

Parma, and Rexburg, Idaho. Colleagues from these agencies and school districts were especially generous in their willingness to try out whole-system approaches and work with me in the process.

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Introduction

FOR WHOM THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

In the field of education, there are dedicated administrators, supervisors, faculty, support staff, and school board members who are striving diligently and heroically to improve the quality of education they provide to students. However, the school improvement tools and approaches currently available to them are based on principles of incremental, piecemeal change. These current approaches also have no credible evidence to support their effectiveness for improving school districts. This book is written for these people. It offers them an innovative methodology for redesigning entire school systems.

THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In organizations throughout the world there is a revolution under way in how these systems are organized and managed. Within the past 10 years, barriers to innovative thinking about organization and management have come down, and cutting-edge ideas are emerging quickly. "The business model hasn't changed this dramatically in 70 years," says Chris Turner, the "learning person" for Xerox Business Services (XBS). She continued:

If you look around at business, at government, schools, and colleges, isn't it clear that it's time to think very differently [about organization and management]? I say to people, "You have a choice. You can be the last of the old generation of managers or you can be the first of a new generation." The revolution is going to happen. It's just a matter of whether you're with it or you're behind it. (cited in Webber, 1996, p. 51)

Our current schooling structures are also inflexible and outdated. They make schooling "agonizingly difficult" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998) for educators to respond to the needs of children.

Regardless of efforts to develop state and local standards, new forms of assessment, innovations in technology, or applications of new approaches to teaching and learning, these attempts at educational reform will not succeed without fundamental and heroic changes in the culture, structure, policies, and perceptions of the place we call school.

This book offers a cutting-edge methodology for redesigning entire school systems that has the potential to make significant and positive differences in the lives of school-age children and the adults who work with them. Our team-based methodology is designed to transform entire school systems into high-performing learning communities that create student, teacher, and system learning. This new methodology has the capacity to create what Brown and Moffett have called for: "changes in the culture, structure, policies, and perceptions of the place we call school." This methodology is called Knowledge Work Supervision®.

School improvement must be strategic, systematic, and systemic. Although student learning is the core mission of a school system, it would not and could not occur in a large-scale systematic manner without the organizations called "school systems" and without the adults who work in them.

Systemic school improvement does not search for quick-fix solutions to complex problems. Instead, in the words of Richard Farson (1996), author of *Management of the Absurd: Paradoxes in Leadership*:

What we need when confronting a problem or a predicament is not quick action based upon a glimpse, but rather a careful consideration of all the issues involved, no matter how paradoxical or absurd. Such a process can lead to a new perspective. . . . "doing" should follow thinking. . . . Perhaps it is more like "stewing" than thinking. (p. 169)

THE NEED FOR NEW APPROACHES TO SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

Why is there a need for a new approach to school district improvement? In the literature on school improvement, there are many reasons *why* schools need to be improved. In the same literature, there are many authors telling you *what* the outcomes of school improvement should be. Some of these models aim to improve individual school buildings, while others attempt to improve the curricula. Very few of them, however, talk about *how* to redesign entire school systems for high performance. Most of what is described in the literature represents incremental, piecemeal change.

Jack Dale (1997), the innovative, transformational leader for the Frederick County Public School system in Maryland, has talked about

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the problem of incremental, piecemeal change. He says that piecemeal change occurs as educators respond to demands from a school system's environment. He asks:

How have we responded? Typically, we design a new program to meet each emerging need as it is identified and validated. . . . The continual addition of discrete educational programs does not work. . . . Each of the specialty programs developed have, in fact, shifted the responsibility (burden) from the whole system to expecting a specific program to solve the problem. (p. 34)

Regarding piecemeal change, Dale also observes that "a permanently changed educational system is mandated. We cannot tinker around the edges. Instead, we must provide leadership and vision to change the entire system. We must create a system that perpetually examines itself and continually strives for improvement" (p. 35).

Lewis Rhodes (1997), former deputy director of the American Association of School Administrators, has also addressed the issue of piecemeal change. He says that educators experience the

difficulty of perceiving and understanding the role of the school district as the fundamental unit for effective changes that must impact all children. It was a lot easier 30 years ago when John Goodlad popularized the idea of the school building as the fundamental unit of change. . . . But now it is time to question that assumption—not because it is wrong, but because it is insufficient. Otherwise, how can we answer the question: "If the building is the primary unit at which to focus change efforts, why after 30 years has so little really changed?" (p. 19)

THE NEED TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINING SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

Knowledge Work Supervision (KWS) is built on the premise that school systems must develop the capacity for sustaining districtwide improvements. This premise is supported in the literature. For example, O'Day, Goertz, and Floden (1995) said:

The most critical challenge is to place learning at the center of all reform efforts—not just improved learning for students, but also for the system as a whole and for those who work in it. For if the adults are not themselves learners, and if the system does not continually assess and learn from practice, then there appears little hope of significantly improving opportunities for all our youth to achieve to the new standards. (p. 1)