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Personal administrator development affects entire school districts

Effecting principal growth

By Jerry W. Valentine

The phoenix, a legendary bird of ancient Egyptian folklore, lived five centuries before consuming itself by fire and rising from its ashes with renewed vigor. Many critics contend education is consuming itself through the improper utilization of resources, in particular, human resources. In response to this concern over attrition of quality education, staff development is viewed as a significant factor by which education can arise from its own ashes and exhibit a renewed vigor.

To speak of education as being in ashes is perhaps a bit unjust. But educators do face many issues in 1980 which, when considered collectively, seem insurmountable. As an example, let's eavesdrop for a moment on the opening school address given by Superintendent I.M. Pessimistic to the teachers and administrators of Typical R-I School District.

"My fellow educators. I stand before you today with a few minor concerns on my mind. When each of us entered this profession, many years ago, we realized that we would not reap great financial benefits. We further realized that we were entering a public profession, whose purpose was to serve our patrons. Yet today, and in the future, we face many challenges that clearly emphasize these two issues. Let me list a few:

- Last year we negotiated an impressive nine percent increase in the base salary. Inflation rose eighteen percent.

- Last year we increased our energy related school expenditures by twelve percent. Energy related costs rose twenty-eight percent.
- Last year our student enrollment dropped four hundred students. Even though many of us are within ten to fifteen years of retiring, last year we had but two retiring teachers and, as you know, we had to dismiss five non-tenured teachers to compensate for the declining enrollment.
- As money gets tighter, our school board continues to receive increasing pressure from the community for instructional accountability—whatever that is. The board has no choice but to demand this same accountability of you, the teacher. We must demonstrate teacher effectiveness.

How then do we meet some of these challenges facing us. Financially, we cinch our belts a notch tighter. Instructionally, we implement a district-wide program of teacher staff development so that we can effectively demonstrate to the board and to our community that we do indeed have an exceptional school district."

Two days prior to the speech to the teachers of Typical R-I School District, Superintendent Pessimistic addressed the principals of the district. The superintendent made similar comments to the principals and emphasized the importance of principal staff development as a means of surviving the eighties.

Staff development is viewed by some as the answer to surviving the pressing issues of education and exhibiting a renewed vigor for teaching that so many seem to have lost. On the surface, staff development does appear promising. But, the skilled superintendent realizes that isolated or *en masse* professional growth of teachers is futile without a preceding and corresponding growth of the building level principals. Educators continually give rhetoric to the importance of the principal in setting the tone, the climate, the environment of the school; yet, relatively minimal effort is made to promote the professional growth of that person who is the key to establishing that learning environment. The purpose of this article is to discuss principal professional development as viewed in the context of organization development.

Overview of Organization Development

In-service education, as it has traditionally been implemented, is cosmetic. The adroit superintendent realizes this superficiality and seeks a more Gestalten analysis through the literature of organizational change.

Organization development, a term borrowed from business and industry and now being applied in education, best describes the concept of growth, development and change so frequently sought by superintendents.

Owens and Steinhoff utilize excerpts from French and Bell to present a comprehensive definition of Organization Development (OD).

"Organizational development is a long range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal process, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management of organization culture . . . with special emphasis on the culture of the work teams . . . with the assistance of a change agent, or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioral science, including action research."

Schmuck and Miles define OD as a "planned and sus-

tained effort to apply behavioral science for system improvement, using reflexive, self-analytic methods."²

These definitions are most easily understood by persons with backgrounds in the behavioral sciences and the literature of planned change. Realizing the complexity of the definition, Owens and Steinhoff presented 10 concepts designed to provide a frame of reference by which the administrator can better understand the process of administering change through organization development.

1. The goal of OD is primarily improving the functioning of the organization itself.
2. An organization can develop a system of self-renewal which promotes adaption to change and improved goal achievement.
3. OD is based upon a systems approach emphasizing the wholeness of the organization and the interrelatedness of its component subsystems: human, structured, technological and task.
4. The main concern of OD is the human social system of the organization rather than the task, technology or structure dimensions.
5. OD seeks to stimulate organization self-renewal by changing behavior of people in the organization in significant ways through education.
6. The concept of learning-by-doing applied to organizational life is the basis for learning in OD.
7. OD is applied to an organization in order to deal with existing, pressing problems.
8. OD is a planned, systematic effort toward change.
9. OD is characterized by the participation of a change agent who has a specific role, especially in the early stages of the change effort.
10. OD incorporates the support and involvement of top-level administration, working in partnership with all levels of personnel in the organization.³

With an understanding of the characteristics of organization development, Hentschel⁴ suggested four facilitating factors in the change process. Adaptation of these factors relative to district wide planned change would reveal the following suggestions for superintendents.

- Create a favorable attitude toward change within the system.
- Direct efforts toward the felt needs of the personnel.
- Provide for continuing input into the decision-making process and on-going support for the process and change.
- Develop a system for rewarding the successful adoption of change.

The importance of personnel attitude and involvement are apparent from these thoughts. However, other writers in the field of organization development do not focus so narrowly upon the personnel function of the organization. For example, organizational change is said to take place only when there is an alteration of **more than one** of the following aspects of the organization: (1) tasks, (2) structure, (3) technology, or (4) people.⁵ Implied within this concept is an interdependence of these dimensions of the organization. For effective growth of the organization, a change of a singular dimension is inadequate.

General strategies for effecting change among the dimensions of the organization have been grouped into three major categories. The first grouping, empirical-

rational strategies, accepts the fundamental assumption that man is rational and will follow rational self-interest. A change is proposed by a person or a group and the change will be adopted if it can be rationally justified.

The second group of strategies for change is labeled normative-re-educative. Change, according to this view, will occur only as persons involved in the organization change their norms of acceptance or expectation and adopt new norms. In other words, they are no longer satisfied with current standards and thus seek new and improved standards.

The third group of strategies for change is based upon the application of power in some form. The process is simply the compliance of those with less power to the expectations of those with more power.⁶

These overview thoughts of organization development were presented as a conceptual base for the purposes of underscoring the significance of applying the behavioral sciences in the development of in-service programming and emphasizing a systematic, organization-wide model for implementing change. The following section focuses upon the integration of the concepts of organization development into a model for staff development of principles.

A Model for Principal In-service

A review of the literature of change revealed that recent experience in bringing about change in organizations has tended to indicate that the process, or change strategy, is more important than the identification of product or change desired.⁷ A basic position regarding staff development should be that efforts to change educational practice should emphasize **how** change might occur, rather than the more traditional approach of emphasizing **what** should be changed. Therefore, initial focus of the Model for Principal In-service should be upon the strategy or process. As previously mentioned, three general groupings of organization development strategies have been identified. Of these three, the normative re-educative strategy holds the greatest promise for education.

The normative re-educative strategy deals directly with individual and group attitudinal change. Owens and Steinhoff view this strategy as promising because of evidence that an organization can be changed as a secondary outcome by the normative re-educative changes to the basic unit in the system—the individual person. Growth of the individuals comprising the organization enhances the ability of the organization to adapt to the ever-changing demands from society. To implement a normative re-educative strategy, careful attention must be given to the organizational setting. A setting which promotes collaboration rather than competition between people in the organization, which brings conflict into the open so it can be discussed, and which encourages people to find satisfaction in their work suggests an organizational environment somewhat different from the conventional hierarchial bureaucracy. This strategy suggests a new pattern of administration that will help to keep people growing rather than keeping them in their place.⁸

The traditional approach of in-service education is not adequate to promote the normative re-educative model being proposed. Conventional in-service programs have merely reinforced the hierarchial patterns of organizations and done little to promote a significant feeling of worth among the members of the organization.

The thrust of the proposed model is to develop new

standards of behavior in the organization's social system. Owens and Steinhoff indicate:

These standards will emphasize openness in dealing with conflict, cooperation instead of competition, and an environment that encourages creativity and adaptation to change in contrast to the traditional bureaucratic concept of maintaining existing procedures and awaiting orders from the hierarchy. Such a process can change an organization's basic character from seeking to maintain a status quo to seeking to meet changing conditions in a dynamic fashion.⁹

Based upon the normative re-educative strategies of organization development, the proposed model for principal development would include the following:

1. Participation by all principals in the training experiences.
2. Initial training experiences covering the areas of communication skills, goals identification, conflict resolution, problem solving and decision making.
3. Identification of personal and group goals for the training experiences.
4. Identification of specific changes relative to the goals.
5. Identification and implementation of activities relative to the desired changes and goals.
6. Members observe the changes in behavior and in the system in order that the changes can be discussed.
7. Commitments of on-going utilization of changes and feedback are made as appropriate, i.e. adoption of changes throughout the organization.

Theory Into Practice

Over the years, education has devoted little effort to in-service specifically designed for administrators. Advanced graduate work and resultant administrative certification have generally been viewed as the culmination of preparation for administration. Considering the continual changes in education, and administration specifically, this phenomena promotes a hastened path toward professional obsolescence which is indeed unfortunate for the administrator, the teacher, the community and, in particular, the student. The cruciality of translating a model for principal development from theory into practice is evident.

The importance of involving all principals in the training experiences is integral to the concept of OD as a system-wide effort for change. The group will be involved in growth experiences which should lead to a better understanding and application of communication skills, conflict management, problem solving and decision making. In reality, some participants will embark upon group experience with cynicism and distrust, others will be ambivalent and others will be open and receptive to the potential of growth. Therefore, the superintendent must establish a positive frame of reference within which the process of principal development can occur.

In addition to the establishment of a positive climate for principal development, the superintendent can enhance the chances for a successful organizational development program in several specific ways. From the group process activities in the early stages of the model, specific goals, changes or areas of concern will begin to evolve. Methods of addressing these concerns must also

be identified. The superintendent has an obligation to support and assist in the efforts to deal with the concerns. The superintendent can also provide feedback to the principals as they implement changes.

The superintendent can further enhance the process by encouraging supportiveness by the board of education. Adoption by the board of a professional development policy can lend both psychological and financial support to professional development. Such policies would (1) correlate in-service growth requirements to salary increments, (2) stress a district-wide, systematic processes for in-service, (3) establish budgetary support of the concept of principal development, and (4) state criteria for acceptable completion of principal development objectives.

Two other decisions relative to principal development must be made by the superintendent and/or the board of education. **When** will the in-service activities occur? Will there be additional **compensation** for participation in the activities? For teacher in-service, these two issues have typically been clear cut, often associated with negotiated agreements. For administrators the superintendent and the board may be more reluctant to provide released time and additional compensation. Principals are considered part of the management team, are usually on extended contracts, and generally earn more money than teachers. Extra time and compensation are volatile issues to be dealt with carefully.

Evaluation of the planned organizational change **process** and **results** is also a task for superintendent's involvement. The superintendent's assessment should be based upon principle, as well as total organization growth. Dimensions such as teacher and student growth and building and district organization climate should be considered.

Conclusion

Let us assume for a moment that numerous traditional in-service programs were implemented for the principals of a given district. Individual principals demonstrated obvious personal growth within the confines of a staid district organization. Those principals soon became impatient with the current organization and sought new organizations which provided challenge and stimulation.

This scenario may not be as unrealistic as might be assumed. Do we not continually witness the quest of new challenge by administrators who feel they have "out-grown" their current setting. Would a district which emphasizes personal development within the context of organization development face the same problem? Would not a planned, systematic district-wide approach to change be more likely to promote personal as well as organizational growth?

The phoenix rose from the ashes with the renewed vigor of youth. To expect the same phenomenal ascension among principals would be unrealistic. Yet reality, however accurate, is in the eye of the beholder. Motivation and self-esteem of the faculty and students are interrelated. Enhancement of job skills leads to enhancement of self-perceived ability, which enhances self-esteem, which enhances learning environment. If the principal is to be the educational leader of our schools, and the person most responsible for establishing the learning environment, then logic dictates that efforts be made in the area of principal professional development.

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