pusely, Virginia Beach Public Schools.



-- Jon Saphier
9/96



Appendix A

Key Studies on School Culture...in chronological order

Rutter, Michael & others. Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.

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