

IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Alma Harris and Janet H. Chrispeels

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IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

School improvement has become a dominant feature of educational reform and has gained prominence and recognition on the international stage. The pressure upon schools to improve performance has resulted in a wide range of school improvement programmes and initiatives. The most successful projects have systematically collected data and disseminated their findings through a wide variety of publications. Consequently there is a wealth of evidence concerning effective school improvement in many different countries, yet in-depth, cross-cultural comparisons of 'what works' to improve both system and schools are fairly rare.

This book considers the collective school improvement research base from different countries. It draws together accounts of school improvement projects, programmes and interventions that have been successful around the world in the last two decades. The broad international range of contributors, each an acknowledged expert, discuss case studies from Europe, North America, South Africa and Asia. The outcome is a considered reflection on the different phases in the development of the field and a consolidation of the main messages emanating from its broad empirical base.

In addition, *Improving Schools and Educational Systems* highlights the increasing shift from individual school improvement initiatives to system-wide (i.e. state, national or district) change. The tensions that this shift can and does create are thoroughly explored through the study of well documented examples.

This important new book will be inspiring and enlightening reading for anyone interested in effective school improvement: academics, practitioners, students and policy-makers alike.

Alma Harris is Director of the Institute of Education and Director of the Leadership, Policy and Improvement Unit at the University of Warwick, UK. **Janet H. Chrispeels** is Professor in Education Studies at University of California, San Diego, and Co-Principal Investigator of the Center for Educational Leadership and Effective Schools, Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA.

CONTEXTS OF LEARNING
Classrooms, Schools and Society

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Part 1

Setting the Context

Introduction

Alma Harris and Janet H. Chrispeels

Over the last 20 years, the school improvement research base has gained prominence and recognition on the international stage. In both a theoretical and empirical sense it has matured through generating a wide range of successful projects, interventions and innovations across many countries in Europe, North America, South Africa and Asia. While many publications crowd the field of school improvement, contemporary comparative reviews of the international field are hard to find. This book is intended to bring together accounts of school improvement projects, programmes and interventions that have been successful around the world in the last two decades. The aim is to reflect and represent different phases in the development of the field and to draw together the main messages emanating from its broad empirical base. In addition, the book highlights the increasing shift from individual school improvement initiatives to system-wide (i.e. national, state or district) change. The discourse of site-based management and local school improvement, typical of the early phases of school improvement, frequently run counter to the discourse of systemic change. The tensions created by these potentially conflicting discourses have yet to be resolved in many systems. In this introductory chapter, we provide the background and context for the chapters that follow. First, we examine the recent history of the school improvement field. Second, we highlight some of the lessons learned from early school improvement initiatives and the policy attributes seen as necessary for sustained school improvement. Finally, we describe the current state of the field and the struggle to balance site autonomy and initiative with systemic

'top-down' approaches, especially at the local educational authority or school district level.

Phases of School Improvement

A review of the last two and a half decades of school improvement suggests that the field has evolved in a number of distinctive phases as practitioners and researchers gained experiences in implementing and studying school change. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) have provided a powerful analysis of the field and have identified three phases of school improvement. These three phases will be used to frame our initial analysis and introduction to the school improvement terrain. We acknowledge that we draw heavily upon Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) in the sections which follow and regard their framework as both informative and helpful in delineating between different forms of school improvement. The boundaries between the phases are not mutually exclusive as the characteristics and qualities found in one phase often are carried forward into the next but they represent a demarcation between different types of intervention that are potentially useful.

Phase 1: focus on the individual school, groups of students or teachers

In its early phase, during the 1980s, school improvement tended to be mainly practitioner-oriented, located in the work of those involved. This work was typified by the 'teacher as researcher' (Elliott, 1980; 1981), school self-evaluation and school self-review movements, particularly but not exclusively in England (Clift and Nuttall, 1987). School improvement was often defined as implementing an innovation or engaging in action research projects. In several countries, especially the United States and Australia, it was also driven by federal funding to address the needs of schools serving disadvantaged students, which mandated the establishment of school-based improvement councils. This 'bottom-up' approach to change in schools manifested itself in small-scale programmes or projects focused sometimes only on select groups of students, individual schools or groups of teachers. In the United States, toward the end of this phase, the emergence of the Effective Schools Research (ESR) began to inform the work of many local school improvement efforts (Chrispeels and Meany, 1989; General Accounting Office, 1989). In addition to providing funding for individual school improvement efforts, state and national governments played an interesting role in this phase. They enhanced the power of individual schools by diminishing the power of intermediate or local educational authorities (LEAs) and agencies. For example, the national government in New Zealand pursued this path and dissolved its local education authorities. Various state governments in Australia, with Victoria leading the way, also dissolved the LEAs in that country. The province of New Brunswick in Canada experimented with eliminating its local school districts but later reinstated them (Anderson, 2003). In the United States, where local boards of education were the primary educational decision-makers, many school boards

implemented site-based management as an engine for teacher empowerment and school improvement (Lieberman, 1986; Mohrman, Wohlstetter and Associates, 1994; Brazer, 2004).

In another context, the Education Reform Act of 1988 in England dramatically altered the power of local education authorities (LEAs), which previously 'were responsible for almost all educational services' (Woods and Cribb, 2001: 1). These changes, which allowed schools to opt out of the LEA control (i.e. grant-maintained status) created considerable stress for LEA staff who struggled to redefine their role and function.

Schools were to offer open enrolment, parents were to be offered real choice in terms of the schools available for their children, a National Curriculum was to be taught and most schools were to be managed through a system of delegated budgeting or Local Management of Schools (LMS), although there were mandatory and discretionary exceptions (Woods and Cribb, 2001: 1).

According to Hopkins and Reynolds (2001), the first phase of school improvement was encapsulated by the holistic approaches of the 1980s and was epitomized by the OECD's International School Improvement Project (ISIP). Hopkins and Reynolds (2001: 12) note, however, that this first phase of school improvement tended to be 'loosely conceptualized and under-theorized. It did not represent a systematic, programmatic and coherent approach to school change'. There was also in this phase an emphasis upon organizational change, school self-evaluation and the 'ownership of change' by individual schools and teachers, but once again these initiatives were not strongly connected to student learning outcomes. They tended to be variable and fragmented in both conception and application. As a consequence, these improvement practices struggled to impact significantly upon classroom practice (Hopkins, 2001).

Phase 2: school improvement focused at the classroom as well as school level

The second phase of development began in the early 1990s. In these years, the school improvement tradition was beginning to provide schools with guidelines and strategies for implementation to promote classroom level change. This approach resulted from more systematic interaction between the school improvement and the school effectiveness research communities (Vinovskis, 1996; Desimone, 2002). There was a greater focus upon organizational and classroom change reflected in approaches to staff development premised upon models of teaching (Joyce and Showers, 1995). A desire to link school improvement to student learning outcomes was the main goal during this phase, which was pursued with varying degrees of intensity. In addition, there were two trends that emerged during this phase. The first trend was the expansion of site-based management within schools, which resulted in the reduction of power of local authorities and local boards of education. In England, New Zealand, Australia and the United States, national and state governments started to play a more active and central role in school improvement. The second trend during this phase, especially in the United States, was the growth of comprehensive models of school reform

that could be adopted by individual schools. These include approaches such as the Comer School Development model (1988), Glickman's *Renewing America's Schools* (1993), Levin's Accelerated School model (Hopfenberg, Levin and Associates, 1993), Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools (1992, 1996), and Slavin's Success for All (1996). These 'whole-school design' approaches combined elements from the school effectiveness and school improvement research bases to focus upon curriculum and instruction as well as management and organizational variables. Some of these approaches were designed to meet particular curriculum needs such as Reading Recovery or Success for All (SFA), which has subsequently been adopted in many other countries. Others, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, tended to reflect a broad set of principles for organizational change and development and were not targeted at any specific curriculum or subject area. Comprehensive accounts of the first two phases of the school improvement movement can be found in Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) and in Fullan (1991).

Phase 3: programme refinement and issues of scalability of reform initiatives

In many countries numerous resources have been targeted at programmes and projects aimed at improving schools and raising standards of performance. The evidence to date, however, suggests that many of these external interventions, although very well intentioned, have had patchy and variable success. The evidence supporting the relationship between school improvement and increased student achievement remains weak and contestable. The emphasis on 'performativity' in many systems generated a form of school improvement premised on the twin components of accountability (inspection, test scores and league tables) and standards (target setting, monitoring and raising achievement plans) which, despite dominating the educational landscape, have largely been unable to yield the increases in school performance sought. More importantly, its net effect has been to render those schools in disadvantaged communities, where progress had most been sought, less able to raise and sustain performance. As Hopkins and Reynolds (2001: 15) note, 'the achievement gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds that seemed initially to narrow in the late 1980s, stayed the same or widened again in the 1990s, raising alarm among national governments in Canada, England, and the United States'.

The third phase of school improvement has arisen because of the relative failure of existing school improvement approaches to make a difference to schools on a large scale. Pockets of success could be seen and were duly celebrated but scaling up from the one to the many proved to be elusive. In particular, success seemed to elude schools in large urban areas serving the most disadvantaged and the evidence from major programmes such as 'New American Schools' confirmed the limitations of 'off the shelf' improvement or whole-school designs to secure long-term, widespread system and school improvement (Berends, Bodilly and Kirby, 2002). Furthermore, some national initiatives such as the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies in England, seemed to show only partial success at the lowest levels of basic skills in closing the achievement gap (Fullan,

2000). In response to previous limitations, the third phase of school improvement attempted to draw upon its most robust evidence and to produce interventions that were solidly based on tried and tested practices. Programmes such as Improving Quality of Education for All (IQEA); High Reliability Schools (HRS), the Manitoba School Improvement project (MISP) and the Dutch National School Improvement project were all examples of projects in this third phase (see Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994; Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Harris and Young, 2000; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Hopkins, 2001). The specific components of several of these programmes will be explored in ensuing chapters of this book and the lessons learned from the most successful forms of improvement will be explored in the concluding section.

A number of analyses seem particularly informative in understanding the types of approaches and reforms being undertaken in this third phase of school improvement. First, is identifying some of the programmatic components that reflect lessons learned from researching the first and second phases of school improvement initiatives. Second, is recognition of the policy attributes that may contribute to successful implementation of Comprehensive School Reform (Porter, 1994; Berends *et al.*, 2002; Desimone, 2002). Third, is the growing acknowledgement that school improvement is exceedingly complex and policy-makers, researchers and practitioners need to be more sensitive to contexts and political dimensions of reform, especially for school communities facing extremely challenging circumstances (Desimone, 2002; Harris, 2002).

Lessons Learned from Prior School Improvement Initiatives

Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) are keen to point out that there are variations among the programmes identified in Phase 3 that make any overall assessment difficult and any formulation of a 'blueprint' based on these programmes unwise. Nevertheless, they suggest that a comparison of third-wave school improvement as a group points toward certain key features that typify the third phase of school improvement projects. First, there has been an enhanced focus upon the importance of pupil learning outcomes and classroom-level change. While previous projects sought to change the organizational conditions within schools, the latter projects also focus on changing classroom-level conditions. Related to this, the second feature of third-wave projects is the attention paid to the learning levels and the *instructional* behaviours of teachers. The third-wave programmes are carefully targeted at changing teachers' skills, attitudes and behaviours in order to positively affect classroom change.

Third, Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) argue that there has been the creation of an infrastructure to enable the knowledge base, both 'best practice' and research findings, to be better utilized, especially through the development of more sophisticated and user-friendly computer programs. This they suggest has involved an internal focus on collaborative patterns of staff development that enable teachers to enquire into practice, and external strategies for dissemination

and networking (Fielding and Eraut, 2003). Emerging from these patterns of collaboration has been the latest development in the school improvement field of networks and networking between schools as a mechanism for change and transformation. We suggest later in the book that this latest phase of networking is in fact part of a fourth phase of school improvement.

Fourth, the school improvement field has recognized and embraced the importance and potential of *capacity building*. Building capacity essentially involves building relationships, building trust and building community. But development of individuals is not enough. Capacity building is about ensuring that the school is a 'self-developing force' through investing in those school and classroom level conditions that promote development and change (Harris and Lambert, 2003).

Finally, there has been an adoption of a '*mixed*' *methodological orientation* by programmes in the field, in which both quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined. The Effective School Improvement project in England is an example of an attempt to look at classroom and school processes and outcomes and to model a more comprehensive framework of intervention. Accompanied with attention to both process and outcome has been the emphasis upon *fidelity implementation* which, it is suggested, is an important determinant of subsequent project success. For example, programmes such as Success for All and High Reliability insist that implementation is carefully controlled to guarantee the maximum effect. It is clear however that this is unlikely to occur without some attention to *cultural change* and the way in which improvement programmes relate to, and impact upon, practitioners and their everyday practices. Many projects therefore have developed increasingly sophisticated training, coaching and development programmes for staff (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001).

The last five years have seen quite dramatic changes toward programmes that embrace these features or principles. In this time school improvement has become increasingly multi-faceted, complex and diverse, embracing research and researchers not traditionally located within the field, and including significantly more overt policy action. Understanding the policy attributes needed to support school improvement represents a second level of analysis that is helping to inform such improvement efforts.

Policy Attributes of Successfully Implemented School Improvement Models

Researchers, policy-makers and programme developers recognized that the variability in levels of implementation often made it difficult to assess the merits of a particular school improvement design. Nevertheless, until recently, many have given insufficient attention to the policy factors that could enhance implementation of any design. Desimone (2002) argues that principals and teachers' perceptions of five policy attributes will influence the level of successful implementation. These policy attributes, which interact and may create unique interdependencies, include:

- *the level of specificity*: the more specific the reform in terms of curriculum and lesson plans, professional development provided, role of the principal, and the information and monitoring guidelines, the more likely the reform will be fully implemented.
- *consistency*: the greater the consistency of the reform model, especially in terms of curriculum and assessments, with other school, district or state reforms, the easier it will be for the school staff to implement the various reforms.
- *authority*: the greater teachers perceive the model's authority because of their own decision-making and buy-in and because the model is supported by the principal and district, the more likely the model will be successfully implemented. This normative authority is also supported or diminished by perceived individual principal authority in relationship to the model. The more knowledgeable the principal is of the change process, capable of marshalling resources and expert in the reform model's fit to faculty, the greater the level of implementation.
- *power*: the more districts or state authorities rely on rewards and facilitate the adoption of reform models rather than use sanctions and mandates, the more likely the models are to be sustained and faithfully implemented.
- *stability*: policy and implementation environments characterized by stability in relationships and change concepts (i.e. low turnover of staff and students, limited volatility in the policy arena, and commitment to a steady and consistent pace of reform) enhance successful implementation of school improvement models that will yield continuous improvement over the long term.

As policy-makers, reformers and practitioners developed a greater appreciation of the components of effective improvement models and the policy attributes that assist the implementation of individual school reform efforts, schools involved in the third phase of school improvement initiatives have benefited. However, even the best designed school improvement strategy can be influenced by context and politics in ways that undermine or compound implementation challenges.

Role of Context and Politics in School Improvement

Another evolutionary aspect in improvement initiatives that is seen in this third phase of school improvement is a deepening awareness of the critical nature of context and political influence on school improvement. Recently, the school improvement field has recognized the need for more differentiated and finely grained approaches to school development and change. Previously, there was a relatively limited focus on examining and evaluating the effectiveness of different change strategies used by schools in different socio-economic contexts with variable internal change capacity. Only in the last few years, for example, have researchers located within the school improvement field focused their attention upon significantly improving 'failing' or 'ineffective' schools (e.g. Stoll and Myers, 1998a; Gray, 2000; Reynolds *et al.*, 2001; Hopkins 2001; Harris and

Chapman, 2002). The call for context specific improvement is well established but relatively little attention has been paid to generating the differential strategies needed to improve individual schools. For example, in England only recently have policy initiatives directed resources to those schools labelled as *Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances*. As Stoll and Fink (1996) argue:

For a school that is ineffective and just starting the process of development, the strategies may be different from a school that has been developing for some time: the former may need an 'apprenticeship' orientation involving giving the school knowledge from outside, while knowledge of the latter may be sufficiently professionally competent to develop its own good practice and the development based upon it. Likewise, the strategies would be different for an individual school at different phases of the development cycle, with beginning provision of information from outside being progressively scaled down until the school is capable of its own knowledge generation.

The emerging research evidence concerning improving schools in difficult contexts demonstrates quite clearly that a diverse range of school-level factors and characteristics is the norm. Each school within this grouping exhibits a unique *organizational mix* of cultural typology, improvement trajectory and level of effectiveness. Unlike effective schools, which have been shown to exhibit similar characteristics, schools in the low-performing grouping may look homogeneous but in practice exhibit very different characteristics. Therefore, it seems important that the school improvement field moves to consider more highly differentiated and context specific programmes.

The interaction of context and politics also can create conditions that undermine or weaken local school improvement work (Desimone, 2002). As stressed earlier, school improvement, especially in schools facing challenging circumstances, is highly complex and requires sustained work over a period of several years. Yet politicians' terms are of limited duration. They want quick fixes and standardized measures that do not take into account the poverty and deprivation faced by many inner city schools. The authority and specifications of a particular reform can be quickly diminished when state policies prescribe curricula that are contrary to the reform model and require assessments that are misaligned to local efforts. Teachers can become discouraged and fail to fully pursue needed implementation strategies that will ensure a reform's success if countervailing policies are also imposed. The failure to address the socio-economic conditions of particular school catchment areas tends to perpetuate savage inequalities in the larger community that even the best school improvement programme and efforts are not likely to overcome. Unfortunately, attention to the larger school community issues is not on most policy-makers' agendas; their focus continues to be on improving schools in order to raise standards, implying a new shift toward system changes.

Improving individual schools through system-wide or systemic changes

We would argue that in some countries, a fourth phase of school improvement is underway: improving individual schools through system-wide or systemic changes. In this phase conflicting forces and discourses can be seen as national and state education systems struggle to find the right balance between top-down and bottom-up reforms that will accomplish national educational goals. This phase also reflects the growing recognition of the nested nature of schools in systems and the frustration, especially of policy-makers, of scaling-up and transferring more quickly the touted *success stories* of individual school reform. To speed the school improvement process, system changes are occurring at two levels: (1) system changes at national or state level and (2) renewal and redefinition of the role and work of local education authorities.

Systemic Efforts to Enhance Individual School Improvement

Systemic change is being pursued at national, provincial or state policies levels as a way to direct local improvement processes. The strengths of national and state educational systems and the rules and regulations they impose on schools, of course, vary considerably across countries and range from highly centralized systems in terms of curriculum to be taught, personnel selection, financing and budget decisions, and assessment (e.g. France, Greece) to very decentralized systems with most decisions residing at the school level (e.g. New Zealand and Australia). In countries such as the United States and England where the tradition of local control is stronger, there has been considerable movement to strengthen the national role at the expense of local educational authorities or school districts. The enactment of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies in 2002 represents an example of the centralization of authority and curriculum in England.

The United States federal government began gradually to increase the federal role with the adoption of Goals 2000 (adopted in 1989) and culminated in the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, which has radically altered the federal government's reach into education policy that was previously under the purview of state and local governments. Although there are no national curricula, each state is now required to adopt state curriculum content standards (a process started before NCLB, but greatly accelerated by it) as a way to ensure systemic reform. Furthermore, the power of a few states (e.g. Texas, California and New York) in adopting textbooks and particular standardized tests to hold schools accountable has considerably narrowed the range of curriculum choices available to schools in the United States, which has a textbook driven approach to schooling. Although each of the 50 states and their 115,000 local school districts are still vested with the primary responsibility for education, the power of local boards of education has been considerably diminished by these new federal and state policies. The standards-based reform movement has systematized what

students are expected to learn, and state prescribed testing, textbooks, and the accompanying required teacher professional development designed to ensure implementation of state standards greatly diminishes the arena and scope of local decision-making. Although the intent of the federal and state legislation was also to give local schools and teachers greater autonomy in how they organized instructional programmes, the discourse of accountability has tended to constrain and confound many local school-based reforms that were begun during the first three phases of school improvement described above (Chatterji, 2002).

Renewed Appreciation of the Importance of LEAs

In spite of the move to centralize more authority through federal and state policy, there is parallel and contrasting acknowledgement of the importance of a second level of school system change agents: LEAs or school districts. There is growing recognition and research on the role these intermediate agencies can play in facilitating, supporting, directing and even mandating school improvement (Elmore, 1993; Spillane, 1996; Elmore, 2000; Woods and Cribb, 2001; Marsh, 2002; Anderson, 2003). The work of these researchers indicates that districts can foster school improvement by:

- interpreting, mediating and buffering schools from state and/or federal legislation, and
- enhancing teaching and learning through curricular choices, staffing, professional development and support for site-based reform initiatives (Marsh, 2002; Anderson, 2003; Grubb, 2004).

Although the policy-mediating role between district and state is an important one (and is addressed in chapter 7 on reform in San Diego Unified School District by Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues), the primary focus here is the second – the LEA's role of supporting school improvement.

As mentioned earlier, frustrations with local education authorities led several systems to treat LEAs as ancillary to the change process or to disband them altogether. For example the Illinois State Legislature (USA) in 1988 delegated almost all authority to local schools in the city of Chicago (Bryk *et al.*, 1998). Although there was considerable euphoria surrounding the bold restructuring move, the local councils 'failed to produce significant widespread gains in student learning' (Anderson, 2003: 4). Schools in Chicago only began to show improvements and gains on a large scale when the district reasserted its role in providing capacity building, accountability, and innovation support to schools (Anderson, 2003: 4). The Chicago story is unique in that the drastic action of the state legislature forced the district to redefine its role and relationship to its schools and to break some of the previous bureaucratic interactional patterns with local schools that were no longer productive. Research about Chicago Public Schools by Bryk *et al.* (1998) and the report on the work of District no. 2 in New York City (Elmore

and Burney, 1997, 1998) rekindled interest in the potential of school districts to support school improvement.

Research was beginning to show that standards and accountability systems alone were not sufficient to ensure the desired learning gains. Children will only meet challenging standards if schools consistently create high quality learning in every classroom every day. Yet many urban schools serving large populations of low-income and diverse learners fail because of lack of resources (adequate facilities, materials, time and highly qualified teachers), lack of technical knowledge (curriculum expertise) and unstable operating environments (high leadership, staff and student turnover as well as missing leadership skills and collaborative time). These schools are not able to create high quality learning environments without considerable outside support and assistance. LEAs or school districts represent one mechanism for providing the needed help.

Potential Roles and Responsibilities of LEAs to Support School Improvement

A review of current research on school district reform suggests a variety of roles and responsibilities that LEAs, school districts or other intermediate agencies might undertake to support school improvement (Woods and Cribb, 2001; Anderson, 2003). These responsibilities fall into several critical leadership categories including setting direction, providing professional development, especially for school leaders, providing data to guide the change process, and marshalling resources to meet needs and ensure equity (Togneri and Anderson, 2003; Leithwood and Riehl, 2004).

Setting direction

Research on successful LEAs suggests that establishing a clear focus on teaching for powerful learning and communicating the focus to all shareholders, including students, is key (Elmore and Burney, 1997; Togneri and Anderson, 2003). To carry out this direction, central office administrators often found they were the ones who had to alter practices first. The administrative team representing all areas (instruction, personnel, facilities, transportation, maintenance, categorical and special education) may need to meet frequently to address educational issues and discuss what might be hindering educational advancement at each school. Agullard, Huebner and Calisi (2004) also found that when the superintendent or head of the LEA articulated and shared a coherent theory of action, this helped the central office to be more focused in assisting schools and enabled schools to make greater sense of the reform demands.

A concurrent challenge facing school districts as they attempt to set direction is the need to create coherence among competing reform agendas (Hatch, 2002; Honig and Hatch, 2004). Goertz, Floden and O'Day (1996: 7) described the challenge as:

achieving a delicate balance between old and new goals, greater coherence across a wide range of policies and levels of education, maintaining momentum in a rapidly changing political environment, achieving needed increases in capacity of the education system, and ensuring that the changes benefited all students.

Honig and Hatch (2004: 16) argue that 'coherence is a process, which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies'. This task is greatly complicated if there is not a level of trust to support the work (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Daly, 2004).

LEAs often place principals and teachers in a problematic situation by asking them to pursue multiple reforms, some of which may not be in alignment with a school-based reform initiative, without sufficient negotiation and mutual sense-making by the different actors. District level administrators and programme improvers similarly struggle to balance fidelity to programme implementation with local needs of the district and the local schools (Hatch, 2002). Spillane and Thompson (1998) found that districts varied in their interpretation of state and federal reform policies based on their human, social and financial capital. In other words, if the district staff lacked an understanding or a commitment to the reform agenda (human capital), they were much less likely to successfully assist their schools in implementing the reform. They also found, in the case study of maths and science reform, that the level of human capital was also reflected in the level of social capital, especially in terms of the district's engagement with professional networks and relationships with external agencies promoting the reform (Spillane and Thompson, 1998).

Providing professional development

A second key role of the LEA or school district is providing professional development for instructional renewal (Elmore and Burney, 1997; Anderson, 2003). Anderson (2003) found that school districts where learning gains were being made tended to focus on two types of professional development: intensive long-term development of instructional leaders, especially principals or headteachers and districtwide job-embedded professional development for teachers. In the United States, such district guided professional development has largely focused on literacy. In England the focus has been on both literacy and numeracy. LEAs in England are expected to play a role in disseminating best practices to schools in their areas through such strategies as a register of expert practitioners, involving associate heads and deputies as mentors, publishing research or models of best practice in a variety of formats, providing in-services, linking and networking schools to promote learning from each other (Woods and Cribb, 2001: 80–99). Fullan and Watson (2000) also found that professional development for school leaders in Africa proved to be central to achieving school improvement on a wide scale.

An emerging aspect of job-embedded professional development is the creation

of professional learning communities both within and across schools. ‘Communities of teachers in schools help teachers make sense of multiple messages about instruction, not only from districts but from states and professional associations as well’ (Honig and Hatch, 2004: 21). District-encouraged collaboration among teachers within their schools and across the district helps to develop and sustain goal consensus, foster shared beliefs and increase commitment to reform (Anderson, 2003). Districts can strengthen school-level collaboration by assisting schools to restructure the school day and the allocation of time, which may require negotiations with the teacher union and building support in the parental community. Honig and Hatch (2004) also maintain that district consultants, coaches or professional developers who facilitate regular dialogue among school staff and teachers’ engagement with multiple professional communities can expand the number of scripts and logics available to school-level actors to use in interpreting and making sense of multiple reforms.

Providing data to guide the change process

Research of successful school improvement efforts have consistently shown the importance of the school staff’s ability to collect and use appropriate perceptual and achievement data to guide their improvement plan (Chrispeels, 1992; Datnow and Stringfield, 2000; Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown, 2000; Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy, 2003); however, frequently schools tend not to have people skilled at using data for decision-making (Datnow and Stringfield, 2000). Thus school districts and LEAs can play an important intermediary function in providing the data, especially regarding disaggregated student achievement, in forms understandable and useful to teachers. Anderson (2003: 10) found in his review that:

Successful districts in the current era of standards, standardized testing, and demands for evidence of the quality of performance invest considerable human, financial, and technical resources in developing their capacity to assess the performance of students, teachers, and schools, and to utilize these assessments to inform decision-making about needs and strategies for improvement, and progress toward goals, at the classroom, school and district levels .

As more districts adopt benchmark assessments to determine regular progress toward achieving standards, the district’s ability to get timely information to schools is critical as is the assistance and training in how to use the data. Particularly useful is the practice of district leaders modelling open discussions around data on student performance and developing an inquiry stance to enable them to find ways to continuously improve district support for schools. LEAs in England have been tasked with the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating the school improvement programme and assisting schools in their own self-evaluation (Woods and Cribb, 2001).

Marshalling resources to meet needs and ensure equity

Through infusing fiscal resources and new knowledge about best practices into the school improvement process and assisting teachers in learning how to apply the knowledge in their classrooms, LEAs increase their potential to guide improvement across a wide array of schools (Anderson, 2003). There is also a close link between the use of data to guide decision-making and the marshalling of resources to meet equity needs. Skrla, Scheurich and Johnson found in their study of Texas districts, serving large low-income Latino populations, that the district central office staff kept the equity agenda in the forefront and constantly stressed and enacted their beliefs regarding the ability of each child to succeed. District leaders also have a responsibility to identify practices, policies and programmes that may hinder the achievement of equity throughout a district. Research on high performing districts found that armed with such audit information, district leaders helped to ensure that schools with the greatest need received needed resources. As Darling-Hammond and her colleagues point out in the chapter on San Diego's reform, central office leaders took an alternate stance from the state by providing more support rather than sanctioning its most underperforming schools. Honig and Hatch (2004), however, caution that it may be counterproductive to school improvement if the central office provides the goals and strategies for schools as opposed to enabling individual schools to develop and implement their goals and strategies. Furthermore, many district central offices may not have the staff, knowledge-base or fiscal ability to sufficiently support school improvement. In other words, there may need to be a healthy balance and a dynamic tension between districtwide goals for student achievement and school-level autonomy that allows each school to reflect its unique strengths and circumstances even as it pursues the unified district direction. The district may need to be tactical about what decisions are made where and what responsibilities follow as it creates a process to accelerate system-wide school improvement.

Overview of the Book

Part 1 of the book, including this introductory chapter and chapter 1 by Charles Teddlie and Sam Stringfield on the history of school improvement research in the USA, provides an historical review of school improvement and sets the broader context for subsequent chapters. Chapter 1, although focused on research in the US, is valuable in showing what has been learned collectively over many studies and many school improvement efforts. Although using standardized test measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the authors acknowledge it might be easy to conclude that little progress has been made in school improvement; however, they caution that what has been learned in the last hundred years about school reform designs and processes lays a valid and viable foundation for substantial gains in the future.

Part 2 of the book features a series of case studies of school improvement that reflect Phase 2 and Phase 3 school improvement work in multiple contexts

including the US, England, Hong Kong, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. The foci of these chapters is at the individual school level and on the particular programmatic and procedural aspects of school improvement. Part 2 begins with a description of the Success for All programme by Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden. The chapter reflects one of the more powerful and well-documented 'off the shelf' school improvement programmes that epitomized Phase Two school improvement work. This chapter is followed by the David Reynolds, Sam Stringfield and Eugene Schaffer chapter on the High Reliability Schools Project (HRSP), which captures the beginning of Phase 3 school improvement work in which a design team (university based consultants) work with a school team to co-create the reform and school improvement plan. The focus of the HRSP is less on a programme and more on developing the knowledge and skills of school staff to deepen the quality and effectiveness of school improvement processes. In other words, the chapter addresses how schools might be able to ensure high quality teaching in every classroom every day.

Chapter 4, by Paul Clarke, Mel Ainscow and Mel West highlights the implementation of the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) school improvement project. The IQEA model has elements of Phase Two design in its strong focus on organizational components of school improvement, but also equally focuses on Phase Three dimensions by engaging school staff in a deliberate, sustained process of inquiry, which helps to surface underlying beliefs and practices that may be hindering student learning, thus addressing both organization and outcomes. The chapter illustrates how the model has been implemented in two very different contexts: Moldova and Hong Kong. Chapter 5 in Part 2 by Louise Stoll, Bert Creemers and Gerry Reezigt reports on another Phase 3 initiative: the linking of the school effectiveness and school improvement paradigms in a multi-national European project, the Capacity for Change and Adaptation in the Case of Effective School Improvement (ESI). This study is important in illustrating the power of context in shaping school improvement in varying national contexts. For example, Portugal has no word for 'accountability' and Greece is so highly centralized that the idea of local school improvement has little meaning. This chapter adds greatly to the richness of our understanding of school improvement in varied contexts and shows there is no one best approach. In short, school context matters.

Part 3 of the book provides a shift in focus and examines systemic change as a lens for looking at school improvement. The chapters in this section highlight what we have called the fourth phase of school improvement. They help illuminate through case studies this Phase 4 with its focus on national, regional and district level initiatives to support school improvement in Canada, England, South Africa and the US. Part 3 begins with a systemic initiative undertaken by the province of Manitoba (Canada) to improve schools. Chapter 6 by Lorna Earl, Nancy Torrance and Stephanie Sutherland, *Changing Secondary Schools Is Hard*, describes steps used to guide the improvement process and the evaluation of the results from teacher perspectives. This province-wide systemic high

school improvement initiative is unique because it involved a private foundation that networked secondary schools and provided support for their improvement efforts.

Chapter 7 by Linda Darling-Hammond, Amy Hightower, Jennifer Husbands, Jeannette LaFors, Viki Young and Carl Christopher investigates the vigorous path of district reform pursued by San Diego (California, USA) Unified School District. This chapter considers the role that improving teaching can have in bridging the gap between an outside and an inside perspective of school improvement. San Diego's top-down approach and radical reorganization of the central office to provide more support to schools brought initial increases in learning gains. This district reform approach focused on investing heavily in building the capacity of teachers and administrators; however, the approach has met resistance, especially from the teachers union, and may not have created the ongoing teacher support needed for long-term sustainability.

Chapter 8, authored by Chrysan Gallucci, Michael Knapp, Anneke Markholt and Suzanne Ort, investigates district guided school improvement in New York City. In *Standards-based Reform and Small Schools of Choice: How Reform Theories Converge in Three Urban Middle Schools*, these authors continue the important discussion of the inside-out and outside-in debate. The chapter illustrates that it is possible for schools to carry out school reform within the context of somewhat competing theories of change. The authors found that having school-designed reforms to foster professional learning create closer teacher-student relationships, and shared responsibility for student achievement can set the stage for successful implementation of district guided standard-based reform.

In chapter 9, Brahm Fleisch explores school district development in South Africa. Districts are now charged with assisting schools to become self-managing (and eventually self-reliant and not needing the district) and at the same time to meet the demands for higher achievement and central accountability. Fleisch presents various models that districts are pursuing to develop themselves. The chapter is valuable in sharing the lessons learned from a part of the world that faces extremely challenging circumstances as it works to educate children who for too long were left on the margins and now face the scourge of AIDS.

Chapter 10 by Janet Chrispeels and Margarita González describes a systemic model of school development undertaken through a partnership between one school district and a university to implement a comprehensive districtwide reform initiative in California (USA). The model, based on an Effective Schools framework, engaged teachers and administrators at multiple levels of the system simultaneously – district-level alignment of curriculum to state standards, leadership development for administrators, leadership team training for school leadership teams and grade-level facilitation to engage teachers in collaboratively examining student work and planning lessons. The results of this three-year initiative showed promising upward trends in student achievement growth in schools fully implementing all aspects of the system-wide reform; however, the opposition of the teachers union was inadequately addressed.

Part 3 also includes two chapters that surface a potentially new form of system reform for school improvement: networked learning communities. The first example, chapter 6, described previously, represented a small-scale network fostered through the work of a private foundation in Manitoba (Canada) that assisted with implementing the province's high school reform initiative. The second example, chapter 11, by David Jackson, Director of Networked Learning, describes a large, multi-level and fast-developing system of networked learning communities being sponsored by the National College of School Leadership in England. This chapter provides an exciting new model for bringing schools together to support each other's learning in the arduous task of school improvement. The chapter highlights the challenges and possibilities of this new form of systemic change and school development.

Part 4 concludes the book with lessons that can be drawn across these important and varied examples of school improvement and highlights directions of future development and for future research.

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1

A Brief History of School Improvement Research in the USA¹

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Any adequate preface to a description of school improvement efforts in the USA within an international framework should begin with two American contextual considerations: the size/diversity of the nation and our history of seeking change in the name of improvement. The easier of these to explain is size. The USA has over 280,000,000 citizens, living in 50 states plus Washington, DC. Our decentralization of education has resulted in the creation of over 15,000 local education authorities (LEAs), with dozens of them serving fewer than one hundred students to one serving over one million students. In the majority of school districts in the USA, the greatest numbers of students are of European extraction; however, there are hundreds of districts serving majorities of students that are of Central or South American or African extraction. Levels of per-student funding in school districts in the USA vary by almost 300 per cent.

A recent analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores (Flanagan and Grissmer, 2002) indicated that students attending suburban and rural districts in the Northeastern and Midwestern regions of the USA are scoring at levels equivalent to the highest scoring nations on the Third International Math and Science Studies (TIMSS). On the other hand, some urban districts in the USA are scoring in ranges more often seen in third world countries. On a wide range of input, process and output educational issues, the USA is perhaps the most diverse nation on earth. It follows that virtually any effort at declaring a generalization about school improvement in the USA must be assumed to have nearly as many 'exceptions' as 'rules'.

A second fundamental characteristic of the USA generally, and of educational

reform efforts specifically, is our tendency to embrace a wide range of change efforts in the name of improvement. Over a century and a half ago, a still-widely-quoted visitor from France observed that Americans,

have a lively faith in the perfectibility of man, they judge that the diffusion of knowledge must necessarily be advantageous, and the consequences of ignorance fatal; they all consider society as a body in a state of improvement, humanity as a changing scene, in which nothing is, or ought to be, permanent; and they admit that what appears to them today to be good, may be superseded by something better tomorrow.

(de Tocqueville, 1835: part 1; chapter 3)

Whatever the other costs and benefits of such a trait, the USA's national character is nearly ideal for the production of a wide range of restless criticism of whatever is perceived to be the status quo, coupled with demands for 'new' school improvement efforts. Consider, for example the following two quotes from respected educational observers. The first is from a former president of Harvard University:

[T]he main characteristic of instruction [in public schools] is dullness, a complete lack of human interest . . . That is the condition of too many children in American schools – not the condition for half an hour, but the chronic condition, day after day and month after month.

(Eliot, 1898: 184)

And 86 years later, describing the results of hundreds of hours of classroom observations in a large-scale national study, one of our foremost educational researchers noted the following:

Only rarely . . . did we see activities likely to arouse students' curiosity or to invoke them in seeking solutions to problems not already laid bare by teacher or textbook . . . Boredom is a disease of epidemic proportion.

(Goodlad, 1984: 236–42)

As de Tocqueville observed about Americans and a range of our institutions, we perpetually are both unsatisfied by the current status of our schools and seeking improvements.

School Improvement Research Conducted before the 1970s

Given a nation of such size and a general drive to change, it is hardly surprising that the USA has a relatively long and well-documented history of 'scientific' efforts at school improvement. The first large-scale, cross-state effort began at the 1930 meeting of the Progressive Education Association. Not lacking for ambition,

this group declared the goal of fundamentally reforming American high schools. The group would provide ‘Curriculum Associates’ who would work with a range of schools. They conducted a national search for 30 particularly promising initial sites, and found a control school for each experimental site. The 30 schools did away with much of their previously existing curricula, and replaced it, as much as possible, with more ‘relevant’ topics. While some new courses were no doubt highly rigorous, others had such titles as ‘Social Dancing’ and ‘Football from a Spectator’s View’. Detailed qualitative and quasi-experimental quantitative data revealed that, in general, the students from the 30 pilot schools performed at no higher levels in college (the stated, desired outcome) than students from the control schools (Aikin, 1942). However, in an analysis that presaged subsequent analyses of educational reforms in the USA, the research team conducted a separate, follow-up analysis of the results from the six schools that the research team believed, in retrospect, to have been the strongest implementing sites, and then focused a great deal of discussion on that sub-group’s somewhat greater long-term effects.

One unintended effect of the Eight-Year Study seems to have been a dampening of interest in studies of large-scale change. It was a generation before additional large-scale school reform studies were again attempted.

Educational Change Studies in the 1970s and early 1980s

School improvement research in the 1960s in the USA was limited to curriculum reform, which we will not discuss in this chapter owing to space constraints. This period has been succinctly described elsewhere as follows:

The disciplinary area of school improvement has gone through a number of phases. The first phase, which dates from the mid-1960s, was the emphasis on the *adoption of curriculum materials*. On both sides of the Atlantic, the curriculum reform movement was intended to have a major impact on student achievement through the production and dissemination of exemplary curriculum materials. Although the materials were often of high quality, being produced by teams of academics and psychologists, in the main they failed to have an impact on teaching. The reason in hindsight is obvious; teachers were not included in the production process and the in-service that accompanied the new curricula was often perfunctory and rudimentary. Teachers simply took what they thought was of use from the new materials and integrated them into their own teaching. The curriculum innovation, however, was consequently subverted.

(Reynolds *et al.*, 2000: 208, italics in original)

Follow Through Classroom Observation Evaluation (FTCOE)

Several large-scale school reform studies were conducted in the USA in the 1970s and early 1980s. They examined the factors that facilitate or inhibit change in educational settings, including leadership roles and local contexts. Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974) conducted the FTCOE, which was the first effort to gather detailed classroom observational data in a large number of schools that were attempting to implement diverse reforms. The authors made repeated observations in a range of classes and schools attempting six very diverse, federally-funded reform designs. Unfortunately, funding for the development and dissemination of the designs was being cut even as the study began, and hence observations were conducted at sites that were attempting implementation even as the reforms were being designed. In most instances, the result was far-from-ideal support for the reforms, and equally far-from-full implementation of the designs.

However, FTCOE did demonstrate that classroom-level comparisons among diverse designs were possible, and that the more fully developed and structured designs tended to produce both more nearly consistent implementation and somewhat greater student achievement.

Rand Change Agent Study

Another well-known, large-scale study of the period was the Rand Change Agent Study (e.g. Berman and McLaughlin, 1976, 1978), which focused on three stages of the change process: initiation, implementation and incorporation. The study revealed the importance of local contexts in the implementation process:

Contrary to the one-to-one relationship assumed to exist between policy and practice, the Change Agent study demonstrated that the nature, amount, and pace of change at the local level was a product of local factors that were largely beyond the control of higher-level policymakers.

(McLaughlin, 1990: 12)

The authors concluded that there were four implications of this general observation:

- policy cannot mandate what matters
- the level of implementation dominates outcomes
- local variability is the rule, and
- uniformity is the exception.

Although policies may set directions and provide a framework for change, they cannot determine outcomes. It is implementation, rather than the decision to adopt a new policy, that tends to predict gains in student achievement.

In a retrospective reflection on the Rand Change Agent Study, McLaughlin

(1990) concluded that several contextual and strategic factors facilitated educational change, including the following:

- a receptive institutional setting or organizational climate
- a critical mass of teachers to support and motivate each other
- the active support of the principal
- teacher training that was specific, concrete and ongoing
- teacher observation of more experienced peers in other classrooms
- regular project meetings that focused on practical issues and
- teacher participation in project decision-making.

Successful implementation of projects in the Rand Change Agent Study required adaptation of the reform to the local context. Principal support was crucial. When teachers perceived that the principal liked a project and actively supported it, the project fared well. While the role of the external change agents was important, the involvement of the principal was even more important to the project's success.

Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement (DESSI)

One of the largest and most ambitious studies of educational change ever attempted in the USA was the DESSI study (Crandall and Loucks, 1983). Data for DESSI were gathered in 146 local sites spread over 10 states. Questionnaire data were gathered from over 3,000 teachers. Interviews were conducted with 393 teachers, 146 building administrators and 138 district administrators.

DESSI was so large, so methodologically diverse, and produced so many reports, that it defies simple summary. However, two particular additions to the school improvement field came from DESSI:

- Local accommodations (in conjunction with design teams) of externally developed school improvement design are more likely to result in (a) classroom-level implementation and/or (b) changes in achievement than are locally developed school improvement efforts.
- Teacher 'ownership' of reforms, previously identified as critical to reform success, is not an all-or-nothing beginning state. Rather, ownership comes through months and years of engagement working to implement a reform. Both in DESSI and the Rand study noted above, the authors concluded that belief and commitment tended to follow successful practice, rather than the other way around (for review, see Nunnery, 1998).

The research community tended to interpret the results of these large-scale reform efforts as indicating that local conditions and actions were more important than the characteristics of specific reform designs. This conclusion paved the way for interest in a newly emerging field – school effects.

School Improvement Research Based on Effective Schools Research (1970s to early 1990s)

Effective schools research (ESR) began in the 1970s contemporaneous with the educational change studies described in the previous section. The researchers conducting these effective schools studies often wrote with an advocacy tone (i.e. equity in schooling for the disadvantaged), seeking to create better educational opportunities for the urban poor (e.g. Weber, 1971; Brookover and Lezotte, 1979; Venezky and Winfield, 1979; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b; Lezotte and Bancroft, 1985).

Cawelti (2003) recently declared Edmonds' research to be one of the 11 studies that has had 'the greatest impact on education' over the past 50 years, to a large degree because the initial results have often been replicated:

Edmonds showed that high achievement correlated very strongly with strong administration, high expectations for student achievement, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on basic skills acquisition, and frequent monitoring of student progress. Although some scholars scoffed at this research's lack of rigor, several investigators replicated the research by using these findings, and the study influenced thousands of educators working in schools in which students from low-income families tended to achieve less well than others.

(Cawelti, 2003: 19)

School change agents immediately took Edmonds' five correlates and translated them into improvement models in large urban districts such as Milwaukee (McCormack-Larkin and Kritek, 1982; McCormack-Larkin, 1985) and New York (Clark and McCarthy, 1983). Edmonds was instrumental in developing the New York City School Improvement project, which had three components: school-based planning, a school liaison role and a focus on the five school effectiveness correlates. Similarly, Milwaukee's RISE (Rising to Individual Scholastic Excellence) project utilized six factors that were called the 'essential elements of effective schooling'.

Brookover and his colleagues (1982) developed an in-service programme for school improvement based on ESR and other research related to

- grouping students for instruction
- effective teaching (including academic engaged time-on-task)
- classroom management
- co-operative learning
- principles of reinforcement, and
- parental involvement.

This 11-module programme became the foundation for many research-based school improvement projects throughout the USA in the 1980s.

Taylor (1990) presented a dozen case studies of local schools and school dis-

tricts that had implemented improvement programmes based on ESR. These studies were drawn from hundreds of such projects that were ongoing across the USA in the 1980s. These case studies included projects in Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland (Murphy and Wyant, 1990), San Pascal Union School District in California (Chrispeels and Beall, 1990), and in Spenceport, New York (Sudlow, 1990). Lezotte (1990: 196–8) summarized several lessons learned from these case studies, including the following:

- *Planning and implementing programmes of school improvement does not follow a recipe or formula* – improvement projects based on ESR are not 'prepackaged programmes'; rather, they involve changes in the processes ongoing at specific, context-bound schools (e.g. D'Amico, 1982).
- *School improvement is a complex and ongoing process that requires patience and persistence* – there are few, if any, 'quick fixes'; rather, staff members must be prepared for the 'long haul' of ongoing school improvement.
- *Teacher improvement can work if the mission is clear and if time and other resources are available to support school-based planning and training processes* – this 'lesson learned' acknowledges the importance of processes ongoing at the classroom level, as well as at the school level.

The importance of the ESR model for school improvement during the 1980s and early 1990s was demonstrated with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1988 (known as the 'Hawkins-Stafford Amendments', in honour of the key Congressional authors). This legislation specifically mandated the use of the effective schools 'correlates' in improvement programmes funded with ESEA chapter 1 and chapter 2 monies (General Accounting Office, 1989).

The significance of context variables in the generation of the effectiveness status of schools was demonstrated in a series of school effectiveness research (SER) studies conducted during the 1980s and into the 1990s (e.g. Teddlie and Stringfield, 1985; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986). Context factors explicitly studied in these SER studies included

- the socio-economic status of students attending schools
- the community type of school
- the grade phases of schooling, and
- the governance structure of schools.

Differentiated recommendations for school improvement models based on this 'context sensitive' SER appeared in the literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993). As Wimpelberg, Teddlie and Stringfield (1989: 85) noted:

Context was elevated as a critical issue because the conclusions about the nature, behavior, and internal characteristics of the effective (urban

elementary) schools either did not fit the intuitive understanding that people had about other schools or were not replicated in the findings of research on secondary and higher socio-economic status (SES) schools.

The original five correlates of effective schooling were expanded to a nine-component 'process model' by the end of the 20th century as the ESR literature grew and more sophisticated research was completed (e.g. Bickel, 1990; Reynolds and Teddlie, 2000; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). More recently, results from ESR have been used, both implicitly and explicitly, in the formulation of nationally and locally developed Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) programmes. Many locally developed programmes (which are mandated to be research-tested, research-based and comprehensive – but often are not) utilize the well-publicized effective schools model.

School Improvement Research Based on School Restructuring (1990s)

The School Restructuring era in the USA began in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the publication of several important articles and books on the topic (e.g. Elmore, 1988, 1991; Lewis, 1989; Murphy, 1991, 1992). The School Restructuring era eventually gave way to Comprehensive School Reform, which swept the USA following the passage of the ESEA Title I amendments of the late 1990s. Thus, the era of school improvement in the USA associated with school restructuring is restricted to the decade of the 1990s (more specifically the late 1980s through the 1990s).

The primary messages of the School Restructuring era were (a) that previous school improvement efforts had been too limited in nature and (b) that true educational reform required 'restructuring' of the basic organization of schools. There was also a change in orientation from equity to economy in school improvement research in the USA in the 1990s; that is, reformers' emphasis was no longer aimed at schools serving the disadvantaged, but instead was oriented toward creating schools that would generate the workforce needed for the 21st century (e.g. Bickel, 1998). Much of the impetus for this growing economic orientation in school improvement was the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *A Nation Prepared* (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986) in the 1980s.

School Restructuring refers to school improvement efforts that are based on a rather wide range of changes in the basic organizational structure of schools, including the empowering of teachers and of parents. Numerous interventions have been associated with restructuring (e.g. Louis and Smith, 1991; Chrispeels, 1992; Murphy and Beck, 1995; Newmann and Wehlege, 1995), including:

- site-based management or SBM (i.e. basic changes in the organization of school systems and schools, such that control is decentralized to the local school)

- changes in the structure of teaching (e.g. interdisciplinary team teaching)
- greater parental involvement in schools
- more flexible scheduling, and
- more sensitive measures of accountability (e.g. portfolio assessment).

This school change ‘movement’ enjoyed great popularity in the USA especially in the early and mid-1990s, when most large school districts underwent some form of ‘restructuring’. Well-publicized restructuring projects based on SBM were reported in Dade County, Florida; Chicago, San Diego and New York City, among many other sites. The popularity of the movement and the multiple operational definitions of the interventions, however, caused difficulties in measuring the actual impact of school restructuring especially with regard to student outcomes. While there was some evidence of successful school restructuring (e.g. Newmann and Wehlege, 1995), many reviewers have been disappointed with the overall research evidence regarding the success of restructuring efforts for a variety of reasons:

- The interventions were often too ‘scattergun’ in nature and therefore it was difficult for researchers to determine what intervention caused what effect in restructured schools. Interventions were often interwoven to the degree that it was impossible to determine the effect of a single ‘treatment’ such as SBM (e.g. Murphy and Beck, 1995).
- There was evidence that the interventions implemented in restructuring projects often did not actually deliver the key components of the proposed reform (e.g. Berends, 1992; Fullan, 1993).
- Fullan (1993) concluded that the reforms from restructuring efforts often did not penetrate the ‘learning core’ of the schools and classrooms based on several research studies (e.g. Taylor and Teddlie, 1992; Weiss, 1992).

While the research evidence for restructuring schools may be inconclusive, there is no doubt that the theoretical and political work associated with restructuring has had an impact on schools in the USA. For instance, there are now omnipresent school improvement teams (school councils, etc.) throughout the USA, with requisite teacher and parent representation, which are theoretically ‘empowered’ to run the schools. These teams are often mandated by state legislation or district policy, and in some cases perform the intended functions.

School Improvement Research Based on Comprehensive School Reform (late 1990s to today)

The decade of the 1990s also witnessed the emergence of whole-school reform, special strategies for school reform and, lastly CSR, which is now the most commonly used term for improvement efforts that engage the entire school. The federally funded Title I programme, which is earmarked for schools that serve

the economically disadvantaged, has played a major role in the evolution of CSR as the primary vehicle for school improvement research in the USA today. The steps in this evolution are as follows:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created the initial Title I programme, which for the first time provided federal funds to decrease funding disparities between schools serving affluent and economically disadvantaged districts, and hence to increase the achievement of low-income children (e.g. Borman and D'Agostino, 1996).
- Following several well-documented cases of local misuse of Title I funds, Congress mandated that these funds be used to 'supplement' not 'supplant' state and local funding. In efforts to keep federal monies clearly separate from local funds, districts often adopted policies of removing students from class for part of the day to receive 'special' Title I services in small groups. These programmes became known as 'pull-outs'. In theory, this pull-out process would result in students receiving completely supplementary service (Angelle, 2001). Such 'pull-out' programmes were subsequently criticized for stigmatizing low-achieving students and for being generally ineffective.
- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ESEA rules were changed to allow districts to implement schoolwide programmes, which permitted federal funds to be used for all the students in schools that served large percentages of economically disadvantaged students, not just the lowest achieving students in those schools (Wong and Meyer, 1998).
- Several whole-school reforms designs (e.g. Accelerated Schools, Success for All, New American Schools) began development and dissemination activities during the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Slavin *et al.*, 1990; Stringfield, Ross and Smith, 1996; Slavin and Madden, 2001).
- The passage of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration amendments to the federal Title I legislation (the 'Obey-Porter Amendments') provided additional federal funding to districts, particularly those with Title I schools, to implement whole-school reform models. These competitively funded CSR funds have grown from \$145 million in 1997 to \$310 million in 2002 (Success for All Foundation, 2002). These funds have been used to stimulate implementation of school improvement projects associated with national and local CSR designs.

The 1998 Obey-Porter Amendments were an example of legislation – and funding – at least partially following research. Stringfield, Millsap and Herman (1997) had recently completed a study of 10 'promising programmes'. The Special Strategies studies owed much methodologically to the earlier works of Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974) and Crandall and Loucks (1983), in that they followed a variety of schools attempting to implement either nationally- or locally-developed reforms. However, two major differences in Special Strategies were that (a) the reforms were relatively well developed prior to data gathering and (b) the sites were nominated as being relatively strong implementations of the diverse reforms.

Findings from Special Strategies replicated many aspects of prior research in highlighting the importance of site-level leadership and high quality professional development. The authors further concluded:

- that whole-school change efforts were more effective than ‘pull-out’ or otherwise targeted programmes
- that early-elementary reforms tended to produce greater measured change than reforms focused on later grades, and
- that externally developed designs were both more likely to obtain coherent implementation and to produce measurable positive results, thereby replicating the results from DESSI.

Building on the various studies of ‘promising reforms’ of the past 20 years, Borman *et al.* (2003) conducted a large-scale meta-analysis of the effects of specific whole-school reform designs. Their analyses included over 300 studies based on 29 different reform designs, ranging from reforms focused on primary grades through high school. Their analyses most clearly point to the need for additional highly rigorous research, and also echoed earlier research in indicating a great deal of within-design outcome variance, hence suggesting the importance of local co-construction. However, the authors also identified three reform designs that could be described as having reasonably solid supporting evidence of effects on student outcomes. We believe that further studies will make similarly strong cases for other, research-based reform designs.

Conclusions from School Improvement Research Conducted in the USA

Several themes run through the near-century of school improvement research in the USA. These may be summarized as follows:

1 *While stability in both processes and outcomes tends to be the rule, meaningful improvement is tantalizingly possible.* Long-term NAEP analyses clearly demonstrate the national-level stability of educational outcomes in the USA (e.g. Campbell, Holbo and Mazzeo, 2000), yet every major study of educational change in the last century found positive examples of change. Clearly, individual schools can and do improve measurably. Equally clearly, the national norm has tended toward stability.

2 *The importance of a clearly defined intervention or set of interventions.* Consistently, researchers have found that vague philosophical goals, however laudable in the abstract, tend to vaporize in the crucible of the American classroom. One advantage of some – though not all – externally-developed reform designs, is that the developers have had decades of experience honing the particulars of their intervention.

3 *The importance of the local context.* As noted in the introduction, teachers, schools, school districts and states in the USA vary tremendously. Just as there is not one 'right' engine for all trucks, buses, cars and motorcycles, there is not one 'right' reform for all schools. Material resources, human capacities, prior experiences with change and belief systems all vary across schools, and within schools, over time. In study after study, context matters.

4 *The co-constructed nature (by school staff and school improvement teams) of the reality of the interventions.* Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) examined a range of school improvement efforts and found that the more successful of them tended to involve local teachers and administrators adapting external research and development efforts so that it will work well in the local context. Given the complexity of modern schools, this finding points to the next item (5).

5 *The importance of strong focused leadership at the school site.* Whether the studies have been of 'school effects' or 'promising programmes' or 'school restructuring', a very nearly universal finding in change efforts in the USA has been the need for strong, academically focused principal leadership.

6 *The importance of ongoing teacher support.* Students don't learn at the principal's knee or that of the reform designer. They learn in a classroom, under the direct tutelage of a teacher. If the teacher is not provided with ongoing professional development on topics relevant to the intersection of the reform's goals and the teacher's areas of needed growth, the teacher is unlikely to grow.

7 *The need to focus on processes as well as outcomes* when assessing the success of the programme. Desired outcomes do not 'just happen', or happen because someone focuses attention on them. Effective practices and processes produce outcomes. A focus just on process tends to produce more processes, but not higher outcomes. A focus on outcomes that ignores processes tends to produce few generalizable results in either.

It would be possible to end this chapter on a relatively discouraging note. Studies have documented many more cases of school improvement efforts not resulting in either process or student outcome changes than in the obviously desired alternative. Results from NAEP have indicated little to no national progress in most areas over the past quarter century of unparalleled reform efforts. We believe that such a lack of optimism would be a misreading of research's history.

In 'Medical lessons from history', Lewis Thomas (1979) described how many medical historians trace the astounding progress of 20th-century medicine to a series of advances from the 1930s (sulfa drugs, penicillin, etc.). In gently disagreeing, Thomas documented how a century's careful research conducted prior to the 1930s had built inextricably toward the astounding medical advances of the 20th century. We believe that much of the careful educational research of the 20th century has produced the potential to lead to substantially improved reform

ideas and designs, to more reliable implementation of those reforms, and to more rigorous research on reforms affecting all students in the USA. We believe that the potential now exists for substantial, school-based, systemically supported educational improvement in the USA.

Notes

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- 2 Funding from the Institute for Educational Research, US Department of Education (Grant No, OERI-R-117-D40005) supported Stringfield's writing for this chapter. However, the opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent positions or policies of IES.

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Part 2

School Improvement: Phases 2 and 3

2

Success for All

Research and Reform in Reading¹

Robert E. Slavin and Nancy A. Madden

Success for All Foundation

What does it mean to succeed in the early grades? The primary school's definition of success, and therefore the parents' and children's definition as well, is overwhelmingly success in reading. Very few children who are reading adequately are retained, assigned to special education or given long-term remedial services. Other subjects are important, of course, but reading and language arts form the core of what school success means in the early grades.

When a child fails to read well in the early grades, he or she begins a downward progression. In Year 1, some children begin to notice that they are not reading adequately. They may be held back or assigned to long-term remediation. As they proceed through the primary grades, many students begin to see that they are failing. When this happens, things begin to unravel. Failing students begin to have poor motivation and poor self-expectations, which lead to continued poor achievement, in a declining spiral that leads ultimately to despair, delinquency and drop-out. Remediating learning deficits after they are already well established is extremely difficult. Children who have already failed to learn to read, for example, are now anxious about reading, and doubt their ability to learn it. Their motivation to read may be low. They may ultimately learn to read but it will always be a chore, not a pleasure. Clearly, the time to provide additional help to children who are at risk is early, when children are still motivated and confident and when any learning deficits are relatively small and remediable. The

most important goal in educational programming for students at risk of school failure is to try to make certain that we do not squander the greatest resource we have – the enthusiasm and positive self-expectations of young children themselves. In practical terms, what this perspective implies is that schools must shift from an emphasis on remediation to an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Prevention means providing developmentally appropriate kindergarten (reception) programmes so that students will enter Year 1 ready to succeed, and it means providing regular classroom teachers with effective instructional programmes, curricula and professional development to enable them to see that most students are successful the first time they are taught. Early intervention means that supplementary instructional services are provided early in students' schooling and that they are intensive enough to bring at-risk students quickly to a level at which they can profit from good quality classroom instruction. The purpose of this review is to describe the current state of research on the achievement outcomes of Success for All (SFA), a programme built around the idea that every child can and must succeed in the early grades, no matter what this takes. The idea behind SFA is using everything we know about effective instruction for students at risk to direct all aspects of school and classroom organization toward the goal of preventing academic deficits from appearing in the first place; recognizing and intensively intervening with any deficits that do appear; and providing students with a rich and full curriculum to enable them to build on their firm foundation in basic skills. The commitment of SFA is to do whatever it takes to see that every child becomes a skilled, strategic and enthusiastic reader.

Success for All: Programme Description

Success for All began in one Baltimore primary school in 1987–8, and since then has expanded each year to additional schools. As of Spring 2003, the programme is in about 1,500 schools in 500 districts in 48 states throughout the United States, and has been adapted for use in schools in England, Canada, Mexico, Australia and Israel. In England, there are Success for All schools in London, Nottingham, Hull, Derbyshire, Essex and Leeds. Almost all Success for All schools serve high-poverty communities, with an average of 80 per cent of children qualifying for free meals.

Success for All has somewhat different components at different sites, depending on the school's needs and resources available to implement the programme. However, there is a common set of elements characteristic of all Success for All schools. These are described below (adapted from Slavin and Madden, 2001).

Programme Components

Although the materials used in England have been extensively revised to adapt to National Literary Standards as well as both the language and the cultural content

of England, the structural components are essentially the same as they are in the US. These are described in the following sections.

Reception

The current version of the Success for All programme for reception is called KinderCorner. This programme focuses on providing a balanced and developmentally appropriate learning experience for young children. The curriculum emphasizes the development and use of language. It provides a balance of academic readiness, emphasizing phonemic awareness and alphabet awareness and non-academic music, art and movement activities in a series of thematic units. Readiness activities include a programme called Story Telling and Retelling (STaR) in which students retell stories read by the teachers. More formal pre-reading activities begin during the second semester of kindergarten, incorporating a beginning reading programme called KinderRoots, described in the following section.

Beginning reading

Success for All uses a reading curriculum based on research and effective practices in beginning reading (e.g. Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000), and on effective use of co-operative learning (Stevens *et al.*, 1987; Slavin, 1995).

Reading teachers at every grade level begin the reading time by reading children's literature to students and engaging them in a discussion of the story to enhance their understanding of it, listening and speaking vocabulary and knowledge of story structure. In reception and Year 1, there is also a strong emphasis on phonemic awareness activities which help develop auditory discrimination and supports the development of reading readiness strategies, and students are taught alphabet and sound blending in a programme called FastTrack Phonics.

KinderRoots is typically introduced in the second semester of the reception year. In Year 1, this beginning reading programme is called Reading Roots. It uses as its base a series of phonetically regular but meaningful and interesting minibooks, and emphasizes repeated oral reading to partners as well as to the teacher. The minibooks begin with a set of 'shared stories', in which part of a story is written in small type (read by the teacher) and part is written in large type (read by the students). The student portion uses a phonetically controlled vocabulary. Taken together, the teacher and student portions create interesting, worthwhile stories. Over time, the teacher portion diminishes and the student portion lengthens, until students are reading the entire book. This scaffolding allows students to read interesting literature when they have only a few letter sounds.

Letters and letter sounds are introduced in an active, engaging set of activities that begins with oral language and moves into written symbols. Individual sounds are integrated into a context of words, sentences and stories. Instruction is provided in story structure, specific comprehension skills, metacognitive strategies for self-assessment and self-correction, and integration of reading and writing. Specific adaptations are made for English-language learners being taught in English.

When students reach the Year 2 reading level, they use a programme called Reading Wings, an adaptation of Co-operative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) (Stevens *et al.*, 1987). Reading Wings uses co-operative learning activities built around story structure, prediction, summarization, vocabulary building, decoding practice and story-related writing. Students engage in partner reading and structured discussion of stories or novels, and work in teams toward mastery of the vocabulary and content of the story. Story-related writing is also shared within teams. Co-operative learning both increases students' motivation and engages students in cognitive activities known to contribute to reading comprehension, such as elaboration, summarization and rephrasing (see Slavin, 1995). Research on CIRC has found it to significantly increase students' reading comprehension and language skills (Stevens *et al.*, 1987).

In addition to these story-related activities, teachers provide direct instruction in reading comprehension skills, and students practice these skills in their teams. Classroom libraries of trade books at students' reading levels are provided for each teacher, and students read books of their choice for homework for 20 minutes each night. Home readings are shared via presentations, summaries, puppet shows and other formats twice a week during 'book club' sessions.

Materials to support Reading Wings throughout Year 6 are built around children's literature and around the most widely used basal series and anthologies. Beginning in the second semester of programme implementation, Success for All schools usually implement a writing/language arts programme based primarily on co-operative learning principles (see Stevens *et al.*, 1987).

Students in Years 1 to 6 are regrouped for reading. The students are assigned to heterogeneous, age-grouped classes most of the day, but during a regular 90-minute reading period they are regrouped by reading performance levels into reading classes of students all at the same level. For example, a reading class might contain Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 pupils all reading at the same level. The reading classes are smaller than homerooms because tutors and other certified staff (such as librarians or art teachers) teach reading during this common reading period. Regrouping allows teachers to teach the whole reading class without having to break the class into reading groups. The regrouping is a form of the Joplin Plan, which has been found to increase reading achievement in the primary grades (Slavin, 1987; Gutiérrez and Slavin, 1992).

Eight-week Reading Assessments

At eight-week intervals, reading teachers assess student progress through the reading programme. The results of the assessments are used to determine who is to receive tutoring, to change students' reading groups, to suggest other adaptations in students' programmes, and to identify students who need other types of assistance, such as family interventions or screening for vision and hearing problems. The assessments are curriculum-based measures that include teacher observations and judgements as well as more formal measures of reading comprehension.

Reading Tutors

One of the most important elements of Success for All is the use of tutors to promote students' success in reading. One-to-one tutoring is the most effective form of instruction known (see Wasik and Slavin, 1993). The tutors are either certified teachers or well-qualified paraprofessionals. Tutors work one-on-one with students who are having difficulties keeping up with their reading groups. The tutoring occurs in 20-minute sessions during times other than reading or maths periods.

In general, tutors support students' success in the regular reading curriculum, rather than using separate materials. For example, the tutor will work with a student on the same story and concepts being read and taught in the regular reading class. However, tutors seek to identify learning problems and use different strategies to teach the same skills. They also teach metacognitive skills beyond those taught in the classroom programme. Schools may have as many as six or more teachers serving as tutors depending on school size, need for tutoring and other factors.

During daily 90-minute reading periods, certified tutors serve as additional reading teachers to reduce class size for reading. Reading teachers and tutors use brief forms to communicate about students' specific problems and needs, and meet at regular times to co-ordinate their approaches with individual children.

Initial decisions about reading group placement and the need for tutoring are based on informal reading inventories that the tutors give to each child. Subsequent reading group placements and tutoring assignments are made using the curriculum-based assessments described above. Year 1 pupils receive priority for tutoring, on the assumption that the primary function of the tutors is to help all students be successful in reading the first time before they fail and become remedial readers.

Family Support Team

Parents are an essential part of the formula for success in Success for All. A family support team works in each school, serving to make families feel comfortable in the school and become active supporters of their child's education as well as providing specific services. The family support team consists of a parent liaison, assistant principal (if any), counsellor (if any), facilitator, and any other appropriate staff already present in the school or added to the school staff.

The family support team first works toward establishing and maintaining good relations with parents and increasing parental involvement in the schools. Family support team members may complete 'welcome' visits for new families. They organize many attractive programmes in the school, such as parenting skills workshops. Most schools use a programme called Raising Readers in which parents are given strategies to use in reading with their own children. Family support teams also help teachers implement a social skills curriculum,

Getting Along Together, which emphasizes peaceful solutions to interpersonal problems.

The family support team also intervenes to solve problems. For example, team members may contact parents whose children are frequently absent to see what resources can be provided to assist the family in getting their child to school. Family support staff, teachers and parents work together to solve school behaviour problems. Also, family support staff are called on to provide assistance when students seem to be working at less than their full potential because of problems at home. Families of students who are not receiving adequate sleep or nutrition, need glasses, are not attending school regularly, or are exhibiting serious behaviour problems, may receive family-support assistance.

The family support team is strongly integrated into the academic programme of the school. It receives referrals from teachers and tutors regarding children who are not making adequate academic progress, and thereby constitutes an additional stage of intervention for students in need above and beyond that provided by the classroom teacher or tutor. The family support team also encourages and trains the parents to fulfil numerous volunteer roles within the school, ranging from providing a listening ear to emerging readers to helping in the school cafeteria.

Programme Facilitator

A programme facilitator works at each school to help oversee the operation of the Success for All model. The facilitator helps plan the programme, helps the headteacher with scheduling, and visits classes and tutoring sessions frequently to help teachers and tutors with individual problems. He or she works directly with the teachers on implementation of the curriculum, classroom management and other issues, helps teachers and tutors deal with any behaviour problems or other special problems, and co-ordinates the activities of the family support team with those of the instructional staff.

Teachers and Teacher Training

Teachers and tutors receive detailed manuals supplemented by three days of in-service training at the beginning of the school year. Throughout the year, school and classroom follow-up visits are made by trainers, and additional in-service presentations are made by the facilitators and other project staff on such topics as classroom management, instructional pace and co-operative learning. Facilitators also organize many informal sessions to allow teachers to share problems and problem solutions, suggest changes and discuss individual children. The staff development model used in Success for All emphasizes relatively brief initial training with extensive classroom follow-up, coaching and group discussion.

Special Education

Every effort is made to deal with students' learning problems within the context of the regular classroom, as supplemented by tutors. Tutors evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies to teach in the most effective way. In some schools, special education teachers work as tutors and reading teachers with students identified as learning disabled, as well as other students experiencing learning problems who are at risk for special education placement. One major goal of Success for All is to keep students with learning problems out of special education if at all possible, and to serve any students who do qualify for special education in a way that does not disrupt their regular classroom experience (see Slavin, 1996).

US Research on Success for All

Early research

The early research on Success for All used a consistent paradigm. In each case, children were pretested (usually on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) on entry to kindergarten or first grade, and then followed over time with individually administered reading tests given to all children each Spring. These were typically scales from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test and the Durrell Oral Reading Test.

From the first studies, it was clear that Success for All was making a substantial difference. Longitudinal studies of the first five schools in Baltimore found that these schools gained substantially more than matched controls, with effect sizes (ESs) averaging around 50 per cent of a standard deviation for students in general and more than a full standard deviation ($ES = +1.00$) for students who began in the lowest 25 per cent of their grades (Slavin *et al.*, 1990; Madden *et al.*, 1993; Slavin *et al.*, 1996). This paradigm was ultimately followed in schools in 11 districts around the US, and the results continued to strongly support the programme's impact (see Dianda and Flaherty, 1995; Livingston and Flaherty, 1997; Nunnery *et al.*, 1997). Figure 2.1 summarizes the impact from studies of various durations, from one to six years. The figure shows that by the end of fifth grade, students in Success for All schools were performing about a full grade equivalent higher than matched control schools on individually administered tests. In addition to effects on achievement, studies found substantial impacts on assignments to special education (Slavin, 1996) and other outcomes (Slavin *et al.*, 1996; Slavin and Madden, 2001).

Later research

After the many studies establishing the basic effects of Success for All, research attention has shifted in different directions. One line of research has focused on effects for English language learners, evaluating both a Spanish bilingual adaptation and an English language development adaptation (see Slavin and Madden,

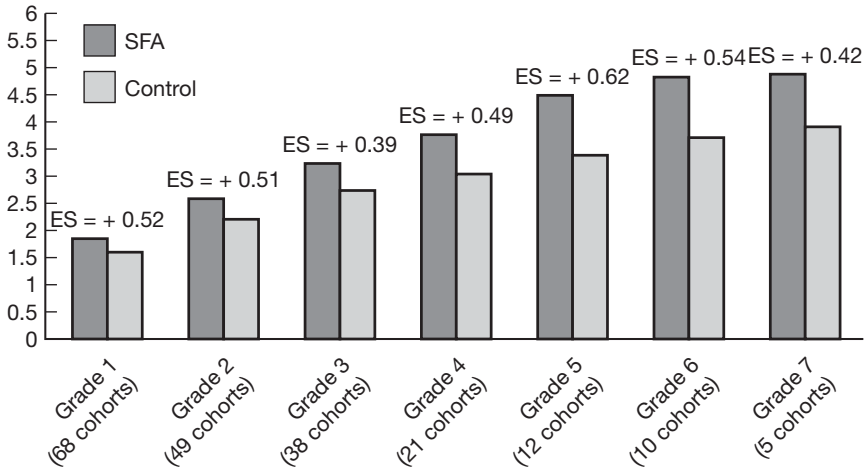


Figure 2.1 Comparison of Success for All and control schools in mean reading grade equivalents and effect sizes 1988–99

Note

Effect size (ES) is the proportion of a standard deviation by which Success for All students exceeded controls. Includes approximately 6,000 children in Success for All or control schools since first grade.

1999; Slavin and Cheung, in press). Both adaptations have been found to be effective. Research correlating quality and completeness of implementation with student outcomes has been a focus (Ross *et al.*, 1995; Nunnery *et al.*, 1997). A longitudinal follow-up of students who had been in the original Baltimore schools found that by eighth grade, these students were still performing significantly better on standardized reading measures than former control students, and were substantially less likely to have been retained in grade or assigned to special education (Borman and Hewes, 2003).

Because of demands from policy audiences, some attention has shifted to studies that take data from routine state assessments. Formal studies in Texas (Hurley *et al.*, 2001), and California (Slavin, Madden and Liang, 2002), have found substantially higher gains for Success for All students than for the state as a whole. Similar analyses have found the same patterns in nearly every state with more than 10 Success for All schools. Such comparisons are less scientific than the longitudinal experiments, but they respond to a desire from policy-makers and educators to know how the programme performs on the assessments for which they are held accountable.

As research on comprehensive reform programmes and on reading programmes has taken on greater political and practical importance, a number of reviews of the research have appeared. The American Institutes for Research (Herman, 1999) rated comprehensive reform models and found Success for All to be one of two

elementary programmes with the strongest evidence of effectiveness. This conclusion was echoed in a report for the Thomas Fordham Foundation by Traub (1999). A recent meta-analysis by Borman *et al.* (in press) identified 41 experimental-control comparisons done to evaluate Success for All, of which 25 were done by third parties. This was the largest number of such studies for any comprehensive reform model, and Borman *et al.* listed SFA as one of three programmes with strongest evidence of effectiveness. Finally, Pearson and Stahl (2002) evaluated reading programmes and gave Success for All the highest rating for evidence of effectiveness among all core reading programmes.

Randomized evaluation of Success for All

Despite the many rigorous experimental-control comparisons evaluating Success for All, these have all been matched experiments, which leaves open the possibility that selection bias or other unmeasured differences might account for some of the effects. To investigate this possibility, a randomized evaluation is currently under way, in which 41 schools were randomly assigned to use Success for All either in grades K–2 (Kindergarten to second) or in third to fifth grade. The results at the end of two years indicate positive effects in line with the earlier matched studies (Borman *et al.*, 2005).

International evaluations of Success for All adaptations

Several studies have assessed the effects of adaptations of Success for All in countries outside the United States. These adaptations have ranged from relatively minor adjustments to accommodate political and funding requirements in Canada and England to more significant adaptations in Mexico, Australia and Israel. The Canadian study (Chambers, Abrami and Morrison, 2001) involved one school in Montreal, which was compared to a matched control school on individually-administered reading measures. Results indicated significantly better reading performance in the Success for All school than in the control school, both for special needs students (a large proportion of the SFA students) and for other students.

In England, an early study of SFA schools in Nottingham found that Success for All students gained more in reading than did students in a previous cohort, before the programme was introduced (Harris *et al.*, 2001). A two-year study of five schools in Nottingham by both Hopkins, Harris and Sinanan (2002) and Tymms and Merrell (2001) found more mixed results, with improvements on Key Stage 1 Reading but not Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS). Comparisons of gains on Key Stage 2 assessments for all 11 schools that had begun SFA by Fall 2000, found gains of 6.6 percentage points in students scoring at Level 4 or better. Schools in England in general were unchanged over the same period (see Slavin and Wordsworth, 2003).

A school in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Texas, implemented the Spanish adaptation of Success for All, *Éxito Para Todos* (Calderón, 2001). This study showed substantial pre- to post-test gains for the experimental schools, but there was no control group.

Australian researchers created a substantially simplified adaptation of Success for All, which they called Schoolwide Early Language and Literacy (SWELL). SWELL uses instructional procedures much like those used in Success for All, but uses books adapted for the Australian context. Only the early grades are involved, schools do not have full-time facilitators or family support programmes, and they may or may not provide any tutoring. Two studies of SWELL found positive effects of the programme on reading performance in comparison to control groups and to Reading Recovery schools (Center *et al.*, 1997; Center, Freeman and Robertson, 2001).

Because of language and cultural differences, the most extreme adaptation of Success for All was made to use the programme in Israel with both Hebrew-speaking children in Jewish schools and Arabic-speaking children in Israeli Arab schools, all in or near the northern city of Acre. The implementation involved community interventions focusing on parent involvement, integrated services and other aspects in addition to the adapted Success for All model. In comparison to control groups, Success for All Year 1 pupils performed at significantly higher levels on tests of reading and writing (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2001).

The international studies of programmes adapted from Success for All have importance in themselves, of course, but also indicate that the principles on which Success for All are based transfer to other languages, cultures and political systems. In addition, they provide third-party evaluations of Success for All in diverse contexts, strengthening the research base for Success for All principles and practices.

Conclusion

The results of evaluations of dozens of Success for All schools in districts in all parts of the United States, as well as studies in England, Canada, Australia, Israel and Mexico, clearly show that the programme increases student reading performance. In almost every case, Success for All students learned significantly more than matched control students. Significant effects were not seen on every measure at every grade level, but the consistent direction and magnitude of the effects show unequivocal benefits for Success for All students. Effects on district-administered standardized tests reinforce the findings of the studies using individually administered tests.

The Success for All evaluations have used reliable and valid measures, in particular individually-administered tests that are sensitive to all aspects of reading: comprehension, fluency, word attack and word identification. Positive effects on state accountability assessments (including Key Stage 2 in England) and on other standardized measures have also been documented many times. Performance of Success for All students has been compared to that of matched students in matched control schools, who provide the best indication of what students without the programme would have achieved. Replication of high-quality experiments in such a wide variety of schools and districts is extremely unusual.

The research summarized here demonstrates that comprehensive, systemic school-by-school change can take place on a broad scale in a way that main-

tains the integrity and effectiveness of the model. The schools we have studied are typical of the larger set of schools currently using Success for All in terms of quality of implementation, resources, demographic characteristics and other factors. Programme outcomes are not limited to the original home of the programme. The widely-held idea based on the RAND study of innovation (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; McLaughlin, 1990) that Comprehensive School Reform must be invented by school staffs themselves is certainly not supported in research on Success for All. While the programme is adapted to meet the needs of each school, and while school staffs must agree to implement the programme by a vote of 80 per cent or more, Success for All is an externally-developed programme with specific materials, manuals and structures. The observation that this programme can be implemented and maintained over considerable time periods and can be effective in each of its replication sites certainly supports the idea that every school staff need not reinvent the wheel.

The demonstration that an effective programme can be replicated and can be effective in its replication sites removes one more excuse for the continuing low achievement of disadvantaged children. In order to ensure the success of disadvantaged students we must have the political commitment to do so, with the funds and policies to back up this commitment. Success for All does require a serious commitment to restructure schools and to reconfigure uses of funds to emphasize prevention and early intervention rather than remediation. These and other systemic changes in assessments, accountability, standards and legislation can facilitate the implementation of Success for All and other school reform programmes. However, we must also have methods known to be effective. The evaluations presented in this report provide a practical demonstration of the effectiveness and replicability of one such programme.

Note

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3

The High Reliability Schools Project¹

Some Preliminary Results and Analyses

David Reynolds, Sam Stringfield and Eugene C. Schaffer

Introduction

The last 30 years may well be the time of greatest ferment in public education in the history of developed nations. Whether an observer begins in England, The Netherlands, Canada, or any nation from Argentina around the Pacific Rim, including New Zealand and Australia, the calls for reform have been loud and growing louder. In a post-Cold War global information economy, national government after national government has found that individual incomes and gross domestic products are ever more closely tied to the education levels of their citizens. Specifically:

- Social change means that there is a premium on reliability because of the interconnectedness of modern industrial societies.
- A trailing edge of uneducated labour has costs for the wider society in terms of lost production, potential costs of crime and social problems.
- The international mobility of capital means that production processes follow labour which is productive, whether this is in Pinner or the Pacific Rim.
- Original and valid ideas that used to stay within geographical boundaries, where they may have been developed unreliably, now spread around the world in a millisecond.

In the current environment, school improvement discussions and, indeed, educational improvement programmes and whole-school reform designs, are all

emerging within individual countries and travelling internationally at unprecedented levels and speeds. Examples abound. Reading Recovery (Pinnell, 1989) was developed in New Zealand, yet certified Reading Recovery teachers are practising from Hong Kong to Scotland. The Coalition of Essential Schools began as a volume about a fictional English teacher (Sizer, 1984) and has spread to over 1,000 schools including Pueblos in New Mexico and the 'leafy suburbs' of London. Success for All (Slavin *et al.*, 1990, 1996) began in Baltimore, Maryland, and has spread to over 1,500 schools from Mexico to Israel.

Research has almost always been slow to follow reform efforts. Slavin *et al.* (1996) noted that high quality evaluations of educational reform efforts have typically not been conducted until after a reform has passed its zenith, and the great majority of educators have moved to the next fad. However, several strands of research now have long enough histories and have had enough staying power to allow studies. These in turn are able to provide useful information regarding the plausible impacts of ongoing educational improvement efforts.

The Use of Promising Programmes

This concerns efforts to chart the effects of diverse school reform efforts. Over a 60-year period, a reasonably stable body of research has evolved from the Eight-Year Study (Aiken, 1942), the Follow Through Planned Variation Study (Stallings and Kaskowitz, 1974), the RAND Change Agent Study (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977; McLaughlin, 1991), the DESSI studies (Crandall *et al.*, 1982) and the Special Strategies Studies (Stringfield *et al.*, 1997), to the New American Schools initiatives (Bodilly, 1996) and studies of specific reforms such as Success For All/Roots and Wings.

Four of the major conclusions that can be drawn from this half-century-plus of large-scale studies follow. A first is that most, but not all, of the reforms can point to one or more schools that have greatly improved some combination of faculty attitudes, student deportment and student attendance. A second is that all of the reforms that have 'scaled up' to significant numbers of schools have examples of schools in which the reform has had no measurable effect and been discontinued. A third is that in virtually every case involving onsite observations of the reform implementation efforts, success has been greatest in schools where the design team and the local educators worked together to create the most efficacious interaction of the local realities with the reform design. Berman and McLaughlin (1977) referred to this as 'mutual adaptation'. More recently, others have described the process in a more active, engaging voice as 'co-construction' (Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan, 1998; Datnow and Stringfield, 2000). The important point being that there are virtually no sites described in any of the available studies in which a local school literally and uncritically adopts a reform 'whole hog'. Rather, in study after study, the sites obtaining the greatest multi-year effects actively engage ideas and practices, and eventually are full partners in the creation of an improved school.

A fourth general finding has been that, over diverse reform efforts and contexts, reforms have been substantially more likely to produce measured results if they focused on primary schools (see Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). This is not to suggest that all primary based reforms have proven equally effective. However, secondary school reforms have consistently found the achievement of measurable, long-term results challenging.

School Effects

The ability of a school to engage with a design team in co-constructing school reform and thereby achieving reasonably strong implementation of most design components within a specific context implies a school that either possessed a substantially healthy or 'effective' school culture prior to engaging in a specific reform, or developed such a local environment as a result of the reform. Either possibility suggests the relevance of the school effects research base. Following initially promising work by Edmonds (1979) and Rutter *et al.* (1979), much of the academic field of school effectiveness fell relatively silent. A great deal of subsequent hucksterism in the name of 'effective schools' caused the field to fall into substantial disrepute. Cuban (1993) described the evolution of scholarly criticisms of the field as being such that '[B]y the late 1980s [the field of school effectiveness] had largely been banished to the netherworld of pop-research . . .'. However, a steady stream of school effects research subsequently evolved, such that a recent review of the fields of school effects and school restructuring described the primary difference between the two fields as simply being that school effects has a credible research base. The *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000) reviewed over 1,700 articles and books in the field. Paradoxically, the majority of school reform projects now assume the importance of basic school effects dimensions, typically without referencing such areas as 'instructional leadership', 'school culture/climate' and 'efficient use of school and classroom time' to the field.

A key finding from one longitudinal school effects study is particularly relevant to the issue of improving the reliability of reform. The Louisiana School Effectiveness Study (Stringfield and Teddlie, 1991; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993) followed eight demographically matched pairs of schools for over a decade. One school in each pair had a stable history of relatively high academic achievement, and the other had a stable history of relatively low achievement. Multi-level analyses of qualitative data over the first six-year period led the team to the conclusion that the greatest differences between pairs of schools was neither consistent brilliance of administration or teaching in the positive outlier schools, nor universal incompetence in the negative outlier schools. The authors in fact noted specific examples of exemplary teaching in some very dysfunctional schools. Rather, along several dimensions at the student, classroom and school levels, positive outlier schools were most clearly identifiable by an intolerance for large negatives. The less effective schools, regardless of the socio-economic

status of the communities they served, were substantially less consistent or stable, classroom to classroom and year to year, in the quality of services they provided to their students. Stated positively, the more effective schools were substantially more reliable.

If existing educational reforms, however promising, are most often successful when they are either introduced into, or help create, healthier, more effective schools, and if more effective schools are more reliable at multiple levels, it would follow that consciously building reliability into school reforms would be an avenue worth exploring.

High Reliability Organizations

For over a decade, scholars in fields as diverse as political science, organizational behaviour and engineering have studied non-educational organizations that are required to work under the very unusual demand of functioning correctly 'the first time, every time' (LaPorte and Consolini, 1991; Roberts, 1993). Such complex social organizations as air traffic control towers and operators of multi-state electric power grids continuously run the risk of disastrous and obviously unacceptable failure. Several thousand consecutive days of efficiently monitoring and controlling the very crowded skies over Chicago or London would be heavily discounted by the public if two jumbo jets were to collide over either city. Through fog, snow, computer-system failures and nearby tornadoes, in spite of thousands of flights per day in busy skies, such a collision has never happened above either city, a remarkable level of performance reliability.

By contrast, in the USA, one of the most highly educated nations on earth, within any group of 100 students beginning first grade in a particular year, approximately 15 will not have obtained their high school diplomas 15 years later. In Britain, slightly less than half of all pupils will not have the 'benchmark' of five or more high level public examination passes. Obviously, many nations have even lower levels of educational performance.

Combining evidence from bodies of knowledge on school effects, school reform and educational organizational performance, and contrasting those data with studies of HROs, it seems appropriate to hypothesize that part of the explanation for the relative flatness of long-term measures of such educational effectiveness measures as the US National Assessment of Educational Progress is not merely a lack of reform efforts. It seems likely that the efforts themselves, whether locally developed or co-constructed, have often lacked reliability. However valid, the lack of reliability has put a ceiling on validity.

Regardless of the sector of a society in which they work, highly reliable organizations (HROs) share several characteristics. Twelve of them are described below (adapted from Stringfield, 1998a):

- High organizational reliability evolves under a particular circumstance. HROs evolve when both the larger society and the professionals involved in the

working of the organization come to believe that failure of the organization to achieve its key goals would be disastrous. Thus, individual airlines are allowed to add and subtract specific routes, but both commercial aircraft maintenance and air traffic control are very closely monitored. Changing routes has little consequence for the larger society; however, one flight's total failure is unacceptable. Similarly, one badly cascading error in the 40-year life of an otherwise superbly performing nuclear power station is simply not acceptable, either for the surrounding community or the professionals working within.

- Organizational reliability requires a clear and finite set of goals, shared at all organizational levels. Reliability requires priority setting and focus.
- An ongoing alertness to surprises or lapses is maintained. Small failures in key systems are monitored closely because they can cascade into major problems. In order to sustain multi-level awareness, HROs build powerful databases. These databases can be described as possessing Four Rs:
 - a relevance to core goals
 - b rich triangulation on key dimensions
 - c real-time availability to all organizational levels, and
 - d regularly cross-checked by multiple, concerned groups, both inside and outside the organization.
- The extension of formal, logical decision-making analysis as far as extant knowledge allows is a further characteristic. Regularly repeated tasks which are effective become standard operating procedures, partly to make 'best practice' universal, but also to allow a rich web of peer observation and communication.
- Highly reliable organizations actively sustain initiatives that encourage all concerned to identify flaws in standard operating procedures, and honour the flaw finders.

Because high reliability is a social construction and requires high levels of individual professional decision-making, HROs perpetually engage in the following three activities:

- Active, extensive recruiting of new staff at all levels.
- Constant, targeted training and retraining.
- Rigorous performance evaluation – in HROs, monitoring is necessarily mutual, without counterproductive loss of overall professional autonomy and confidence. This achievement is possible because organizational goals are clearly and widely shared, and because experience has taught all concerned that reliable success evolves through frank, protected, multi-way performance feedback.

HROs have four more characteristics:

- Because time is the perpetual enemy of reliability, HROs are hierarchically structured. However, during times of peak activity, whether anticipated or not, HROs display a second layer of behaviour that emphasizes collegial decision-making, regardless of the formal position of the decision-maker.

- Clear, regularly demonstrated valuing of the organization by its supervising and surrounding organizations. All levels work to maintain active, respectful communication geared to the key goals of the HRO.
- Short-term efficiency takes a back seat to very high reliability.
- Equipment is kept in the highest working order.

Two additional points relate to the above HRO characteristics. The first is that while these characteristics must necessarily be described separately, their effect is multiplicative, not additive. The total absence of any one can nullify great efforts to obtain others. For example, standard operating procedures can become mindless rigidity in the absence of ongoing honouring of flaw-finders. Active recruiting in the absence of supportive, long-term professional development is futile. The first 10 characteristics, however laboriously put in place, cannot be sustained if an organization continues a history of such poor accounting and economic prediction that it must periodically make drastic cuts in personnel, machinery, etc.

A second note concerns the description of the characteristics. It would be easy to read each of the above as a stable state. In fact, all are dynamic and regularly evolving. As technologies advance, systems have the opportunity to create much richer databases. Last year's teacher recruiting effort, however successful, merely becomes the baseline for measuring this year's effort, and so on.

Reliability analyses can be very useful for preventing failures in such diverse contexts as avoiding the future running aground of multi-billion dollar aircraft carriers or industrial catastrophes (Shrivastava, 1986). Far more often than not, catastrophic failures are the result of a cascading series of human errors or lapses in judgement. This relates to the 'social construction' of reliability.

Stringfield (1995, 1998) discussed each of these general principles in terms of educational reform efforts. Obviously many schools currently exhibit several of the HRO characteristics. Diverse reform efforts are also particularly well/ill designed to achieve one or more of the characteristics.

The current paper reports on the first five years of an ongoing effort to work on improving reliability with four clusters of secondary schools in Great Britain. The objective of the effort has not been the installation of any specific curricular package or set of reform characteristics, but rather to work with the clusters in co-constructing higher reliability in all schools' core activities.

The High Reliability Schools Project (HRSP) over Time

The programme began in 1995 with a group of eight secondary schools in Area A, an English area more advantaged than the English mean of all LEAs and an area producing slightly better than average achievement results, although in 'value added' terms these results perhaps should have been better, given the school intakes.

Initially, we were unsure exactly what the organizational processes were that could have been necessary to deliver the promise of the interesting ideas about high reliability that we were aware of and which were reviewed above. There were no alternatives to develop these processes with the schools themselves, on the principle that if we ‘let the ideas go’ through a programme of in-service education about high reliability, adding relevant bodies of academic knowledge, then we would be able to see over time which schools developed practical procedures and real life definitions of HRS which might deliver the reality of enhanced student gain.

In this first geographical area we did the following:

- Generated an administrative structure of twice-a-term meetings of the HRS co-ordinators from each school (these were senior management persons responsible for activities in their schools, project liaison, etc.).
- Brought to schools in training days the relevant material on high reliability concepts, plus also bringing knowledge on school effectiveness, some limited treatment of teacher effectiveness and some limited treatment of issues related to the induction of new teachers (because of the importance of minimizing within-school range and unreliability).
- Encouraged schools to significantly increase the volume of their assessment data through blanket testing of their intakes, use of performance indicator systems that picked up within-school variation and the like.
- Asked schools to focus upon ambitious targets for their pupils in only four core areas, including the compulsory project-wide goals of academic achievement in public examinations and the attendance rates of pupils at school. The two additional targets were, for each school, to be school chosen, reflecting each school’s historical developmental priorities and their context/culture.
- Asked schools to constantly review their organization and processes to eliminate cascading errors and to intervene with their pupils at risk of failure, in the attempt to raise performance.

The programme was also piloted in five English secondary schools in Area B, beginning in January 1997 two years after Area A but with a very similar programme structure. Certain additional bodies of knowledge were added – that on departmental effectiveness being a notable example – and there was an enhanced concentration on knowledge related to ‘feeder’ primary schools, since the intellectual quality of the intakes into the secondary schools was a particular problem in this area possessing very high levels of social disadvantage.

Both these two areas were used to ‘pilot’ and develop the programme, which in its most fully developed version, finally, was implemented in two groups of schools in a moderately disadvantaged area in Wales – Area C. It went first into four schools as ‘pilots’ from Autumn 1996 and then went into all the area’s schools from Spring 1997, since all schools around the initial group of schools wished to be involved, adding eight further schools.

The final programme represented a very significant development of, and growth from, the very hesitant first steps of piloting in Areas A and B, in the following ways:

- The headteachers of all schools, as well as the HRS representatives, were involved in all project meetings, leading to an enhancement of programme understanding within schools and leading to the headteachers reinforcing the programme in their day-to-day management.
- There was enhanced cohesion and power in the project through the employment of a part-time project 'driver', who was one of the headteachers working one day per week.
- These schools had available to them a great deal of detail about the 'technology' of HRS that had been generated by the experimentation with HRS ideas within the Areas A and B samples. This covered, in depth, a technology to deliver the HRS 'principles' noted above. This material obviated the need for schools to 'discover' best practice and gave schools considerable foundations on which to build (we should note that the project eventually utilized 10 HRS components, rather than the original 12 outlined above).
- The focus in the project on the 'broad brush' principles of HRS and the detailed organizational features of the HRS model as outlined in the components material was supplemented in Area C by a regular focus upon what was called 'the little things that matter'. All HRS meetings increasingly centred upon a key session in which each school explained to the whole group of Welsh schools the practical things that they had done at the 'micro' level to embed the concepts and the components in the form of practical organizational features at the point of delivery of education to pupils in classrooms and schools.
- The project added regionally based residential sessions for all headteachers and HRS representatives, and also added national residential sessions, all aimed at enhancing knowledge transfers across schools.
- The HRS representatives and headteachers were given additional bodies of knowledge to those given to all staff, to help them in their role. Additionally, bodies of knowledge were 'previewed' with them, before the exposure of the material to whole-school staffs, so that they could answer staff questions and 'ease' the material into schools.
- The training days were changed to be more involving of staff, in the departmental effectiveness session for example involving meetings of staff arranged by department filling-in questionnaires that self reported on the extent to which individual departments were following the HRS technology.

As well as these changes to both the detail and general ethos of the project, the final version implemented in Area C exhibited substantial changes in both the knowledge base and the applications of it that were utilized, which reflected our increased knowledge over time of which knowledge bases were 'potent', and which of possible 'potency' had been missed.

It was clear that the initial concentration upon the school level that had been reflected in the school effectiveness knowledge base was not powerful enough to affect key processes and outcomes. The classroom behaviours of teachers, the key determinants of pupil outcomes, appeared, unsurprisingly, to alter very little because of these knowledge inputs, so the knowledge bases on teacher effectiveness were greatly expanded and supplemented with those on advanced teaching methods (e.g. groupwork and constructivism). The knowledge base on departmental effectiveness was also added, reasoning that the department was closer to the learning level and that changes at that level might ripple through to affect outcomes.

This latter proved to be particularly powerful, since the department was comprised of people teaching the same subject and therefore had teachers with something in common, and since the department's performance was directly shown in the public examination performance indicator material that all schools possessed on performance on different subjects. The department was also a managerial entity that was, in practice, an alterable as well as a 'proximal' variable.

It was also clear that the simple provision of information to schools about 'what works' in various areas was not sufficient to ensure change. Such foundational school effectiveness material is of course not 'owned' by schools or teachers since it comes predominantly from the research community. This material was also not sufficient for more than perhaps one year or 18 months of professional development activities, since teachers seemed to 'move past it' very quickly as their own professional development expanded.

Our focus shifted in Area C towards attempting to turn our schools into 'knowledge generators' rather than passive knowledge recipients. Particularly, we focused upon the introduction of peer observation systems to permit the charting, generation and transmission of good practice in classrooms, training some school personnel to use observation systems which were then cascaded around the entire school. Also, our focus upon improving schools' capacity to be 'intelligent' about their organizational functioning and outputs was enhanced, utilizing additional training, the provision of sessions on the statistical analysis of data and the provision of the most advanced relational database that we could find which stored grades, background information and test scores of pupils.

It was also clear that our earlier emphasis upon schools adopting standard operating procedures and the other detailed aspects of the HRS technology that we had outlined for their use was a 'one size fits all' approach to a situation in which schools were situated in highly variable local situations.

Schools clearly differed in their:

- levels of effectiveness
- levels of 'raw' outcomes
- improvement trajectory over time

- socio-economic status, and
- development history.

Over time we moved to an emphasis upon greater context specificity in terms of the precise organizational practices that we encouraged schools to adopt, while retaining the universality of the core HRS concepts. We encouraged schools to think of which may be ‘universal’ features of the HRS technology, that they should all apply in the same detail to the same degree (e.g. testing programmes), and which may be aspects of the technology that should be different in detail and degree in different situations.

It was also clear in Area C that the very ambitious aims of the project to generate ‘failure free schools’, as highly reliable industrial settings generating ‘failure free’ outcomes (as with the example we historically used of landing planes), may have lost us valuable teacher commitment because of the project being perceived as wildly unrealistic in scope, typified by the comment of one teacher that ‘air traffic controllers don’t have to deal with planes that don’t want to be landed’ and that ‘teachers have to deal with children who want to fly to Paris when they’ve been told to fly to London’. Over time, it was the practical problem solving usefulness of the HRS model that was stressed, rather than adherence to a set of ideas taken from outside school settings.

The programme in its most fully developed version also began to take a close interest in the effectiveness of the primary feeder schools that were generating intakes of pupils which, in the case of most schools, were regarded as imposing ‘low ceilings’ on what it was possible to achieve. Primary senior management teams were in some cases invited to the secondary school’s HRS training days. Some schools organized special help to their primary clusters on issues such as literacy and numeracy.

Results

We have collected a considerable volume of data on the effects of the project on schools and their outcomes, including ‘audit’ visits to all schools, questionnaires to participating school personnel, collation of all material used in the training of schools, and analysis of assessment data collected, and of course also have our own ‘participant observer’ recollections of programme content, impact and effects. Analysis of all this is now underway. We content ourselves here with looking at data relevant to two questions:

- did the schools who utilized more of the HRS ‘technology’ show more gain in outcomes over time?
- did the HRS schools do better than the national totality of schools in their gain in outcomes over time?

Table 3.1 Spearman's rho correlation mean of HRS components against increase in percentage of pupils with five or more A to C GCSEs*

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Correlation increase 5+ A* to C GCSE results 1994/5–2000/1 with mean of HRS components (r)</i>
All	0.366 ¹

Note

¹ Correlation significant at $p < 0.01$ (1 tailed)

Looking at the first question, analysis of the increase in the proportion of pupils getting five or more A* to C GCSE passes from the 1994/5 school year to 2000/1, against a mean of all HRS school based components, indicated that there were significant correlations at $P < 0.01$ level (see Table 3.1).

Because of these results, HRS mean component scores and the increase in five or more A* to C GCSE passes were analysed further. Table 3.2 shows that 71.1 per cent of the HRS 'technology' correlated significantly with increases in the percentages of five or more A* to C GCSEs obtained by HRS schools during this period. Furthermore, 44.9 per cent correlated significantly at $P < 0.01$ level. Clearly, schools using more of the HRS constructs and associated practices showed more achievement gain than those using less. The detail of which precise HRS organizational features are most 'potent' in affecting achievement can be seen in Table 3.2.

Moving on to look at the second issue, whether our HRS schools out-performed the national totality of schools, Table 3.3 shows the performance of schools in the three areas where we piloted and implemented the final programme. Area A schools where we first piloted performed much in line with other schools in the local authority, and both the local authority and our schools performed less well than the national totality of schools. Area B showed again a moderate pilot performance, probably because the local authority had allocated us a group of schools with the lowest results and which were most in need of improvement, which may explain our inability to impact much on outcomes. In Area C, however, where the fully developed version of the programme was implemented, levels of gain were running at close to double that for all Welsh schools, and at close to triple the improvement in all English schools. In Areas A and B also, as the programme developed coherence by 1998–9, and 1999–2000, the schools' levels of achievement gain were significant.

The global area differences hid significant differences between schools in their levels of improvement over time which are a focus of our continuing research effort.

Table 3.2 Spearman's rho correlation between HRS school-based components' mean scores and increase in 1994/5–1999/2000 GCSE results

Individual HRS school-based components	r_s
1 A perception, held by the public and the employees, that failure within the organization would be disastrous	
The school involves parents in a commitment to improve the school and their child's learning	0.097
<i>There is a shared belief in the school that pupil educational failure is completely unacceptable</i>	0.379 ²
The belief in school is that pupil exclusion is a major system failure	0.267 ¹
2 A Small number of clear goals, that are understood by staff and students and a strong sense of primary mission	
<i>The school vision and mission encompass HRS philosophy</i>	0.384 ²
<i>All stakeholders understand the school vision and mission</i>	0.333 ²
The school vision and mission are reflected in all aspects of the school	0.309 ¹
The school is working to be reliable on no more than four goals	0.193
<i>Two of the school's goals are improving attendance and performance in public exams</i>	0.342 ²
<i>The School Development Plan reflects HRS principles</i>	0.347 ²
The School Development Plan aims to create an environment to promote learning and reduce failure	0.288 ¹
The school evaluates the appropriateness of its goals and the progress toward them	0.287 ¹
3 Consistent best practice, based on SOPs	
<i>Within the school benchmarking against its own best practice takes place</i>	0.340 ²
Between-school benchmarking takes place	0.171
Best practice is shared between schools	0.122
School SOPs have been developed and are written down	0.166
School SOPs are consistently applied across the school	0.289 ¹
Appropriate teaching strategies are being used which allow all pupils to experience success	0.156
Appropriate classroom management strategies are being used which allow all pupils to experience success	0.042
Pupils have high expectations of their own success	0.301 ¹
<i>Teachers have high expectations of pupil achievement</i>	0.329 ²
Opportunities to learn are maximized at every opportunity	0.177

4 Systems for identifying flaws in SOPs and validating appropriate changes

There is ongoing monitoring of stakeholders (pupils and parents)	0.120
There is ongoing monitoring of external views of the school	0.107
<i>The ongoing monitoring of SOP implementation does take place</i>	0.336 ²
There is ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of SOPs	0.305 ¹

5 Extensive recruitment, training and retraining

<i>The school has sufficient well-qualified staff to deliver its curriculum</i>	0.357 ²
The school has sufficient well-qualified staff to deal with its pastoral responsibilities effectively	0.153
The school does recruit a high calibre of staff	0.250 ¹
The school introduces all new staff to its values and ways of working	0.292 ¹
There is additional support for the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) into professional practice	0.234 ¹
Staff in the school have good subject knowledge and expertise	0.123
<i>Staff have good school effectiveness knowledge and expertise</i>	0.426 ²
Staff have good departmental effectiveness knowledge and expertise	0.164
Staff have good teacher effectiveness knowledge and expertise	0.265 ¹
<i>Staff with managerial responsibilities have good management knowledge and expertise</i>	0.411 ²
<i>All teaching staff have been given training in best practice research</i>	0.384 ²
<i>All staff have been given training in how to use best practice research findings</i>	0.338 ²
<i>All staff have been trained in proven best practice, which underpins the SOPs of the school</i>	0.481 ²
Teachers reflect on and discuss their practice	0.133
Teachers continually strive for the improvement of classroom performance	-0.062
<i>The school has a provision of wide-ranging teacher development opportunities through a coherent programme</i>	0.438 ²
Development opportunities are designed to meet the needs identified in the School Development Plan	0.254 ¹
Professional development focuses on the improvement of teaching and learning	0.313 ¹
Professional development focuses on the improvement of pupil performance	0.287 ¹
<i>There are high expectations of staff performance</i>	0.577 ²

6 Mutual monitoring of staff, without counterproductive loss of overall autonomy and confidence

<i>The school has a culture of peer classroom observation</i>	0.423 ²
<i>There is ongoing monitoring of teacher performance</i>	0.449 ²
<i>Ongoing monitoring of manager performance does take place</i>	0.419 ²

7 Data richness – performance analysis is taken very seriously to improve the processes of the organization

<i>Pupil input data is used to identify pupils in need of support and intervention</i>	0.454 ²
<i>Pupil output data is used to assess value added of pupils</i>	0.579 ²
<i>Pupil attendance data is used to identify pupils at risk of underachieving</i>	0.238 ¹
<i>Pupil attendance data is used to assess individual pupil performance</i>	0.327 ²
<i>Pupil attendance data is used to assess school performance</i>	0.312 ²
<i>Pupil attitudinal data is used to assess school performance</i>	0.081
<i>Tutors are used as academic monitors in tutor groups</i>	0.279 ¹
<i>The heads of department are academic monitors of pupil performance in their respective departments</i>	0.371 ²
<i>Pupil data is shared with respective pupils</i>	0.076
<i>Pupil data is shared with respective parents</i>	0.154
<i>Pupil data is used for coaching and tutoring pupils</i>	0.269 ¹
<i>Pupil data is shared with feeder schools</i>	0.291 ¹
<i>Pupil data is shared with feeder schools as part of collaboration for improvement</i>	0.406 ²
<i>The implementation of all policies and development strategies are monitored</i>	0.342 ²

8 Teachers are alert to surprises or lapses and prevent small failures from cascading into major systems failures

<i>There is ongoing monitoring of pupil performance across the curriculum</i>	0.290 ¹
<i>There is early identification of pupils at risk of underperforming</i>	0.406 ²
<i>There is early intervention with pupils who are underperforming</i>	0.377 ²
<i>There is early intervention with pupils at risk of becoming disaffected</i>	0.325 ²
<i>There is early intervention with pupils at risk of being excluded</i>	0.170

9 Schools are hierarchically structured, but with an emphasis on collegial decision-making and interdependence

<i>There is high quality leadership from the headteacher</i>	0.570 ²
<i>There is high quality leadership from the senior management team</i>	0.428 ²
<i>There are effective management structures</i>	0.353 ²
<i>In the school significant responsibility is taken by middle managers</i>	0.269*
<i>In the school there are positive collegial relationships between staff</i>	0.172
<i>The staff work in interdependent, synergistic teams</i>	0.304 ¹

10 Equipment and the environment are maintained in the highest order; responsibility is shared equally by all who come in contact with it

<i>The school site is well maintained</i>	0.343 ²
<i>The school site provides a pleasant working environment</i>	0.323 ²
Equipment is cared for by all who use it	0.144
<i>The staff are smart in appearance</i>	0.366 ²
<i>Wall displays are well designed and tidy</i>	0.331 ²

Notes

Correlations at $P < 0.01$ have been typed in italics

¹ Correlation significant at $P < 0.05$ level

² Correlation significant at $P < 0.01$ level

Table 3.3 School-level mean percentages of students with five or more A* to C GCSEs over time: HRS cohorts contrasted with English and Welsh means

5 or more A* to C GCSEs (%)

Region		School year							Overall gain (00–start)
		1993/4	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7	1997/8	1998/9	1999/00	
England	Mean	43.3	43.5	44.5	45.1	46	47.9	49	5.6
Area A	Mean								
Started Fall 1995	46.9	48.5	45.3	46.6	47.0	45.6	46.5	50.6	3.7
Area B	Mean								
Began Jan. 1997	23.1	24.2	21.4	23.6	24.2	21.4	24.4	26.0	2.9
Wales	Mean	39	41	42	44	46	48	49	8.3
Area C – Old Welsh 4	Mean								
Began Fall 1996	20.8	26.5	26	28	34.5	37.3	40.0	15.6	
Area C – New Welsh 8	Mean								
Began Spring 1997	36.1	34.8	36.6	42.3	44.9	47.6	51.0	15.2	

Note

Tint denotes years required to produce raised levels of performance.

Variation between Schools over Time²

The above description of the three LEA sites shows that there were distinctive contexts for the implementation of high reliability schools. For the purpose of this section, we have drawn on our case studies and audits of the 25 schools to describe the impact of context and school-level decisions on the implementation and the success of the project, since there was variability between schools and sites as to the quantity and quality of the HRS intervention.

The experience of some HRS schools in inner-city sites was quite promising. As in most settings, the comprehensive schools drew from a number of local primary schools in their area. At the time the study began, little data were collected in the primary schools on student performance, including reading. Following HRS principles, the comprehensive schools began to collect data on entry and found, in some schools, two-thirds of the entering students were two or more years behind in reading. The strategy of one of the most successful schools, Water Edge Comprehensive School, when it found itself in this circumstance was to employ reading teachers to work with the 11-year-old pupil population to assure basic level reading and writing competence. They were so successful that many other schools requested their assistance in setting in place reading recovery and homework schemes. The success represents the results of a combination of use of data, focused goals and consistent application of a technology to create success.

While this strategy was an excellent demonstration of the power of the school in stopping the problem before failing pupils cascaded throughout the school and impacted upon the school's performance in all subjects, one of us naively pointed out to the administrators of Water Edge Comprehensive School that the reading problem was caused by the primary schools' inadequacy in teaching reading and that the primary schools, one in particular, had come up short. The headteacher insisted that the school management had held a discussion with the primary school headteachers in the area, but could say little to them about what they might change or the schools would send their pupils to other comprehensive schools that did not make such demands!

The reading strategy that worked in one of the successful HRS schools did not work in all settings. One of the comprehensive schools, Limefield School, also experienced similar reading problems among students from its intake schools, and was taking from middle schools which taught students until they were 13 years old. Two-thirds of the middle school students were two or more years behind in reading when they arrived, but the middle/high school model gave the comprehensive school only two years to remediate in reading as well as to cover all the necessary subject matter to pass the GCSE examinations. They were unable to meet this difficult task and were closed and merged with another school, which had been unable to overcome its previous negative image and was on special measures. It is unfortunate that neither of these schools paired with successful HRS schools in order to emulate their success. As seen above, some of the HRS schools had high enough competencies and resources to offset the negative effects of context, while others found more difficulty in tackling their problems.

In the more advantaged catchment areas, one school involved in the HRS project provides an illustration of how rigorous implementation was critical to success. Four Square Comprehensive School entered the project above the national average for 5 or more A* to C GCSEs. Given its well-to-do and comfortable socio-economic base, ability to gain and hold strong teachers and substantial support from the parents, this was a well-positioned school. Yet over the years, Four Square did not improve greatly, rather it gradually slipped downwards toward the average for the country. Close examination of records, discussions with teachers and administrators, and reviews of HRS audits suggests much less than the necessary commitment to improve. First, Four Square refused to clearly select and hold a few central goals focused around student success. The school often looked at the range of activities for students, the links with parents and the happiness of the staff as additional measures for success. As often communicated by the HRS co-ordinator, Four Square School found the HRS focus too narrow, the efforts too labour intensive and the work with lower performing students of little interest to the staff who valued the academic students to the exclusion of those who were not doing as well. Little effort was made to bring students up to speed if they fell behind. There was little done to create an atmosphere supportive to all students and the efforts of the HRS staff to train or organize teachers to examine their own teaching was met with hostility from the administration, and regarded also as intrusive.

How schools were able to lift themselves beyond their historic level of performance regardless of their starting point is of particular interest. Another school, Chateau School, was another 'leafy suburb' school with a competent staff and solid parental support. The Chateau School began above the national average and made ongoing gains that well exceeded national performance, leaving the school comfortably ahead of other schools. When the school entered the HRS programme, they determined that the performance of their pupils on GCSE was critical to their improvement and the headteacher determined he wanted to create a data-rich environment to track the individual performance of students to assure that they reached their potential.

Examining the performance of students over time against their predicted performance did this. When students did not perform at expected levels, he delivered resources to the class or student to assure success. A side value of this strategy permitted the headteacher to compare the performance of departments against one another. There was no expectation that each student would receive the same number of five high-grade GCSEs, rather the question was asked, are there departments who do remarkably well with students and some departments that are particularly unsuccessful? This permitted the headteacher to adjust teaching loads, deliver additional resources where necessary and focus attention on certain areas of the school. The level of consistency rose between departments as well as the number of high-grade GCSEs for each pupil across departments. By the end of the third year, gains were significantly higher than comparable schools in the district.

The most dramatic change in performance was in a school in a highly

deprived area with originally approximately 10 per cent of the students gaining scores of five or more A* to Cs on the GCSE tests. Claymound School appeared defeated and unable to determine how it might survive. Even its physical plant was in dire need of repair. Broken windows, water-stained walls and filthy halls were the norm. No one seemed prepared to take the effort to lead the school. A new headteacher was appointed to the school who seemed committed to the HRS process and pulled together staff for a meeting. In a large faculty hall, HRS consultants suggested the staff choose a simple task as a first step in the process of setting goals and directions for the school. Since the idea of improved GCSE performance seemed impossible, the commitment of the school to the short-term goal of respect for the school environment – even the simple cleaning of halls and repair of windows – could be a worthwhile first step, it was argued.

The new headteacher stood up at the end of the meeting and said he wanted to make this commitment and through a good clean-up would bring about a new beginning for the school and the pupils. There was a positive buzz in the hall as teachers nodded yes: then from the back of the room came a staff member's voice saying, 'This is all well and good, but I am sure we will run afoul of the public health regulations'. At this point, the room exploded with anger as the staff with a single voice shouted down this dissent. This was the turning point for the school.

From this day forward, Claymound believed it could turn around its image and performance. There has been no looking back. Over time its results have continued to move from below ten through the teens and twenties into the 40 per cent levels, an astounding set of gains over a short time. While the commitment and spark of its first HRS year has carried this school, there have been enormous positive changes in the quality of leadership and instruction. The headteacher worked with three other talented heads to help develop standard operating procedures. The teachers worked together to focus instruction on clear outcome goals for the school. The school used data systems to determine their improvement in these areas and focused on year by year improvement as well as some long-term goals. As basic problems have been solved through better feedback, standard operating procedures and improvement of teaching performance, the leadership team has been able to work on more specific needs of departments that could not be cleared up with general strategies. The efforts of the school are now focused on specific programmes and teachers to reduce within-school variation to enhance the ongoing positive movement of the school.

Conclusions

We began this chapter by outlining the bodies of knowledge that pointed us toward attempting a new kind of school improvement initiative. Work in fields as diverse as educational policy analysis, school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness pointed us toward the importance of reliability in organizational processes, a concept which itself was further developed from the early 1990s by a number of schools and researchers working outside educational settings.

We have shown in our work with schools that a programme of school improvement in schools, co-constructed with school personnel and based upon insights from the knowledge bases in high reliability research, school effectiveness and school improvement, is linked with school's enhanced 'added value' to pupil achievement. We have also shown that individual aspects of the HRS 'technology of practice' are differentially associated with these gains, with 'maintenance of the school environment', 'mutual monitoring of staff' and 'data richness to improve the processes of the organization' being particularly important determinants of the degree of gain over time.

We are now analysing our full datasets and attempting to explain the variation that exists between areas and individual schools, hoping to emerge with case studies of what contextual and school factors are present in those schools that have improved most. We have also further data on academic achievement results for the 2000/1 and 2001/2 school years, plus a wide range of further performance data on other pupil outcomes such as attendance rate and the specific goals that were chosen by individual schools.

Although our analysis is still ongoing, we would conclude that our results show that the achievement of what have been historically regarded as highly ambitious goals is indeed possible if the optimum combination of local contextual factors and school factors is obtained. While much remains to be learned, it is clear that secondary schools can be transformed by an improvement programme like ours that:

- improves the quality of decision-making by generating and using high quality performance evaluation data
- reduces unreliability by insisting on the following of standard operating procedures for core organizational functions
- restricts the focus of effort to a small number of finite goals, on which very high targets are set
- systematically recruits staff and trains and re-trains them through benchmarking against internal and external best practice, and
- commits to high quality in terms of the functioning and upkeep of site and equipment.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter was originally presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Toronto, 2001.
- 2 In all cases the names used for the schools are pseudonyms.

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4

Learning from Difference

Some Reflections on School Improvement Projects in Three Countries

Paul Clarke, Mel Ainscow and Mel West

Since its formation over fifteen years ago, the school improvement initiative, Improving the Quality of Education for All, has moved beyond the shores of the UK to school systems around the world. These experiences have led us to reflect on what it is that we take for granted within school improvement. This process seems to have a potential for stimulating new ways of thinking

In order to illustrate what this involves, in this chapter we describe and reflect on our experience of school improvement initiatives in Portugal, the Republic of Moldova and Puerto Rico. These accounts throw light on the ways in which contextual factors influence the nature of improvement efforts.

At a recent international conference, the Australian scholar Roger Slee referred to Edward Said's explanation of how when ideas 'travel' to other times and situations, they can lose some of their original power and rebelliousness (Slee, 2004). In this sense, the movement for school effectiveness and school improvement shows all the signs of jetlag. At its point of origin, it was based on a rebellion against conventional explanations about educational failure, particularly in urban contexts (Edmonds, 1979). More recently it seems to have become domesticated into a political discourse that tends to stifle creative thinking.

At the same time, there seems to be an assumption that ideas and approaches developed in one country can be simply lifted and exported to another. Such a view masks the way that schools reflect local culture and histories. In so doing it also limits our capacity to learn from the experiences of others.

In this chapter we reflect on accounts of school improvement in three different countries in order to show how such experiences can draw attention to new possibilities for learning and development in the field. This leads us to argue that the power of comparison for the development of practice comes not from lifting approaches and moving them from place to place, but from using the stimulus of more exotic environments to reconsider thinking and practice in familiar settings (Delamont, 1992; Ainscow, 1999). It is about making what is familiar strange, as when seeing your own town in a new light when showing a visitor around. Features that are normally ignored become clearer, possibilities that have been overlooked are reconsidered, and things that have become taken for granted are subject to new scrutiny.

Improving the Quality of Education for All

Our work is set within the framework of a school improvement initiative known as Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA). Begun in the late 1980s in the UK, IQEA involves university academics working in partnership with networks of schools in order to find ways in which the learning of all members of these communities can be enhanced (see Ainscow, 1999; Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994; and Hopkins 2001, for more detailed accounts).

The IQEA approach to school improvement emphasizes the following features:

- developments in teaching and learning, through the creation of conditions within schools for managing change successfully
- school improvement led from within schools, focusing on areas that are seen to be matters of priority
- collecting and engaging with evidence in order to move thinking and practice forward, and to evaluate progress, and
- collaboration among colleagues in partner schools and with IQEA consultants, so that a wider range of expertise and resources is available to support improvements in all of the participating schools

The overall framework used to guide these activities is shown in Figure 4.1.

Groups of staff are encouraged to examine the realities of their schools in relation to the four areas outlined within this framework. As can be seen, this emphasizes the centrality of the quality of experience provided for students. Engaging with evidence about this, school groups go on to develop areas of focus that will guide their improvement efforts. They then look more specifically at ways in which teaching and leadership practices can be analysed and developed within their schools in order to bring about improvements.

The analysis of the experience of IQEA over 15 years provides strong evidence of how inclusive school improvement can be achieved. More than anything this points to the importance of developing a school culture that fosters positive attitudes toward the study and development of practice (Ainscow, 2005). However,

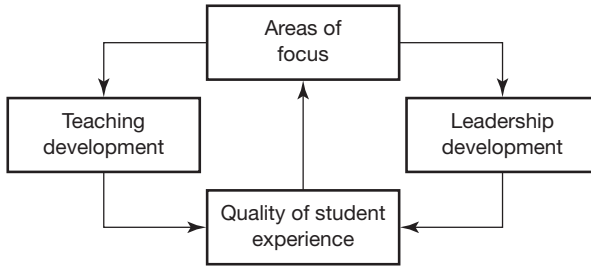


Figure 4.1 A school development model

much of the evidence for such conclusions is derived from British contexts. Bearing in mind our interest in learning from difference, in what follows we consider our experiences of using the approach in three different countries.

Portugal

Since 1995, we have been involved in a series of school improvement activities in Portugal. These experiences illustrate how local factors influence the ways in which improvement efforts are interpreted and implemented within particular contexts.

The focus of the Portuguese initiative was on the development of more inclusive practices in schools, exploring ways of reaching out to all learners by reducing barriers to participation and learning (Ainscow, 1999). It involved two outside consultants, one English and the other Brazilian (Windyz Ferreira), in working collaboratively with a team of colleagues from the Portuguese Institute of Educational Innovation, largely using ideas and materials imported from IQEA and other improvement strategies from outside the country.

During the first phase of the project (1996–8) work was carried out with groups of schools in five regions of the country. Development materials and workshop sessions were provided for school teams and they were also given local support by higher education institutions and district staff. The evaluation of these activities in 1998 suggested lots of enthusiasm but severe difficulties in implementation at the local level, all of which seemed to generate a degree of rancour. This led to a review of the experience and the decision to focus in detail on a smaller group of schools in one district in order to explore the nature of these implementation difficulties and how they might be overcome.

Phase two lasted from 1999 until 2002. During this period there was continued support for national dissemination activities, alongside action research in a small group of schools in the greater Lisbon area in relation to the following questions: How can we foster inclusive practices in Portuguese schools? What forms of external support are needed to assist this process?

The focus was on school-led action research in order to develop classroom

practices and bring about overall school improvement. As a result of these activities detailed evaluative case studies were produced in collaboration with schools. In what follows we provide a flavour of what happened by providing a brief account of developments in one of the participating schools.

Da Costa School serves an economically poor, culturally diverse district in Lisbon. It has a population of 1,200 students in the age range 10 to 16 years. A team of teachers, including the principal, led the school improvement initiative. They carried out surveys of staff, students and parents and, as a result, implemented strategies in order to make their school more inclusive. These involved the collection and use of more detailed evidence through mutual classroom observations, including group analysis of video recordings.

Possibly the most powerful strategy they used involved interviews with students, carried out by a support team from outside the school. The school co-ordinating team analysed transcripts from these interviews and used extracts as the basis of staff development activities in the school. Some extracts were also used on posters that were displayed in the staff room. These invited teachers to write their reactions to comments made by the students.

Subsequently, Da Costa took the lead in creating a network of local schools that are assisting one another in fostering more inclusive forms of education. Here the aim is to encourage forms of inter-dependence that will support sustainable improvement. This is based on the assumption that progress within individual schools will remain fragile unless it becomes part of a strategy for systemic change.

Our experiences as outsiders working in Portuguese schools such as this one point to certain factors in that country which can either assist or limit opportunities for moving practice forward. These experiences can be analysed in relation to the typology for explaining educational innovations developed by House (1979), i.e. technical, micro-political and cultural perspectives.

From a technical perspective certain advantages were apparent. Class sizes in Portugal are small relative to international standards and the schools are well staffed with teachers and support staff. While there are national curriculum and assessment guidelines, schools have a reasonable degree of discretion, such that they can offer flexible responses to their students. On the other hand, teachers have low status and are poorly paid. In addition, many teachers are moved to another school each year, thus making it very difficult to create a longer-term improvement strategy.

Moving to a micro-political perspective, the outsider is struck by the emphasis on democracy in schools. For example, various staff committees are created in order to develop policies, and school principals are elected by staff, parents and, in secondary schools, student representatives. Unfortunately, in some instances this democratic emphasis creates a rather conservative atmosphere within which school principals are often reluctant to 'rock the boat'. All of this is set within a context of uncertainty, where nobody seems clear as to how and where decisions are made. There is, for example, a degree of ambiguity between the national, regional and district levels in relation to where power lies. It may well be that it

is this combination of uncertainty and ambiguity which explains the tendency to dispute that marked certain phases of this particular initiative. Also apparent is a highly individualized and sometimes competitive pattern of working within which teachers rarely have time to plan, share their ideas, materials and experiences and solve problems together.

House suggests, however, that it is the deeper cultural norms within a school that influence attitudes and practices. Here the notion of culture refers to taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions. In this respect, there is in Portuguese schools a noticeable acceptance of the rights of students with disabilities to attend their local schools. On the other hand, discrimination toward students from minority ethnic groups is evident in some schools, particularly in relation to black children and those from gypsy families. Meanwhile, there is a noticeable attitude among some teachers that changing policy and practice is not within their powers.

Having shared these perceptions with our Portuguese partners, we subsequently worked together to formulate a framework for the next stage of the initiative. Here our aim was to build on existing strengths and minimize the impact of local barriers. The framework that we created for this work was built around three interconnected processes, each of which can be addressed in schools through a series of guiding questions. These are:

- *Working together*
What are we trying to achieve?
Who needs to be involved?
How are we going to provide leadership?
- *Analysing contexts*
What types of information do we need?
Whose voices need to be heard?
How do we collect and engage with evidence?
- *Addressing priorities*
What are the barriers we need to address?
Who can contribute to the process?
How do we manage the process of change?

Within this overall framework particular stress is placed on the issues of distributed leadership, collaborative decision-making, the role of outsiders as 'critical friends', and the use of 'levers' for change, including school-to-school co-operation.

Moldova

Moving on, we now reflect on our involvement in school reforms taking place in Moldova, in eastern Europe. This work began as a Soros Foundation – Moldova (SFM) funded programme in 1998 and operated out of the non-governmental educational centre ProDidactica, based in Chisinau.¹ From the outset, there were some major considerations that steered this initiative. In particular, it had to take

account of wider developments in a country that was being reconstituted following the fall of the Soviet empire in 1992.

At first, the focus of the work was on the concept of school self-evaluation. This was designed in a manner that encouraged school staff to consider those aspects of local school development that they felt were most salient to the facilitation of student, teacher and parental voice. It was the case, and remains the case, that confidence among Moldovan people to speak out about injustice, in all aspects of their lives, was rarely articulated in public, owing to their experience under Soviet rule when it was simply unsafe to do so. This brought a dimension to discussion and reflection sessions that we had never previously encountered.

The overall strategy used was based on IQEA principles. High on that list was the concept of inclusion and on reaching out to learners in order to hear what they wanted to say about their new country and the efforts being made to 'build a better future'. A pilot initiative drew together six schools from across the country. Some schools represented people from extremely poor rural villages (annual income less than US \$50), while other schools came from the relatively affluent (annual income US \$600) and Western-exposed capital city of Chisinau.

Poverty haunted the early planning of the programme and, as a result, many of our taken-for-granted aspects of school improvement initiatives remained frustratingly difficult to establish. So, for example, communication with the schools was often impossible because of the fragility of the telephone system. Beyond the city, any form of communication beyond the telephone was impossible, other than through direct visits, and the road system meant that at least a day was needed to undertake even the shortest of journeys. In the city, only one school had email connection, and this was on one computer terminal. As a result, all forms of connection with the schools were based on physically meeting teachers and principals, and working directly with them in their schools.

In addition to these basic communication difficulties, teachers outside the city were often volunteers, because the state simply had insufficient funds to pay them. Many of the people charged in the villages with running the schools were not professionally trained; instead, they were interested amateurs who spent most of their time out of school on their fields growing food to ensure survival through the winter months.

What was not lacking, however, was a commitment to the concept of improvement. Indeed, the schools saw their role not merely to educate, but to emancipate a community through education. To this end, the concept of school self-evaluation was both attractive and important as a political expression of the power of learning.

The work was carried out with school teams and, for political reasons, involved regional education officers. These officers were often powerful people who could approve local activity and who reported directly to central government officials. Development materials and workshop sessions were maintained by ProDidactica staff who provided school teams with ongoing consultancy advice and regularly visited schools to see how their 'forums' for change were progressing. An evaluation of these activities suggested that the first wave of enthusiasm

had been sustained, despite tremendous logistical trouble in meeting and communication (Clarke, Popa and Burslec, 2001). Severe weather meant that for each of the three years, access during the winter months (November to March) was restricted to those schools based in the city. Meanwhile, the regional education officers were often seen as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution to a more open society. Their appointments were often created as a result of whom they knew and how much they were willing to pay for the position of regional officer. Such practices are officially denied, but remained a considerable handicap to the progress of the project because these regional officers were concerned about the implications of empowered schools at the community level working closely with parents and students, and demanding greater levels of freedom.

These observations meant a redesign of the programme in mid-2001 to begin to account for greater levels of localized interest among schools, as word got around of the work. At the same time, changes in budgets and priorities of the schools, as a result of new World Bank criteria, meant less opportunity to fund such activity from school budgets which were already fully stretched. During the next period, the existing schools continued to pursue their activity but a parallel development began which was based around three new schools, each located in very different parts of the country – a rural northern school (pro-Russian locally), a city school and a south-eastern school, bordering Romania.

The programme began with a discussion about the experience of change in Moldova since the Soviet period. Many of the teachers spoke movingly of their belief in the power of education as a vehicle of social reform and of their frustrations with the machinery of government to provide appropriate designs and 'solutions' to the challenges faced daily by most Moldovans. These discussions led to matters of focus and action, and to begin with this posed the greatest difficulties for the teachers. It seemed that they had little experience of being asked to design responses to the challenges they faced and, while they felt comfortable discussing such issues within a relatively safe community of colleagues, the idea that these discussions would lead to action in schools was troublesome.

An example illustrates the nature of what then happened in the schools. The school serves a small and very poor rural community on the borders of Romania and Moldova. This region has for the past ten years seen a slow but relentless decline in the standard of living, and most people now live on less than US \$50 per year. The community is predominantly farming families, but 10 years ago a large chemical plant served as a major employer. Today the chemical plant is empty, but its legacy remains. The river, a major source of water for crops in the locality, is heavily polluted as a result of the seepage of vats of chemicals which were left there when the Russian owners fled in 1992. This pollution is a cause of cancers, high toxicity in locally grown foodstuffs, and seepage into the drinking water.

The school team chose to focus their attention on this issue with the students and to develop a forum that would draw attention to the difficulties that the chemical plant raised for the community. They went on to create a series of teaching modules aimed at awareness-raising on the issue. These modules took

students outside the classroom to document the range of problems caused by pollution, the effects it had on people's lives, and to look at options for improvement. At the time of writing the students are participating in the first of a series of planned 'community fora'. These meetings will, it is hoped, stimulate local awareness and action to resolve this long-standing problem and many of the proposed activities bring together both local support and lobbying at parliamentary level.

Making sense of the complexity of such experiences in a system that is so radically different to that of our own country represents a considerable challenge. From a technical perspective, the Moldova system is rich in possibility but weak in execution. There are many schools that have no professionally trained teachers, and those which do have teachers find that they often have no money to pay them. Resources are almost non-existent, with very few books and basic materials, such as pencils, paper and chalk, are simply a luxury. In the villages, classes ebb and flow according to the season, since parents will draw on the resource of the children at planting times, harvest and the like.

From a micro-political perspective, we see how the state curriculum remains broadly based on the same conceptual model as that used in the Soviet period. However, one significant difference from that time is that all lessons are in the Romanian language. There is also an increasing awareness of the importance of listening to the voice of students. This, in turn, is creating turbulence among teachers, some of whom question the relevance and suitability in a democratic system of a heavily centralized programme. The result is that in many schools a local curriculum which has little resemblance to the formal curriculum is being explored. In effect, just like so many things in Moldova, schools have begun to take a much more radical response to the challenge of reform. This follows through to the procedural activity in schools, some of which operate in more democratic ways, with regular team meetings, committees and councils. Power does exist in the schools, but in many cases those involved find it hard to define ways of exercising such power and simply wait to be told what to do, a harking back to other times. Added to this is the pervading effect of poverty, which seeps into all aspects of the people's lives, from students to teachers to parents. On a personal level, people get by, but as a society it is struggling to overcome one old system and to introduce another. Somewhere in the middle there is a level of bribery, corruption and suspicion which means that all efforts, of any kind, will succeed so far, and then inexplicably, they seem to stop gaining the access, influence and opportunities. We remain hopeful in this programme, but we also remain realistic about such a difficult cultural history.

The experiences gained from working in Moldova raise some interesting considerations for established school improvement programmes. In particular, there is the fundamental question of school improvement for whom? The Moldovan concern to improve schools for the betterment of a democratic way of life is often in established school improvement programmes a given, and yet, as one begins to problematize the nature of dialogue within schools, the issues of power and voice of participants in the exercise are real and dominant. The Moldovan experience

raises the significance of school improvement not as a means of implementing someone else's policy, but as a move toward localized emancipation; as a political exercise which identifies and pursues educational change as a means to social justice and change.

Puerto Rico

Proyecto Equipo de Comunicacion Educativa (ECOPE), which began in Puerto Rico in 1996, brought together a group of elementary schools committed to improving learning outcomes for their students. The project was modelled on the IQEA programme. Initially supported by outside consultants, it was subsequently taken over by local university staff, though the improvement model in which the project was grounded remained one generated outside the country (see West 1998 for descriptions of project management arrangements). Below, we outline some findings from our experience in Puerto Rico which seem to have some significance for our understanding of how such transfer might be approached.

Three short examples of what schools did as a result of this involvement in the project point to some interesting outcomes. One school identified as its priority a wider involvement of parents in the life of the school. Parents had previously been involved in a range of practical activities, such as painting, gardening and improving the buildings. Looking beyond these contributions, teachers reviewed the teaching/learning relationship, and considered how parents might contribute to this. Efforts were made to extend parental involvement, with initiatives to 'teach' parents about computing and to bring parents into school to observe classrooms at work. In a second school the focus was on the students' study skills. With this in mind, an investigation of how study skills could be used to enhance the learning experiences of fourth-grade students was conducted. A third school worked to boost the literacy skills of students, mindful that self-esteem and the capacity to value oneself as a learner has a significant effect on achievement.

So, what did our observations of such activities tell us about the nature of school improvement in Puerto Rico? First of all, they reinforced our understanding that schools are always different, each with their own unique combination of problems and opportunities. Consequently, each requires its own targeted actions for improvement. The accounts also indicated that it is these small 'local' solutions that make the difference. Second, they demonstrated how teacher development is inextricably linked with school development. Schools only seemed to make progress when teachers changed their patterns of working and thinking. Third, the accounts illustrate how improvement is achieved through a series of small steps, taken continuously, and only rarely brought about through large-scale curriculum change or by legislation. In essence then, these accounts remind us that it is, for the most part, teachers who improve schools.

The practice of teachers is, of course, central to any improvement strategy. But what was most striking in Puerto Rico were the changes that occurred in the *thinking* of the teachers involved. Indeed, this has led us to speculate that

involvement in Proyecto ECOE had helped to draw teachers toward a reconceptualization of what it meant to be a teacher. Many of the teachers involved in the project also pointed to what they had learnt about working with and in groups, and it was clear that membership of such groups had been a useful developmental experience.

Involvement in the project led to changes in the way some of the teachers perceived their own influence. It is easy to explain away the progress (or lack of progress) of students in terms of their socio-economic or family circumstances – and tempting to see these factors as crucial, since they are clearly beyond the control of the individual teacher. However, once teachers became committed to the goals and processes of the project, they seemed to develop a corresponding sense of responsibility for what was happening in their classrooms. This, of course, can be a source of stress. But it can also be a source of strength, underlining the value of the teacher, the importance of the individual teacher to the individual student, and feeding a sense of empowerment which has strong motivational influence.

A further area where comment seems justified relates to the philosophy underpinning the creation of what were described as community schools. Coherent as the philosophy behind this initiative was, it was harder to understand what it meant in practice. There had been little training for community school directors, beyond the dissemination of information about the new context and expectations, and no training for teachers, though their own jobs were now placed in a very different context. It was not surprising, therefore, that in such circumstances, many schools and teachers were slow to come to terms with the implications of the community school. However, we found evidence both in the comments made by Proyecto ECOE members, and in their behaviour and methods of organizing, that they were coming to terms with what it means to be a community school. Among other things, this meant understanding that self-direction must inevitably bring with it accountability, and that these two things – autonomy and accountability – need to be built inside the school's structure as well as be recognized in the relationship between school, community and Department of Education.

Accordingly, it seemed that the participation of this group of schools within the project was an important factor in the development of their understanding of the new educational landscape in Puerto Rico; perhaps involvement in similar projects would prove a useful vehicle for other community schools that still need to develop this kind of understanding.

Toward the end of our involvement, we invited teachers from Proyecto ECOE to tell us what they would want to tell colleagues from other schools about their experiences of school improvement. Many of them felt that what had emerged as important had been the careful selection of appropriate priorities that reflected the school's own context and agenda, and for which there was broad support among their colleagues. They also explained how organizing themselves within the school was important – particularly organizing the implementation and evaluation of their plans. Finally, they noted that improvement activity makes considerable demands on the school director.

From our own observation of and conversations with these teachers, we felt that they had identified some of the most important issues. However, there were other interesting issues that emerged from an attempt to transfer a model of school improvement from a developed to a developing country. Here, we will simply mention three matters that relate to the different assumptions about the role and status of the school leader.

The first concerns the high dependence of schools on the central administration, not just for policy guidance, but often for advice on practices. As a result, there is a great reluctance at the school level to vary from what is perceived as 'official' policy, and it is difficult to secure commitment at a school level without some form of official support. In consequence, what 'works' or 'makes sense' tends not to be a good reason for adopting new practices – rather, the question is 'what is approved?'

The second issue relates to the parallel dependency relationship that is found within the schools. Though school directors in Puerto Rico have actually quite limited autonomy, they tend to guard what they have quite jealously. Within the culture of the schools, directors have enormous power relative to the teachers. Consultation, which in some instances is seen as a sign of weakness, is rare. When the teaching staff are brought together by the school director, it is generally so that they can be 'told' things (often things the school director has been told in turn by the central department.) This lack of involvement in decision-making by teachers is reflected in the lack of management structure within the school – there are frequently no members of staff other than the school director who could be described as exercising a management function, and no middle management arrangements within the school.

The third issue relates to the perceptions of role and of what matters most within the school. School directors are thought of as having 'moved beyond' classroom contact. Often they have little contact of any sorts with students, and the suggestion that they might continue to teach for part of their time is unlikely to receive a positive response. In this culture, what are eventually low-level, administrative tasks, such as form-filling or record keeping, are seen as more important than teaching or interacting with children. It is extremely difficult to induce school directors either to 'share' these tasks with colleagues, or to play a more active role in the teaching and learning activities that are at the centre of the school. It can be difficult even to persuade them of the need to be in classrooms so that they can see the teachers at work and undertake meaningful monitoring activities.

Of course, there are many other differences, and we would not want to minimize the difficulty of transferring school development models across cultures. Yet, there is evidence within this particular project that there were principles that could transfer and, curiously perhaps, that the closer these were to the teaching/learning relationship, the more universal their application. It is adapting to the systemic and managerial cultures that presents the greatest problems. Nevertheless, with goodwill and no assumption that what is imported represents best practice and what is to be found there inevitably needs to be 'improved', Proyecto

ECOC suggests that some developments can be stimulated by the sensitive applications of a model transferred from one country to another.

Conclusion

The accounts and interpretations we have provided of our Portuguese, Moldovan and Puerto Rican experiences illustrate vividly the way local traditions and circumstances bear on the work of schools. We saw, for example, how the different power relationships between teachers and school leaders in the three countries influenced the way practices develop.

The accounts also show how improvement efforts have to engage with these local factors, such that the replication of imported models is extremely difficult, if not impossible. On the other hand, the accounts indicate that the flexibility of the overall IQEA approach, with its strong emphasis on local leadership and inquiry, can be adapted to fit with different contexts and cultures.

Our conclusions seem to confirm the view of Fuller and Clark (1994), who argue that those involved in international educational innovations overlook local culture at their peril. Such an argument has implications for:

- *school development*, which needs to take account of local understandings, conditions and histories
- *external support*, which needs to start from the assumption that leadership has to start from within individual schools and can often be most effectively achieved through school to school partnership arrangements, and
- *international co-operation*, which must avoid the danger of assuming the ideas and practices found to be useful in one context can simply be lifted and transplanted to another.

All of this leads us to conclude that we *can* learn from one another about ways of bringing about school change, across contexts, including national borders, provided that we appreciate the nature of the type of learning that is possible. As we have seen, this learning is rich in both cultural and social nuance.

In essence, then, we conclude that an involvement in school improvement in systems other than our own has the potential to stimulate a form of social learning that uses difference as a stimulus for reframing existing understandings. As we have illustrated, this has the potential to encourage further reflection and experimentation. In this way, differences can serve as the starting point for learning and development, and, in coming together to seek deeper clarity of purpose and practice, we can demystify aspects of those differences. This means that school improvement can be encouraged by 'making the familiar unfamiliar'.

Note

- 1 The Soros Foundation – Moldova (SFM) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit and non-political organization which was established in 1992 by the financier and the philanthropist George Soros to promote the development of an open society in Moldova by developing and implementing a range of programmes and activities that address specific areas of needs including arts and culture, education at all levels, rural economic development, legal reform and public administration, media and information, civil society and public health.

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5

Effective School Improvement

Similarities and Differences in Improvement in Eight European Countries¹

Louise Stoll, Bert P. M. Creemers and Gerry Reezigt

Worldwide interest in school improvement shows no signs of abating, if different countries' government policies, the amount of literature published, and attendance at the annual conference of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) are used as indicators. Effective school improvement is a major concern for both school effectiveness and school improvement theory and research. Until relatively recently, however, the paradigms of school effectiveness and school improvement remained separate, not only in their methodology but also in their focus. School effectiveness traditionally has strongly focused on student outcomes and the characteristics of schools and classrooms associated with these outcomes without automatically looking at the processes that are needed to bring about change. School improvement until recently, by contrast, was mainly concerned with changing the quality of teaching and schools without automatically looking at the consequences for student outcomes. In short, school effectiveness was trying to find out *what* needed to be changed in schools to become more effective while school improvement was trying to find out *how* schools brought about the process of change.

Increasingly, a range of projects within individual countries have sought to link the two (e.g. Gray *et al.*, 1999; MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). Until the Effective School Improvement (ESI) project, however, the links had not been explored across countries. While sharing school improvement initiatives and projects between countries has been common at ICSEI conferences since its inception in 1988, joint international projects have been less frequently undertaken, especially those attempting to understand if effective school improvement is a similar phenomenon in different countries and to draw out findings that

might be applicable beyond country boundaries (see Mortimore *et al.*, 2000 for one example). This was a key aim of the ESI project, running from 1998 to 2001, that drew together teams from eight European countries: Belgium, England, Finland, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain (Creemers and Hoeben, 1998). Another aim was to continue to establish stronger links between the two paradigms of school effectiveness and school improvement to help both profit from each other's strongest points.

It was felt that the construction of an ESI model would be a first step in integrating the paradigms. Such a model might show the relationships between school effectiveness and school improvement in a meaningful way, and it was hoped it would be a starting point for further development of theories about effective school improvement, promoting research that combined essential factors from both paradigms more powerfully than previous attempts.

Elsewhere, we have charted the course of this project through its stages and a range of papers and reports are available (Hoeben, 1998; de Jong, 2000; Reezigt, 2000; de Jong, 2001; de Jong *et al.*; 2001; Reezigt, 2001; Creemers, 2002; Murillos 2002; Stoll *et al.*, 2002; Wikeley *et al.*, 2002a, 2002b). In this chapter, first we briefly outline the components of the project. Next, we examine issues in conducting comparative case studies before looking at some similarities and differences between countries across the improvement process on the basis of case study analysis. Finally, we present our eventual final framework and offer some recommendations for its use by practitioners, researchers and policy-makers.

The ESI Project

The project, Capacity for Change and Adaptation in the Case of Effective School Improvement (ESI), drew on Hopkins and colleagues' 1994 definition of improvement, defining effective school improvement as 'planned educational change that enhances student learning outcomes as well as the school's capacity for managing change' (Hoeben, 1998). In other words, to evaluate effective school improvement, an *effectiveness criterion* is needed (does the school achieve better student outcomes?) as well as an *improvement criterion* (does the school manage to change successfully from old to new conditions necessary for effectiveness?).

The project consisted of three related research tasks:

- The analysis, evaluation and synthesis of a range of theories that might be useful for effective school improvement to create an evaluation framework.
- The inventory, analysis and evaluation of effective school improvement programmes in the different European countries.
- The creation of a draft model discussed at conferences of practitioners, policy-makers and researchers in each of the countries. The results were the input for a final meeting of the research teams, resulting in rejection of the idea of a model and development of a comprehensive framework for effective school improvement.

Figure 5.1 Key questions in ESI evaluation framework

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- 1 To what extent do the student outcomes provide evidence for the school's effectiveness in attaining its goals?
 - 2 To what extent do the intermediate outcomes provide evidence for the attainment of the school's improvement goals?
 - 3 To what extent do the students show increased engagement with their own learning and their learning environment?
 - 4 To what extent does the curriculum in the classrooms contribute to the school's attainment of students' goals?
 - 5 To what extent does the cycle of improvement planning, implementation, evaluation and feedback contribute to the school's attainment of its improvement goals?
 - 6 To what extent does the school's curriculum – where applicable – contribute to the effectiveness of the classroom curriculum?
 - 7 To what extent does the school's organization contribute to the attainment of intermediate improvement goals and students' goals?
 - 8 To what extent does parental choice and involvement contribute to the school's responsiveness and to its attainment of intermediate improvement goals and students' goals?
 - 9 To what extent does the learning by the school organization contribute to the school's management of change, i.e., to the attainment of the intermediate improvement goals?
 - 10 To what extent do external change agents contribute to the school's attainment of intermediate improvement goals?
 - 11 To what extent do the contextual characteristics allow for, stimulate or hinder ESI, i.e., the attainment of intermediate improvement goals and of the students' goals?
For instance: to what extent does the national curriculum – where applicable – allow for, stimulate or hinder ESI?
-

The initial evaluation framework was developed (Hoeben, 1998) as a means of testing our evolving theory of effective school improvement based on integration of effectiveness and improvement paradigms, taking into account contextual differences inherent in contingency theory (Minzberg, 1979) and incorporating other theoretical influences, several of which had often been unexplored in school effectiveness and school improvement research. These were organizational theories, curriculum theories, behavioural theories, public choice theories and organizational learning theories (Reezigt, 2000). Key questions were outlined in the evaluation framework (see Figure 5.1), and each of the questions included a range of sub-themes that were investigated during the case studies.

The comparative case studies analysis in the ESI project was based on several case studies of improvement programmes in each participating country. All ESI partners provided a number of programme descriptions (varying from 2 to 10 different descriptions) based on the evaluation framework. Researchers in five countries visited the schools involved in improvement programmes, while in three others, improvement programme data were reanalysed by the country team.

Analysis was undertaken to find the factors promoting or hindering effective school improvement in each specific country, and information about the educational systems in each country was used to contextualize each country's findings. Case studies were written of each programme (de Jong, 2000) and country teams were paired up to analyse similarities and differences between the programmes, using a rating instrument (Stoll *et al.*, 2002). We also explored whether the factors worked in the same way in different countries. This was important for constructing an ESI model, especially if they pointed to factors different from those derived from the theoretical analyses and also because they helped the research team to understand how the factors worked in practice.

Issues in Conducting Comparative ESI Case Studies

Before we look at the similarities and differences in the case study findings, it is important to highlight some issues we faced in the case study process: the influence of context, the type of programme studied, and the appropriate outcomes identified.

The importance of the educational context in European countries

Context was a key issue for the research team. At each meeting we spent time discussing the difference between centralized and decentralized systems, and had to question whether at times we took for granted that a more decentralized system was the norm and even more desirable. Our countries varied considerably in the extent of autonomy for schools and teachers. Greece is a centralized school system with, for example, one centrally prescribed textbook per subject matter. As Kontogiannopolou-Polydorides and Stamelos (1998: 68) explain:

The concept of effectiveness in school is treated by the political leader at the Ministry of Education and central administration staff. Consequently, school is considered as a mechanism for implementing the Ministry's policies and decisions on practice . . . Given that in a strong centralized system its hierarchy has a primordial role, it is not strange that the Greek State considers and calls the teachers 'functionaries'.

They continue that the greatest problem of a centralized system is 'the uniformity and the narrow margin of initiatives from the diverse partners of school community' (p. 71). In other countries, schools have much greater autonomy, through decentralized decision-making. This played itself out in different ways during the time of our project. For example, in The Netherlands teachers were free to teach in the way they wished, as were Belgian teachers, who were not obliged to welcome outsiders in to their schools. In Spain, school autonomy had increased significantly, although this autonomy was not being completely exercised by most teachers and schools (Murillo, 2002). In some senses there was considerable decentralization, for example in curriculum choice and flexibility

over timetabling, but schools had no autonomy when it came to recruitment or teacher training and only a certain amount in relation to resources.

The issue was whether it was possible to evolve a language of understanding about the difference of school improvement in the different countries that could lead to overall models or designs for improvement for all of the countries. The theoretical ESI whole-group language worked less well for some countries. The very language each of the countries used showed contextual variations. So, for example, there is no word in the Portuguese language that mirrors the word 'accountability', and 'effectiveness' means different things to different countries. As Demeuse *et al.* (2000: 8) noted: 'the English concept of effective school improvement is difficult to translate into French in the sense the idea is not actually used in our school context'. Rather, the French Belgian expression refers to innovation in the sense of newness. Some countries (for example The Netherlands and England) have a much longer tradition of carrying out school effectiveness research. With it, a tradition has built up, at least within the associated research communities in these countries, that 'effectiveness' needs to include some measure of the value-added academic progress made by students once initial attainment and background factors have been taken into account (see Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000 and Sammons, 1999, for summaries). In contrast, in Finland and Belgium there are no national examinations, making such analysis difficult. School improvement also carries with it a range of meanings: for some it is a term to describe school functioning, for others the processes of change, and for others still it is an outcome.

Types of improvement programmes

Three main types of improvement programmes were selected by country teams in different countries. These can be characterized by the initiator of improvement efforts (whether it came from within the school or outside) and the perceived need for improvement (felt by the school or defined by others):

- *bottom-up programmes*: improvement programmes fully initiated and implemented by the school, in Finland, for example
- *top-down programmes*: external improvement programmes 'forced' on the school, including improvement programmes supplied to Italian schools with low results 'aimed at solving the troubles that determined the low results' (D'Arcangeli *et al.*, 2000: 281), and
- *mixed programmes*: improvement programmes initially developed by external agents but subsequently voluntarily implemented in schools or adapted by them, for example, in Portugal where schools have some freedom to adjust nationally prescribed programmes to their own contexts and needs.

There was no linear relation between the type of improvement programme and the educational system in a country. It would be far too simplistic to say that relatively decentralized countries only have bottom-up improvement, while relatively centralized countries only have top-down improvement. In addition,

countries moving from a centralized system to more decentralization did not automatically show mixed approaches of school improvement. In theory, all types can occur in all countries, although of course the bottom-up approach is more likely to be found in countries where schools have some freedom to make their own decisions. On the other hand, freedom of schools does not guarantee effective bottom-up improvement.

The type of improvement that a school is involved in has consequences for the occurrence and the influence of the particular factors explored. So, for example, readiness for change and school ownership of improvement tend to appear more frequently in bottom-up approaches. The types of improvement we examined, therefore, did not lead to totally different sets of factors that may explain effective school improvement, but the role that these factors played in a specific situation varied. It was important for us to keep this context specificity of improvement efforts in mind in interpreting the influence of the factors included in the ESI framework.

Identifying improvement outcomes

To evaluate effective school improvement, an effectiveness criterion has to be applied as well as an improvement criterion. In the ESI project, the effectiveness criterion referred to changes in the student outcomes in a broad domain of knowledge and skills as a result of improvement, while the improvement criterion referred to changes in the school or classroom conditions that were necessary for effectiveness. These changes might be described as ‘intermediate outcomes’ of improvement (Stoll and Fink, 1996), while changes in student outcomes can be seen as ‘ultimate outcomes’ of improvement. For school improvement efforts to be defined as effective, ideally both criteria needed to be met and both types of outcomes had to be visible.

The case studies showed us that, in practice, it was often very hard to find out whether both criteria were met and whether both types of outcomes were achieved in the programmes we studied (Stoll *et al.*, 2002; Wikeley *et al.*, 2002). Sometimes, and particularly in some countries, only information about the intermediate outcomes (such as better co-operation between teachers, and the implementation of a higher quality curriculum or syllabus) was available. In some other countries, while student outcome data was collected comparisons were made of raw student scores, whereas value-added analysis of student progress was used in other countries. Some country teams drew on external inspection reports or school self-evaluation reports based on indicator systems. For example, Portugal has an Observatory of School Quality self-evaluation instrument focusing on pupils’ background, educational resources, the extent to which the school context is stimulating, and educational outcomes, including rates of achievement, quality of achievement and drop-out rates (Lopes da Silva *et al.*, 2000). In keeping with the tradition of school effectiveness, we felt it was important to keep the final student outcomes in the framework.

Similarities and Differences in the Improvement Process

The case studies analysis resulted in each ESI team describing factors that appeared to promote or hinder effective school improvement. In our analysis we found a number of similarities and differences across the improvement process in different countries.

The main findings are summarized in Table 5.1 at the three levels (context, school and classroom/teacher)¹. The factors are ordered according to the number of countries that have mentioned them as influential for ESI. Sometimes the absence of a certain factor is seen as hindering ESI, for example, a school principal who does not act as an educational leader (in The Netherlands). In this case, 'leadership' is depicted in Table 5.1 as an ESI promoting factor. The factors derived from theories and the factors derived from the case studies analysis show considerable overlap. The effects that factors are supposed to exert are also in accordance with the theoretical expectancies, with the exception of market mechanisms. New factors most often referred to practical constraints that may promote or hinder ESI efforts. Factors promoting ESI in one country were generally seen to promote ESI in other countries. Only three factors did not lead to similar judgements across all countries. These were:

- the role of external agents (seen as important in most countries, but not in Spain)
- the role of parents and the community in improvement efforts (seen as important in two countries, but not in Spain), and
- the complexity of the improvement effort.

While Spain found a comprehensive innovation for schoolwide improvement to be more successful, the Dutch evidence was that smaller improvement programmes with a clear focus in one or two educational domains, e.g. literacy were more likely to lead to success.

Looking at one of these factors – the contribution of external agents – more closely in three different countries, we can see both similarities and differences. The conclusion of the Dutch team was:

External agents played a very important role in the projects. They facilitated the improvement process by assisting in curriculum adaptation, performing class consultations, assisting with the interpretation of student achievement profiles, assisting with the development of group and individual plans, and training the head teachers as coaches.

(de Jong *et al.*, 2002: 451)

The conclusion of the English team, who examined 10 case study schools in two larger programmes, was also broadly positive in relation to the external agents: '... both programmes' intentions were to create a culture of improvement that

Table 5.1 ESI factors for effective school improvement from the case studies analysis

	T	N	F	B	E	S	P	I	G
<i>Context level factors</i>									
External agents involved in improvement programmes	Yes	+		+	+	0	+	+	+
External pressure to start improvement		+		+	+	+	+	+	
External evaluation of schools	Yes	+		+	+			+	+
Market mechanisms	Yes			-	-				
Decentralization of decisions (content, teaching practice)									+
<i>School level factors</i>									
Positive attitude toward change	Yes	+	+	+	+	+		+	
School culture, shared values, vision on education, mission	Yes	+	+	+	+	+			
School organization that facilitates improvement (time, etc.)						+	+	+	+
Leadership of the principal (or other staff members)	Yes	+	+		+	+			
Staff instability		-				-	-		-
Internal evaluation (assessment of students and teachers)	Yes	+	+		+				+
Goal setting (student outcomes and/or intermediate goals)	Yes	+	+		+				
Parental/community involvement in improvement programmes						0	+	+	
Adequate planning of the improvement process	Yes		+			+			
Improvement embedded in overall school development		+			+				
Getting ready for change/tackle visible issues first					+	+			
Complexity/comprehensiveness of the improvement programme		-				+			
Self-regulative improvement cycle	Yes					+			
Student participation in improvement efforts									+
<i>Classroom/teacher level factors</i>									
Teacher motivation and involvement/participation in processes and decisions	Yes		+	+	+	+		+	+
Teacher collaboration (in school, across schools)	Yes		+		+		+	+	
Feedback on teacher behaviour		+	+						
Teacher training/staff development					+	+			
Implementation of essential elements of curricula/innovations	Yes				+		+		

Key:

N = The Netherlands, F = Finland, B = Belgium, E = England, S = Spain, P = Portugal, I = Italy, G = Greece

T = also found to be important in theoretical part of project

+ = positive influence on ESI

- = negative influence on ESI

0 = no influence on ESI

increased the school's capacity for improvement and this was evident in all the schools' (Wikeley *et al.*, 2002a: 384).

In contrast, the Spanish team's findings showed that external change agents collaborating in the development and success of ESI programmes varied considerably, leading them to conclude: '... external agents are not a determinant issue for the success of Spanish ESI programmes. This can be explained in the Spanish system because there are no institutions in charge of supporting schools' (Murillo, 2002: 407).

Developing the ESI Framework

Initially, we tried to construct a draft model. To do this, we:

- selected important factors from theories and case studies
- regrouped them under the heading of a restricted set of key concepts at the context, school and classroom/teacher level: pressure to improve, goal setting for improvement, autonomy granted to schools/used by schools and teachers to decide about improvement, culture that favours improvement, readiness for improvement and cyclical improvement processes
- outlined factors at each level, and
- specified the outcomes of effective school improvement (intermediate outcomes at the school and classroom/teacher level versus student outcomes).

Although individual teacher efforts enhance student learning outcomes (the effectiveness criterion of ESI), they may not have a lasting impact on the school as an organization (the improvement criterion of ESI). As a consequence, it was agreed that the key level in the model would be the school level. A separate *department* level was not distinguished, although it was recognized that improvement efforts in secondary education often concern specific departments and the factors for the departments are in many senses similar to those at the school level (Sammons *et al.*, 1997). School-level factors in the model might also not adequately describe the actual situation in schools in a centralized country such as Greece, but also in a more decentralized country such as Belgium that does not actively stimulate schools to improve. It may be that some of the concepts that we described at the school level in the model are in fact taking place at another level, for example, when the national government takes the initiative for improvement or when teachers decide that improvement is needed in their classrooms. Still, in these situations too the schools will ultimately have to be the essential centres of effective school improvement, even when the initiative for changes comes from the outside or is absent. The research team agreed that when the school as an organization does not actively engage in improvement efforts at least to some extent, improvement effects will be marginal and probably not lasting (in the case of enthusiastic or isolated teachers) or effects may not be found at all.

Through analysis of existing data, country conferences and a final workshop

of the research teams, the ESI model was revised. The main objective of the analysis of existing data was to confront the ESI model with data from effective improvement studies carried out elsewhere but not analysed earlier in the ESI project. Six externally validated and reported studies were selected matching the effectiveness and improvement criteria. A checklist was used to compare the studies, reflecting the key concepts and the factors of the draft ESI model (de Jong *et al.*, 2001).

The second source used to revise the model was information gathered in country conferences in October and November 2000 (de Jong, 2001). Their main objectives were to disseminate preliminary results to researchers, practitioners and policy-makers and to get feedback on the draft model in consideration of its revision. ESI country teams decided about their own conference format. Joint project information was available for all countries to use, including the draft model. A short questionnaire was developed by the ESI team (de Jong, 2001) to structure feedback from conference participants. The questionnaire checked participants' opinions about the models' variables by asking how important the variables are for ESI (either in a positive or a negative sense), why they are important, how the variables are related, which variables are most important, and why. In addition, the questionnaire asked for suggestions for changes to the model and missing factors. While participants in most countries found some benefits to the model, some concerns were expressed. These are described, followed by the names of the countries where conference participants gave the specific feedback.

There were questions about the model's prescriptiveness. When the model is viewed as prescriptive, the factors that constitute the model are read as a prescription or a recipe for effective school improvement (Belgium and The Netherlands). Very few participants in the country conferences actually advocated a prescriptive interpretation. The model was not fully descriptive either. If it would have to be tailored for the different countries in the project, every country would have a different model (The Netherlands and Belgium). Some factors in the model were present in some countries, but absent in others. Some factors had a positive influence in some countries, but a negative one in others and the same phenomenon could also occur within countries (England). These functions can only be fulfilled in different countries when the framework shows some flexibility in the interpretation of the factors and their influences. This is the reason we decided to describe it as a comprehensive framework rather than a model. This requires a rather abstract formulation of the factors, which then can be filled with more detailed examples for each country.

The model was often considered too static to convey the dynamics of school improvement (England and Spain). It was necessary to find a more dynamic way to picture the factors. It should be clear that we are dealing with flexible, dynamic, recursive and revolving processes. Factors and levels are reciprocally related and cannot be depicted by linear cause-and-effect-relationships.

Of all the levels with factors in the model (context, school/department, classroom/teacher), the context attracted the most attention (The Netherlands, Greece, England and Portugal). The model can contribute to cross-cultural issues, because

it enables countries to see the contextual differences better, and to see the similarities. It may well be that the differences are more interesting than the similarities, especially in comparison with within-country models. In these latter models, the context level is often left out and as a consequence the major influences of the context on all other levels in the educational system are not analysed. The context level therefore is the background for all factors at the other levels. There was also some concern that the school level had been overplayed in relation to the individual teacher/classroom level (Portugal, Spain and Greece).

The focus on academic student outcomes as the major outcomes of effective school improvement was criticized (Italy and Finland). Schools pursue more student outcomes than academic ones and these should be represented in the model too. In addition, it should be noted that educational objectives (student outcomes) in some countries are strongly determined by the context level. The model suggests too much that the school can choose the outcomes. Even when choices by the school are possible, the pursued outcomes will always have to be in line with the formal educational objectives. Some respondents also felt that student outcomes reflect the effectiveness criterion of effective school improvement, and that the model did not pay enough attention to the improvement criterion, the capacity of schools to manage change (Spain). It was suggested that concepts linked with the improvement criterion are schools as learning organizations and teachers as reflective practitioners (Finland).

In short, the final version of the model needed to be a common framework on effective school improvement that countries could fill with relevant factors and (if possible) strategies. A final three-day meeting of the research teams explored these issues and led to the development of a comprehensive framework for effective school improvement (see Figure 5.2). The comprehensive framework shows

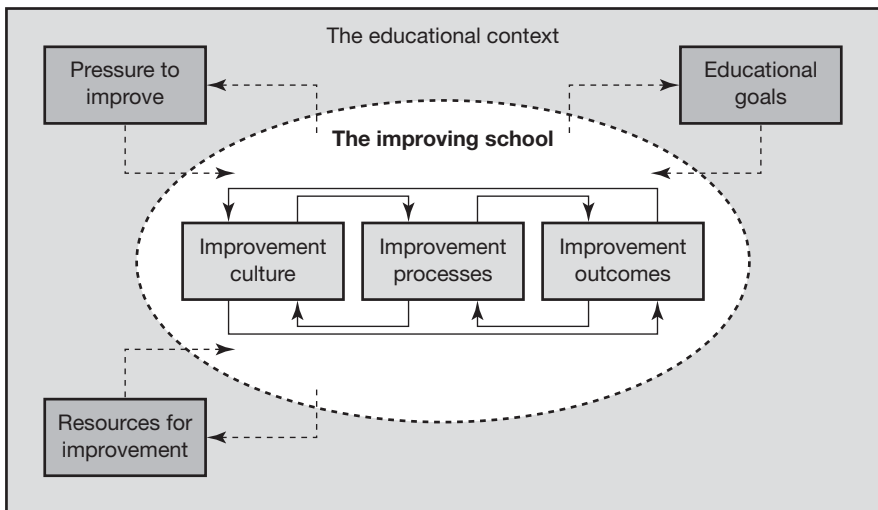


Figure 5.2 A comprehensive framework for effective school improvement

that an improving school is firmly embedded in the educational context of a country. Schools and school improvement can never be studied apart from their educational context. This is clearly indicated by the interrupted line around the improving school which is central in the framework. As such, the improving school is always confronted with the main contextual concepts of pressure to improve resources for improvement and educational goals, that exist in the educational context. Even when schools are free to decide about their improvement outcomes, these will always have to be in line with the wider educational goals determined in that context.

We concluded that the importance of the educational context appears most prominently in internationally comparative studies such as the ESI project, but should also be incorporated in all within-country studies of effective school improvement (Reezigt, 2001). From the perspective of school improvement, the research teams concluded that the influence of the context on the school is more intensive than the influence of the school on the context although, over time, schools influence their context as well. The main contextual concepts of pressure to improve, resources for improvement and educational goals contain a wider number of factors (see Table 5.2).

In the improving school, the concepts of the improvement culture in the school, the actual improvement processes and the improvement outcomes are essential. The improvement culture is the background against which the processes are taking place. The improvement outcomes are the goals that the improving school wants to achieve. The concepts of culture, processes and outcomes are all interrelated and will constantly influence each other. The culture will influence not only the processes, but also the outcomes of improvement. The processes obviously influence the improvement outcomes, but the processes will also change the improvement culture. The outcomes will influence the processes and also the improvement culture of the school. The interrelationships between these main concepts show that effective school improvement is an ongoing cyclical process without a clearly marked beginning or ending. Table 5.3 shows the

Table 5.2 Main contextual concepts

<i>Pressure to improve</i>	<i>Resources/support for improvement</i>	<i>Educational goals</i>
Market mechanisms	Autonomy granted to schools	Formal educational goals in terms of student outcomes
External evaluation and accountability	Financial resources and favourable daily working conditions	
External agents		
Participation of society in education/societal changes/ educational policies which stimulate change	Local support	

Table 5.3 School concepts

<i>Improvement culture</i>	<i>Improvement processes</i>	<i>Improvement outcomes</i>
Internal pressure to improve	Assessment of improvement needs	Changes in the quality of the school
Autonomy used by schools	Diagnosis of improvement needs	Changes in the quality of the teachers
Shared vision	Phrasing of detailed improvement goals	Changes in the quality of student outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes)
Willingness to become a learning organization/ a reflective practitioner	Planning of improvement activities	
Training and collegial collaboration	Implementation of improvement plans	
Improvement history	Evaluation	
Ownership of improvement. commitment and motivation	Reflection	
Leadership		
Staff stability		
Time for improvement		

factors included under the overarching school concepts of improvement culture, improvement processes and improvement outcomes.

Taking one of the factors highlighted under improvement culture, it can be seen how it takes on a different shape in different countries, as described by the different country research teams (see Table 5.4).

Use of the framework

The comprehensive framework is directed at three different target groups: practitioners, researchers and policy-makers. For *practitioners*, we hope that the framework can be useful in the design, planning and implementation of school improvement. The framework gives an overview of all factors that may promote or hinder effective school improvement and as such it can be used as a way of exploring educational practice. However, schools will need to translate the factors into their own situations and tailor them to their own needs. The framework is never intended to prescribe how a specific school in a specific country should act in order to achieve effective school improvement.

For *researchers*, we believe the framework is especially important for further research in the field of effective school improvement. The framework can be used to generate hypotheses and to select variables that should be investigated and further operationalized. It presents an overview of relevant variables but does not specify criteria (such as how often school evaluation needs to take place to have an impact on improvement outcomes). The international dimension of the framework, reflected in the attention given to the context factors, provides insight in the influences of these factors across countries but also within

Table 5.4 Leadership for school improvement in different European countries

The Netherlands	Leadership is becoming more and more important in Dutch schools.
Finland	Leadership and management are both needed. The principal can be seen as a conductor in an orchestra. Sometimes he has to be more visible, sometimes he is more in the background.
Belgium (French community)	Leadership (by the principal) is not an obvious concept in Belgium, where teachers are still rather isolated and principals mainly have administrative tasks.
England	Leadership, particularly of the principal, is seen as important. Improvement however is also generated by other staff members in an informal leadership role.
Spain	The democratic model in the election of the school principal makes him/her the natural leader of the school, with a high capacity to energize the teachers. The management team has always had a core role in change processes.
Portugal	Although leadership by someone in the school is clearly important, leadership by the principal is not so important in Portugal, because principals have mainly administrative tasks.
Italy	Principals in Italy tend to be managers in the first place, not educational leaders.
Greece	Leadership of improvement efforts is exercised by the Ministry of Education. The principal has an administrative role.

countries. In traditional improvement research, the educational context has often been excluded. Its importance is rarely acknowledged and analysed.

Policy-makers have to be aware that the framework can never be used as a recipe for effective school improvement or as a ready-made toolbox for the implementation of improvement in schools. The framework merely clarifies which factors must be taken into consideration in the planning of improvement processes in schools. It also shows which conditions must be taken into account, both at the context and the school levels. The framework may help policy-makers to see how important school improvement is for student outcomes or how important the school is as a meaningful unit for improvement. Also, the framework shows policy-makers how strongly schools are influenced by the context. This implies that adequate context measures will often be needed in improvement efforts. Leaving the school to improve on its own will often not be a realistic option.

It is clear that the framework will always need interpretation whenever it is used, whether for practice, research or policy. Bearing this in mind, the framework may have the following functions for practitioners, researchers and policy-makers:

- It can start a debate and can contribute to ongoing discussions about effective school improvement.

- It can introduce new arguments in a debate and thereby assist in decision-making.
- It can act as an eye-opener about improvement factors which are different in different countries.
- It can be used as a tool for the planning, designing, implementation, evaluation and reflection of improvement projects and research on effective school improvement.
- It can be used as an input in teacher training.

The exact functions of the framework will, however, always be dependent on the context in which it is used and the people who use it. Despite many similarities, effective school improvement in these eight European countries is subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, different.

Notes

- 1 With thanks to all the members of the ESI research team in the eight countries and to participating schools and other improvement programme staff. The research was funded by the European Union through its programme on Targeted Socio-Economic Research (project reference number: CT97/2027).
- 2 For a more detailed description, see Reezigt (2001).

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Part 3

School Improvement:
Phase 4

6

Changing Secondary Schools Is Hard

Lessons from 10 Years of School Improvement in the
Manitoba School Improvement Program

Lorna Earl, Nancy Torrance and Stephanie Sutherland

Over the past several decades, educational reform has become a high priority, with school improvement garnering a great deal of attention in schools, school districts, governments, universities, foundations and other agencies around the world. As school improvement has moved to centre stage, researchers in many locations have been involved in evaluating and learning from a broad range of approaches to educational change initiated by these different bodies. Educational change is not a straightforward progression, and there is a long history of false starts and limited success. No two locations have the same trajectory or experiences but there are many possibilities for learning about school improvement from a range of different contexts.

The Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP) has existed and developed throughout this era of concentration on educational change and has provided a unique opportunity for a longitudinal investigation of a particular approach to educational reform in secondary schools over more than a decade of engagement in the process. When MSIP began, it was in the vanguard of school improvement initiatives around the world. These early entrants to school improvement anticipated that, by applying what was known from both research and theory, they could improve student learning by changing how schools work. But changing schools, especially secondary schools, has proven to be very hard to do. Watching schools over time, as we have in this investigation of MSIP, highlights the difficulty of moving to the ‘deep changes’ that may be necessary to fundamentally improve schools. As teachers in one of the MSIP schools said:

Every teacher wants to be a great teacher. They want to reach kids. They want to connect with kids and give the best possible instruction in their classroom. But it's a daunting task to accomplish those things. I think the philosophy is there, the belief is there, but how do you change the practice, the things that happen every day?

What is MSIP?

MSIP is an example of a whole-school approach to reform that originated in 1991 with private foundation support and has evolved into an independent, non-profit organization. Its goal is to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of secondary school students, particularly those at risk, by building schools' capacities. MSIP is a network of secondary schools supported and challenged by a small secretariat of consultants who help schools serve their students, especially those at risk, through improvement in the conditions for learning in secondary schools, rather than by identifying the student as the problem (Fullan, 1991; Stoll and Fink, 1996). MSIP began not with a master plan, but with a set of assumptions drawn from the research literature that:

- motivation resides at the level of the school
- change occurs through pressure and support, in a spirit of trust and mutual challenge
- schools are unique and deserve personal attention
- independent organizations can be catalysts and brokers
- disparate public voices and conflict are part of the process
- focus on learning for all students is essential
- improvement is evolutionary and involves self-monitoring and mid-course corrections
- success is not straightforward or easy to see, and
- sustained change is a collective effort.

In the early days, MSIP drew on the body of research that was emerging from the school effectiveness movement that identified the school as the ideal unit of change and suggested focusing on school-level intermediate processes that were associated with effective schools (i.e. focus on student learning, engagement of the school community, connection to the world outside the school, ongoing inquiry and reflection, coherence and integration among school initiatives, and internal capacity for change) (Fullan, 1991; Stoll and Fink, 1996).

MSIP invited secondary schools to apply for grants to support projects that:

- were school-based and teacher-initiated
- focused on the needs of adolescent secondary students (seventh grade to Senior 4/twelfth grade)

- addressed fundamental issues of educational improvement and student learning for at-risk students
- had the potential for long-term impact on the school
- had strong potential for replication or adaptation by other schools
- were designed or developed to incorporate a collaborative and participatory approach with the school, and
- included an appropriate evaluation component.

Each school that was approved for participation received project funding, in accordance with their proposal and budget request. These funds were usually small multi-year grants for projects such as peer mediation, girls in technology and community involvement. MSIP staff members worked closely with individual schools and spent much of their time building trust, helping schools develop proposals, and providing support as they implemented their projects and thought about how they could measure and show progress toward their goals.

By 1995 projects were taking root in schools and MSIP began to look more closely at making the focus the school as a whole. MSIP continued to give discretionary funding for school improvement. They also worked as ‘critical friends’ providing onsite support for planning, implementing and evaluating the work in schools and asking difficult questions, encouraging evaluation, and requiring clear and coherent documentation of progress. MSIP expanded its initial service base on two levels. First, they extended the range of roles that the MSIP consultants performed. Second, the nature of service delivery had evolved from school-based projects to a focus on coherent school improvement. Table 6.1 shows the kinds of services that MSIP staff provide to schools and districts.

MSIP has not operated in a vacuum in Manitoba. Many forces within the province have been and continue to be active in educational reform. During the time that MSIP has been in operation, Manitoba Education has initiated its own reform efforts to improve both elementary and secondary schools for at-risk students. Government policies have provided a framework for changes in education at the provincial level in curriculum (particularly in mathematics), provincial

Table 6.1 MSIP service delivery

<i>Consultative services</i>	<i>Network services</i>
Relationship building	Connections among schools/divisions
Planning	Network professional development
Implementation	Sharing of school improvement initiatives
Problem-solving	Current research
Facilitation	Models and processes
Evaluation	
Showcasing	

testing, differentiated instruction, Parent Advisory Councils, and the expectation of school planning processes. All of these changes have been part of ongoing negotiation with and adaptation to the realities that schools are not islands but exist within a larger context.

Learning from MSIP

What has been learned about school improvement in the last decade and how does MSIP add to our understanding? We think that changing secondary schools is the critical issue facing educators today, and there is still no clarity about how to make it happen. In the rest of this chapter, we examine MSIP as an example, in an array of school improvement initiatives that has incorporated many of the elements that were supposed to make a difference but have not really penetrated the way secondary schools work (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2000). It is more and more obvious that any deep change to secondary schools is extremely complex and demands concerted and perhaps even dramatic actions (Fullan 2003).

This study is the third in a series of evaluations that have been done throughout the evolution of MSIP. The 1997/98 evaluation (Earl and Lee, 1998) was a chronicle and cross-case analysis of schools involved in MSIP, using the conceptual model in Figure 6.1.

Data were collected in 22 schools using questionnaires to survey all students, parents and staff from the project schools; interviews with project co-ordinators,

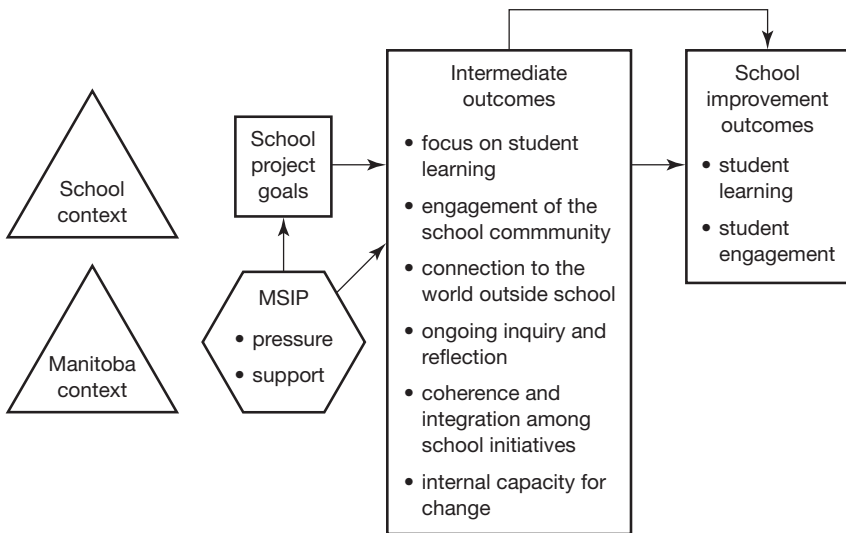


Figure 6.1 MSIP evaluation model

principals and division superintendents; focus groups with at-risk students and with project teachers in each school; and summaries from school records.

Because of our long-standing involvement in MSIP, we have been able to follow three different groups of schools for varying periods of time through different phases of MSIP. The first group (Group 1) of 11 secondary schools were involved in MSIP between 1991 and 1997 and most of them have not had direct support or pressure from MSIP since that time. By considering this group, we are able to assess the sustainability of change, especially in those schools that showed considerable improvement in the 1997/98 evaluation. Group 2 is a group of 13 secondary schools that entered the MSIP network in 1998/99.¹ They were the schools that entered MSIP shortly after the reorganization and establishment of local control. They provide the first data about the impact of MSIP as an independent body. The final group (Group 3) is a small group of 7 secondary schools that joined the MSIP network in 2000/01. This group is made up of schools that became part of MSIP after the directorate was operating independently and had established a systematic service delivery model.

Data were collected through a number of processes:

Principal or key informant interviews

Annual interviews were conducted with principals and/or school improvement coordinators in each of the schools in Group 1 and Group 2. These interviews focused on current school improvement priorities, the process of change, the impact on students, next steps in the school improvement process and the role of MSIP.

Teacher focus groups

Focus groups were conducted with senior years' teachers in each of the schools in Groups 1 and 2. These group discussions focused on current school improvement priorities, the process of change, the impact on classroom practice and on students, the extent of staff involvement in the school improvement activities, measures of success and the role of MSIP.

Student focus groups

Focus groups were conducted with Senior 2 (tenth-grade) and Senior 4 (twelfth-grade) students in each of the schools in Groups 1 and 2. Student discussions focused on what students liked about the school, what had changed and what they wished to change in the school, how they felt they learned most effectively, how involved they felt students were in decision-making processes, and how supportive of the school they felt the community was.

Principal survey

Surveys were sent to schools in Groups 1, 2 and 3. We asked that principals or their designates (individuals familiar with the school's MSIP project) complete the survey. The survey focused on the nature and impact of the support that the school had received from MSIP staff and the relationship of that support to the schools' progress with their school improvement initiatives.

Teacher and student surveys

Survey data were collected from teachers and students at three different times (May 1997, May 2000 and May 2002). Group 1 schools completed surveys in May 1997 and May 2002. Group 2 schools completed surveys in May 2000 and May 2002. Group 3 schools completed surveys in June 2002. Proactive information services administered the evaluation surveys to schools in Groups 1, 2 and 3. All senior years' teachers were asked to complete the survey, which focused on the process of school improvement in the school, the impact on classroom practice and on students, especially those at risk, and community involvement. All Senior 2 and Senior 4 students were asked to complete the student survey, which focused on students' engagement in the school and in their own learning, their perceptions of teachers' involvement with students, changes in the school and how well they felt the school had prepared them for their future plans.

School record form

School achievement data were collected annually from schools in Groups 1 and 2. The school record form asked for Senior 4 graduation rates, summaries of students' grade levels in English, mathematics, history and science, and summaries of students' marks on provincial exams in English and mathematics for those years when provincial exams were set.

Meetings and interviews with MSIP staff

Reports on the participating schools were generated through meetings with MSIP consultants in November 2001 and telephone interviews in May 2003. These discussions focused on the school's context, goals, focus on student learning, the engagement of the school community and the relationship with MSIP, as well as the role that MSIP staff played in each school and their perceptions of successes and challenges.

In the 1997/98 study, we cautioned that there was no formula for school improvement and no guarantees that it would occur. This message is still true, as are a number of the other findings from that earlier study. The key findings were:

There is no formula for changing schools

Each MSIP school was a unique entity that had been formed by its own history and context and changed (or did not change) in its own way. The nature of the particular process in any school was a complex combination of setting goals, establishing directions, working together to negotiate a plan, regularly rethinking and adjusting the approach, developing skills and attitudes to support the work and continuing on the road of change. Changes did not occur by mandate or fiat but reflected the beliefs in the hearts and minds of the people associated with the school that something needed changing and the will to see it through. The successful MSIP schools were protean – like the mythological Greek herdsman – they could assume different shapes at will and transform themselves to adapt to the circumstances that they encountered, in order to thrive. This suggests that school renewal is not a process that can be transported or replicated

directly. There are no cookie cutter solutions. The electrifying experiences and exciting changes in successful MSIP schools were not predictable and cannot be packaged for others. Rather, they emerged from engagement with ideas and personal growth. Ideas cannot be transplanted like petunias. Instead, they need to be seeded, nurtured and fertilized and protected from adversity, so that each one can grow into its own unique form of splendour.

There are no guarantees of school improvement

After five years, many of the MSIP schools were working hard to make positive changes and a few of them had reached a stage where the outcomes and benefits of their work were obvious. Other schools, however, had only tinkered around the edges with isolated innovations and had not accomplished any noticeable changes either in outcomes or in establishing sustainable school improvement processes. Being part of MSIP was not a ticket into an elite group. It was rather an opportunity that required schools to engage in serious effort, look at themselves closely, be honest about their assets and their deficiencies, be prepared to take risks and live with the ambiguity and ambivalence, in order to change.

Changing takes time

After five years only a few MSIP schools seem to have achieved a broad-based and sustainable approach to school change. The rest were at various stages in their comfort with the process and their next stages were not predictable. School improvement still takes time. There are some efficiencies but not a lot of short-cuts. People still need to make – and work through – their own false starts and mistakes.

School improvement is a state of mind

The more successful MSIP schools had a ‘can do’ attitude that carried them forward; less successful schools carried a legacy of attitudes and experiences that combined to frustrate developments. None of the schools were standing still. Instead, they were moving either on an upward spiral, buoyed by the cycle of urgency, energy, agency and more energy or downward on a slide of blame, victimization, frustration and helplessness.

Learning does not increase as a by-product of change; it requires intentional emphasis

Increased learning happened in MSIP schools when there was a concerted effort to change and the staff kept learning as a clear and explicit target for their work. The successful schools had explicit goals for student learning and their actions always reflected back to this goal, while the rest of the schools were not as conscious of or as focused on learning, and their actions were often aimed in other directions. This was particularly noticeable in middle years schools. Although they were all engaged in school improvement activities, the focus on student learning was marginal for over half of them and they were not able to show much evidence of increases in learning. Whatever else, learning can not be overlooked or taken for granted. It is the major purpose of schooling.

Successful schools have a clear focus on student learning, but their definition of learning is not strictly academic

In successful MSIP schools, all students had value and the staff saw their role as one of adapting their strategies so that they reached all students and allowed them to experience genuine success. The schools attended to the larger qualities that were valued for students like self-esteem, being able to solve messy real-life problems, working in teams and developing practical skills, while, at the same time, being very clear that expectations for students were high in all areas.

To care or not to care

Caring for students, especially their learning, was central to the success of MSIP. When teachers showed that they cared and held high expectations for their students, the students responded positively. There was no mistaking the caring ethos in successful schools. The students knew they were valued and that their teachers had some higher purpose for what they did. Caring is not something that can be feigned. It is a deeply held set of beliefs and values that may be difficult to build if it does not exist. Its power, however, is palpable.

School improvement is not just keeping a steady pace; it is pushing harder to look beyond the horizon

None of the MSIP schools were standing still but the successful MSIP schools were not satisfied to keep up with emerging trends. They were 'dreamers' trying to imagine what the future would bring so that they could position themselves and, more importantly, their students to approach it with excitement and zest.

Improvement cannot continue unabated forever

Although none of the MSIP schools had reached their pinnacle, many of them had experienced plateaus and were showing early signs of fatigue and a need for a break. As the novelist Robert Pirsig (1994) describes it in *Lila*, unbridled *dynamic quality* can be overwhelming and destructive unless it is tempered with the stability, security and reflection that comes from *static quality*. These elements need to co-exist in a cyclical pattern. The challenge for MSIP schools will be to recognize and differentiate the stopping points on the journey that are necessary for regrouping and replenishing, from diversions that result in becoming stale and inflexible.

To foster school improvement, unleash the energy within

The urgency, energy, agency, more energy cycle of improvement in MSIP schools is a powerful model for thinking about how school improvement works, in very personal terms. Teachers, students and parents are not cogs in a wheel. In each school, they are particular human beings with their own perspectives and beliefs and visions. The trick is finding ways to touch their hearts and their imaginations so that changing the school becomes their passion, because it matters to them, and then providing the pressure and the support to help sustain their momentum.

The key to ratcheting up school improvement is 'just in time' delivery of pressure and support

MSIP schools were not just isolated entities. They were part of a network of schools in Manitoba linked by some common requirements, a small infrastructure and some opportunities. The schools that made dramatic changes learned how to use this framework to their advantage. They worked with MSIP staff (and other MSIP schools) to capitalize on the pressure and position the support, to provide them with what they wanted and needed at different points in time. This was not a conscious strategy. It grew out of the ongoing planning and negotiations that occurred throughout the development and implementation of MSIP. The result of it, however, was the availability of more timely and appropriate pressure and support. Service providers need to be engaged with the schools to develop insider knowledge, imagine possibilities and negotiate what might come next.

Critical friends are both critical (challenging critics) and critical (essential)

The MSIP staff served as *critical friends* for the MSIP schools. They provided an outsider's eye, offered advice, asked tough questions, reinforced and praised good practice, lent a sympathetic ear, arranged training, supplied resources and were there, just there, when the schools needed them. The MSIP staff were knowledgeable and supportive as well as demanding and challenging. And, the successful MSIP schools saw them as indispensable. Some of their value originates with their expertise and some of it was very much connected to the fact that they were (and continue to be) outside the formal school system. Their importance should not be underestimated.

Urgency, energy, agency, more energy

When schools had a pervasive feeling of *urgency* in a school about changing the way they were doing business, they experienced a surge of *energy*. When the conditions were right, these bursts of energy could be captured and directed toward new learning for teachers and administrators. With an increase in their sense of *agency*, they experienced *more energy* and engaged in an upward spiral of activity and productivity. When the conditions did not support new learning and feelings of *agency*, the energy spirals downward into anger and disillusionment.

Inquiry-mindedness

After several years of onsite support from the evaluation consultant and a number of workshops dealing with evaluation, the staff in successful MSIP schools were engaging in ongoing inquiry and reflection and using data as one element of their planning. They were using data and engaging in systematic inquiry procedures to stand back and think about their school.

Broadening leadership

In the successful schools, many different people, both traditional and non-traditional leaders, accepted responsibility for the project. This meant that administrators, teachers and even students took on leadership roles.

Pressure and support

MSIP staff served as *critical friends* for the MSIP schools by being knowledgeable and supportive as well as demanding and challenging. They provided an outsider's eye, offered advice, asked tough questions, reinforced and praised good practice, lent a sympathetic ear, arranged training, supplied resources, and were there when the schools needed them.

These themes still offer a good image of the way that school improvement operates in the hearts and minds of the people who work in schools and revisiting them in a longitudinal study gives insights to why innovations continue or fade away. We have learned more about the complexity and the interactions among these themes as schools inevitably move beyond the novelty and early excitement of being part of an innovation.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on how these various themes interact with one another over time, in promoting or thwarting school improvement through an extended lens of a cycle of urgency, energy, inquiry, agency, synergy and more energy.

Urgency: Why Change and How Much?

In the original study, we characterize motivation for change as a sense of urgency. Regardless of the impetus for change, successful MSIP schools all experienced a sense of urgency and responded by determining that the school must act. The urgency came in many ways, from a recognition that there were students in the school who were not being well served, to threat of school closure because of declining enrolment but, whatever the source, the staff came to see their schools, themselves and their students through different lenses. The less successful schools, on the other hand, did not feel any sense of urgency. They were often involved in a number of innovations and interventions but their motivation was not rooted in a whole-school sense of necessity to make a difference.

The longitudinal nature of this study allows us to look at MSIP schools through the lens of time. From this vantage point, it appears that the urgency to change is variable and can dissipate quickly. Although many of the schools are engaged in school improvement activities and some have even institutionalized school improvement into their planning and decision-making, we did not detect a strong sense of urgency. School improvement and the processes associated with it seemed to have been incorporated into existing patterns in the schools. Certainly there were many initiatives and activities and projects but no one was talking about why schools need to change or how they are adapting to serve all students. School improvement initiatives had not penetrated to the core of beliefs about schools and schooling. If anything, the urgency that was evident in 1997/98 has been co-opted and diminished by the widespread attention to a range of school improvement activities, as opposed to a focus on the underlying reasons for change. The urgency that was needed to start the change process

was hard to maintain as schools engaged in the process of trying to improve and got engaged in the details of a number of improvement initiatives and school improvement became a routine expectation, without novelty or specialness.

The intractable nature of schools was particularly evident in our conversations with teachers and principals about ‘students at risk’. The culture of many of the schools was still predominantly driven by university entrance requirements and programme structures, with little evidence that this focus was changing, even though there was a recognition that *some students* may need something different from what schools were offering. In discussing the demographic changes within schools, we heard comments like the following:

Communities and demographics are changing fairly radically. Students are coming to us with experiences that most of our middle class teachers could not ever even imagine. And our teachers are at a great disadvantage if we don’t help them to understand some of those notions of poverty without, you know, just talking about it in platitudes. So, we need to do that so they can convene better and have stronger conversations with our whole student body.

(principal)

We hold extremely high expectations towards student academics and behaviour. Teachers here feel that they very much have the support of the community, one that expects the students here to be high achievers. That being said, however, according to our demographic data, in reality many students don’t go on to university. Unfortunately, there are few options available at this school for students who don’t pursue secondary education.

(teacher)

I think that we assume that most of the kids, most if not all are going on to some sort of post-secondary and the entire school is structured around that when, in fact, most kids don’t go on. Very few actually go on to university and even fewer stay there after first year.

(teacher)

Even students were aware of the expectations:

I don’t know, I think it’s like 80% of people who graduate from this school go on to university just because that’s what they are supposed to do. Parents usually pay for the first year and what they are really paying for is the expectation that their kid will go. I know lots of people who went for one year, then quit.

(student)

The focus on academic expectations was evident at the division level:

And every year we have to sit down with our Superintendents and say, 'No, you cannot cut that programme. We need that programme. This is the only way that many of these kids will ever see a high school diploma.'
(principal)

Although the student body was changing and all groups commented on the need to broaden the programmes in their schools, the reality was that the secondary schools (with the exception of one special school) were focused primarily on academic programmes for a subset of the students.

Secondary schools may be in a *paradigm paralysis* where past professional knowledge with a focus on academic subjects, as separate disciplines, is still the norm in a far more complex and changed world. For us this raises the following questions: 'are secondary schools doing the *right* things?' or 'are they working on doing what they have traditionally done, just doing it a little better?'

Energy: Feeling Compelled and Excited to Change

Without a strong sense of urgency, the energy associated with pursuing change in MSIP schools has often been connected to expectations from outside (e.g. MSIP, the division, provincial requirements) or to particular innovations that members of the staff find intriguing. This kind of motivation focuses awareness and action but is unlikely to have long-term staying power. The projects, initiatives or innovations proceed and persist as long as there is external reinforcement to continue or until they run their natural course. Continuous school improvement, on the other hand, requires the kind of intrinsic motivation that keeps people moving forward over the long haul, because it matters (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 2001).

As Evans (1996) contends, the human side of change is often ignored. Administrators and MSIP staff identified the issue of including the 'whole school' into the network as problematic. Indeed, some innovations do tend to produce a 'them' and 'us' dichotomy. Lieberman and Grolnick (1996), however, remind us that at different times in a network's life, criteria are established (and re-established). It is this ownership in the change process that allows adaptive schools possessing internal capacity to take charge of change (Stoll, 1999) but ownership is difficult to establish, extend and maintain over time as contexts change and shift. We heard from schools that many teachers were not yet 'on board' with school improvement. Teachers themselves told us that they were unconvinced, and principals explained that the involvement of teachers was a continual source of tension in attempts to garner schoolwide participation.

Many changes that are suggested under the auspices of school improvement actually challenge some deeply held and valued normative structures inside schools (e.g. 'privacy' practices of the classroom teacher). Even though these norms are not directly related to the school improvement initiatives, they become the determining factors not only in the implementation of any innovations, but also, more importantly, in the school's overall effectiveness in fostering student

learning and student engagement (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993; Elmore, 2001; O'Day, 2002). Before they are likely to make changes, especially to their practices, teachers need to make sense of the ideas and decide that the change is worth the energy (cognitive and emotional) (Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002).

Although MSIP provided the forum for new learning and reflection on practice, these processes need to be embedded into the school culture to be maintained. Motivation and commitment to change were complicated over time because schools might have the same names and be located in the same places but virtually everything else about them could have changed – new students, new curriculum, new administrators and new staff. They really were not the same schools at all.

Most of the schools in MSIP did not move to challenge their deeply-held beliefs. Instead, they were tinkering at the edges of changes in practices, with only one school generating sufficient enthusiasm and long-term commitment to make significant changes to structures and pedagogy. We heard over and over, especially from principals, that they were struggling to both foster and sustain energy for change and felt as if they were losing the battle.

Inquiry: Identifying the 'Right' Changes

MSIP has dedicated considerable energy to helping schools become capable and thoughtful at using data to guide their thinking and planning. Most schools have, in fact, developed some facility with data use, although they still indicate insecurity about their skills in this area. Furthermore, they are not at all sure how to make sense of data and use it wisely.

This is one of the things administrators probably are caught for not doing – looking at the data and reading the data.

(principal)

I would really love it if MSIP could take a greater leadership role in helping us evaluate the on-going projects here. We actually need someone here to help us orchestrate some evaluation. I just don't have anyone here with the kind of research background to know what we should be doing. We need somebody to come in, spend some time with us, go through where we are at in the project and help us get started at the evaluation. We really want to be able to say more about what we're doing and how it's working.

(principal)

It seems to us, however, that the new skills associated with collecting and displaying data may be overshadowing the more pertinent and valuable activities of interpreting data and using it to make focused decisions. The value of using data comes from using it to view the organization in a different manner and question basic assumptions and practices. The crucial element in this process is having what Earl and Katz (2002) call an 'inquiry habit of mind'. Inquiry is, very

simply, a way of finding things out – collecting data and interpreting evidence in ways that enhance and advance understanding. Habits of mind incorporate dispositional, emotional, motivational and personality variables that contribute to competence in managing the environment and making decisions (Keating, 1996). Linking *inquiry* to *habit of mind* suggests a way of thinking that is a dynamic iterative system with feedback loops that organizes ideas toward clearer directions and decisions and draws on or seeks out information as the participants move close and closer to understanding some phenomenon.

When the emphasis moves from having data to having an ‘inquiry habit of mind’, questions about student learning and engagement become the drivers for data collection and provide educators with the opportunity to view what is happening in the school through a series of windows of understanding. This is not always a process that sits easily with educators, although some are coming to accept it.

The big problem we ran into here was our goal to increase student achievement, and for three years we said, ‘Well, how can you measure student achievement? It’s different for every student so how can we measure our goal?’ So, this year we had to say, ‘Okay, what is student achievement?’ And so we asked our students and teachers to define it. ‘What does it look like and how are we going to measure it?’

(principal)

Once they pass this hurdle, using data can be a catalyst and a tool for continuous improvement in the school. Making decisions based on examining a range of perspectives through the lens of data reinforces the individual motivation and the structural arrangements to keep the cycle going to sustain improvement, not as fidelity to a particular innovation or plan, but as a systemic cycle, in which the school uses evidence to investigate current status, challenge and reinforce existing practices, make changes, and review the impact of the changes.

Because inquiry was a constant focus for MSIP, many of the principals felt that they were becoming quite adept and recognizing the value of using data. Very few of them felt as if they had the capacity and skills to use data wisely and well. This was the one area where they felt that support from MSIP was likely to be necessary for an extended period of time so that they could feel competent and confident and use their skill to decide what changes were likely to be most beneficial.

Agency: Professional Learning for Change

Making and sustaining changes in schools is hard intellectual and emotional work so it is no surprise that people are not always eager or ready for difficult new learning (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003). However, continuous school improvement depends on ongoing learning by individuals, separately and collectively.

MSIP has certainly been part of the force in Manitoba to consolidate and focus

attention on individual and organizational learning. There have been extensive opportunities for professional dialogue and professional development for administrators and for teachers in MSIP schools. Although educators have taken advantage of these forums for learning, we found little evidence that they were engaged in the kind of ongoing, job-embedded and intensive experiences that challenge what they are currently doing and push them into making serious changes to their practice. However, this is precisely the kind of learning that appears to be required. Intensive, ongoing learning can be stimulated but cannot be orchestrated from outside. It needs to become a routine part of the culture of the school.

Individual capacity to change classroom practices

It is becoming increasingly obvious that teacher and classroom practices are at the heart of school improvement. For significant changes to occur in student learning and engagement, many more teachers will need to be highly skilled and knowledgeable about teaching, about learning, about emotions, about change, and about their subject matter. They need to be able to link what they are teaching to students' prior knowledge, to identify the preconceptions and misconceptions that students hold, to make connections to concrete and familiar ideas or settings and to integrate their disciplines with others.

Organizational capacity for school improvement

Organizational capacity is more difficult to develop because it requires improvements in the culture (and structure). Professional learning communities, cultures of trust, problem-solving and inquiry are required to create the climate and drive for continuous improvement. Up to this point these cultures exist in only a minority of high schools (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001) and not that many elementary schools (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). MSIP schools are no exception. They have not yet moved to embedded professional learning communities that are strong enough to continually adjust and respond to changing conditions.

Synergy: Mobilizing the Context for Change

As we have continued to observe MSIP, we have added a new dimension to the cycle of urgency, energy and agency. It is *synergy*. As time goes on, it is harder for schools to maintain this cycle and to embark on the next and then the next, stage of school improvement work. This is where synergy comes in. Schools that are ready for continuous improvement have found that they need to expand and challenge their beliefs, their knowledge and their practices, again and again and again. When government, districts, schools and organizations connected to schools work together to provide a model for school improvement that promotes reflection, risk-taking, coherence in messages and sources of support, schools feel as if they are part of some overall plan and can find a way to continue the journey.

Although MSIP began as a separate foundation-funded entity, the foundation

chose Manitoba because there was support from the Department of Education for a school improvement initiative. From the beginning, MSIP has fostered relationships with other educational organizations. The first programme co-ordinator came from the Manitoba Teachers' Society and most staff members have emerged from schools or divisions in Manitoba.

One of the main support activities for MSIP has been promoting and facilitating networking and making connections within schools, across schools and with a range of organizations beyond the schools.

Overall, it is apparent that as an external body, MSIP has been one of the key players in the province working together in a synergistic relationship between provincial mandates, divisional priorities and school-level goals. As one principal told us:

About the same time as MSIP was coming into being our school division began to reorganize with a focus, not that they didn't have one before, but they came up with some divisional priorities. These new priorities and initiative brought a need for new knowledge . . . MSIP helped us to build capacity within our building.

I think that MSIP has been influential in pockets. The goal now is to get the divisions to spread improvement-oriented thinking themselves. What you are doing is starting ripples not waves.

(principal)

More Energy: Embedding and Sustaining Improvement

As school improvement and educational change initiatives mature around the world, it is becoming increasingly obvious that change is hard to sustain. Sustainability, however, is an important indicator of success. This does not necessarily mean fidelity to a particular approach. Instead, sustainability of school improvement depends on the capacity of schools and or individual administrators and teachers to chart and follow through on innovations that have the potential to make powerful changes in student learning, and to abandon what is not working.

Embedding and sustaining change in education is complicated and challenging. As Schlechty (2001) said: 'When changes are started in systems that are without the capacity to sustain them, the changes are unlikely to outlast the tenure of the change agent'.

In education, there are many change agents, sometimes working at cross-purposes. We have identified three levels that can have a profound influence on how change happens in schools – school capacity for change, infrastructures of pressure and support, and the policy arena in which the school resides. Each of them can operate on its own, but without some synergy among them, it is unlikely that changes will become part of the school routines. Such embedding and sustaining of reforms depends on several factors. These include the motivation and capacity of teachers to engage in the reforms, continued professional development

to reinforce and extend the reforms, local leadership and schools' capacity for continuous change (Earl and Katz, 2002). Although motivation and capacity are essential to sustain the push for higher standards and enhanced learning for pupils, they will not be sufficient. Many attempts at educational change have flourished and then disappeared for lack of attention over time (Elmore, 1995) in cases where the situation (or organizational capacity) does not provide enough support for changes to become established. Whether or not innovations are embedded and sustained depends on the capacity of schools and those connected to them, infrastructures of pressure and support, and the broader policy and political context.

The momentum from change creates its own energy in an upward spiral. More energy refers to the sustainability of the process of continuous improvement. The cycle is not always linear and it moves between reflection, action, review and plateaus. The challenge is finding ways for schools and the people who support them to make continuous improvement and constant adaptation to change a routine part of the way schools work.

Pulling Together: Fostering School Improvement

The MSIP story is an interesting one because it was founded on good will and persuasion, not edict or mandate. The original impetus and support from a charitable foundation made it possible for a large number of groups in Manitoba to focus their efforts on school improvement. Approximately 50 schools have been part of the MSIP network and MSIP's influence on other organizations and groups (e.g. Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba Association of School Trustees, Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba Education and Training) has probably touched every school in the province. In contrast to many whole-school reform initiatives in other jurisdictions, there has been remarkably little conflict over directions that schools choose for improvement or the procedures that they use to implement their plans. Each of the key players has established and negotiated a role that allows room for others to contribute, without competition or rancour.

The sponsoring foundation defined its role as an active external facilitator and catalyst for change. In addition to making grants to schools and defining guiding principles for school-based improvement, the foundation created an infrastructure to support educational reform in Manitoba and established the conceptual and procedural underpinnings for the work of MSIP.

The initiative has accelerated change in many schools; it has provided a platform for leadership to develop (many individual change agents have developed as a direct result of their MSIP roles, and remain as key resources in the province); and it has given hope to many students and teachers that schools can be improved.

Over the past 15 years educational reformers have increasingly focused on large-scale improvement, that is, it was no longer seen to be feasible to work with one school at a time. The goal became to improve multiple schools simultaneously, preferably within the same school district.

During this period we have seen whole districts (and in the case of England, whole countries) improve literacy and mathematics in elementary schools (Fullan, 2003). There are now many examples of successful whole district reform. Significantly, however, there are no examples anywhere of successful *whole district high school reform*. There are a few high schools, here and there, that have improved significantly but none as a group.

In light of the above, MSIP has taken on a problem that until recently no one has tackled. MSIP was about a decade ahead of its time. It is only since 2000 that the United States and England have focused on large-scale secondary school reform. It is too early to tell whether these new initiatives will bear fruit.

We see in MSIP a multi-year strategy that has affected positively, although not necessarily strongly, the lives of many teachers and students. We do not see a deep impact on the schools or the systems in which they are situated. Where significant change has been accelerated, it was not sustained. MSIP as an intervention was not and could not have been strong enough to affect lasting change. The problems of high schools are too great, and the resources of MSIP too small to affect such change.

MSIP has opened the door, and provided glimpses of what will be necessary – developing the capacities and energies of teachers, enabling and pushing for student voice, networks of schools and partnerships, and developing leadership among students, teachers and administrators. In the next phase, whole systems (province, district, schools) will need to tackle secondary school reform, focusing on changes in teaching and learning and contributing to as well as learning from, the networks of high schools in other jurisdictions. If the 1990s was the decade of the elementary school (and this work must obviously continue) the next decade (interestingly) must focus on both high school reform and early childhood development.

The cumulative knowledge base about school and system improvement based on initiatives like MSIP is considerable. It is now time to put this knowledge to greater and more systematic use by designing reforms that incorporate all levels of the system.

Note

- 1 One of these schools had been funded in 1996–7, was not part of MSIP at the time of the 1998 evaluation and was refunded in 1999/2000.

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Building Instructional Quality

‘Inside-out’ and ‘Outside-in’ Perspectives on San Diego’s School Reform¹

Linda Darling-Hammond, Amy M. Hightower, Jennifer L. Husbands, Jeannette R. LaFors, Viki M. Young and Carl Christopher

Introduction

During the 1990s, a new hypothesis – that the quality of teaching would provide a high-leverage policy target – began to gain currency. As Sykes (1999: xv) puts it:

The premise is that the improvement of American education relies centrally on the development of a highly qualified teacher workforce imbued with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to encourage exceptional learning in all the nation’s students. The related hypothesis is that the key to producing well-qualified teachers is to greatly enhance their professional learning across the continuum of a career in the classroom.

The notion that investment in teaching quality is at least as important a policy strategy as others – such as curriculum and testing mandates, more rigorous course requirements, new management schemes or targeted special programmes – rests on research suggesting the importance of teachers’ skills for students’ achievement. It also rests on evidence that few other reforms can be successfully implemented without investments in teachers’ capacities to carry them off (Darling-Hammond, 1998). In recent years, a number of states and districts have undertaken intensive policy reforms focused on teachers and teaching. Evidence about the consequences of these approaches is just beginning to appear (e.g. Elmore and Burney, 1999; Wilson, Darling-Hammond and Berry, 2001).

This chapter examines the nested interactions of several sets of policies that target teachers and instruction at all levels of a state system and the implications for teachers' practice of those sometimes conflicting, sometimes coherent policies. We do this by discussing systemic reform in an embedded state and district context – San Diego, California – selected because of proactive attempts at both the state and local levels to address the quality of teaching and learning through multi-faceted policy strategies. Based on interview, observation, survey and record data collected at the state, district and school levels over a four-year time period, we offer a look at how one large urban district has developed an aggressive set of policies to improve instruction and has meanwhile mediated, used and sometimes worked around state policy to further its reform agenda. Within this district and state context, we also explore school-level attempts to reform teaching practice in the classroom.

Our approach integrates two divergent perspectives that have tended to divide research about the improvement of teaching. One perspective – rooted in disciplines of economics, political science, organizational sociology and administrative or leadership theories – entails a view from the 'top', or outside classrooms, and tends to focus on problems of control, accountability and incentives (Elmore, 1983). The preoccupation of this perspective is generally with the 'macro' system in which teaching and learning takes place. The second, 'bottom-up' or inside perspective is derived from research on teaching and teacher development, as well as cognitive and socio-cultural learning theories. Situated in classrooms, it tends to highlight the nature of teaching and learning acts, the multiple demands on teachers, and the conditions under which they try to engage students in learning (Little, 1993; Ball and Cohen, 1999). This 'micro' perspective is more localized, more focused on the individual circumstances of particular teachers and schools, and rooted in considerations of teachers' learning and practice.

The distinctions between these two perspectives highlight a fundamental problem that confronts those seeking to understand policy implementation and impact. Frameworks that treat policy as a discrete, traceable set of resources, requirements and reform intentions emanating from a 'higher level' source tend to lose sight of the way actors at each level of the system interpret and make use of policy events to achieve their own purposes (McLaughlin, 1987; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1999). Frameworks that focus on the fine detail of teachers' or other professionals' practice at the 'ground level' often underestimate how larger environmental factors construct and constrain action, thinking and educational results. By integrating 'micro' and 'macro' perspectives, this chapter examines both sets of concerns, keeping these perspectives in productive tension as they are analysed within a single state and district-embedded context.

Traditional 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' metaphors suggest a hierarchical view of change that, while capturing a common set of tensions, ignores the many environmental forces acting on schools – not all of which are the products of district bureaucracy. The ways in which practitioners experience the world in which they work may also be characterized through an 'inside-out'/'outside-in'

perspective that considers the classroom and the school as the core of a nested set of influences that can influence teaching and learning. These include but are not limited to policy actors presumed to sit in superordinate status. Such influences also include considerations of culture and context that have deeper, though often less perceptible effects on relationships than formal rules or decisions. Thus, as we explore how teaching policy is perceived, used, ignored and adapted within each embedded organizational setting, we employ a lens that places each setting at the centre of an ‘inside-out’/‘outside-in’ analysis of policy influences and that considers the intersections of contexts and their cultures. Our analysis seeks a nuanced view of how the various parts of interlocking systems may influence each other, particularly in environments in which state and district agencies are in proactive policy-making modes and where schools, too, are agents of practice, reform and, sometimes, resistance.

While we weave these stories together to form an interconnected analysis of embedded systemic reform, several tensions raised by one ‘perspective’ and challenged by another run throughout this chapter. Expanding on Hightower *et al.* (2000), these tensions tap the age-old concerns associated with collective efforts versus individual needs and centralized versus decentralized approaches:

- How strategies address both *system-wide needs* (including equity and quality) and *local differences* between (and within) schools or districts. These strategies include differences among grade levels, subject matters, teacher distribution and local labour markets, and considerations of income and knowledge distribution, among others, particularly as these affect the capacity or will to implement state and/or district policy.
- How agents maintain a commitment to *locally defined goals* in the face of district or state policies aimed at *cross-cutting, externally defined goals* that seem to require redirection.
- How policies and agents seeking to redefine professionalism as *collective responsibility* for knowledge-based practice rather than *individual autonomy* attend to questions of principled knowledge, local context and shared authority.

These tensions flow as undercurrents across the analysis that follows; we cycle back to them in our conclusion where we address them directly.

To focus our analysis, we treat three major kinds of policies that influence teaching and instruction:

- curriculum and assessment initiatives
- teacher development initiatives, and
- accountability initiatives.

This chapter is organized as follows. We first explain our methodology and provide some basic contextual information about the nested San Diego, California, system we explore. Next, we turn to the embedded reform story. We begin

in the middle of the policy system – with the San Diego City Schools’ district reform story – and then work outward to the state and back inward to schools. Part II describes the district reform underway. Part III more fully establishes the state policy setting and examines how the district is responding to and using state policy to further its local agenda. Part IV discusses some early results, and Part V returns to the district’s change initiative by examining a reform of the original reform, emphasizing the district’s new push for high school change. We conclude by revisiting the tensions and cross-cutting themes identified above.

Methodology

The data for this chapter come from five years of fieldwork in San Diego City Schools (SDCS), beginning in Fall 1998 as the district started its reform initiative and continuing until the Summer of 2003, with the initiative still underway. Therefore, the story presented here captures the early years of an ongoing reform. Three interlocking teams of researchers working with the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy contributed to this fieldwork and analyses, collectively conducting over 250 interviews and focus groups with teachers, principals, central office administrators, locally relevant community members and state officials. Also, we reviewed a multitude of documents at all levels of the system and conducted approximately 200 observations of school and district events (e.g. conferences, board meetings and classroom teaching). Our school-level data come from a strategically drawn sample of three middle schools, three high schools and four elementary schools selected to represent a range of demographics, leadership arrangements and experiences; these data are supplemented by interviews with about 20 per cent of the principals from a number of schools across the district. In addition, two surveys were administered in SDCS – a principals’ survey (administered to the population of principals in May 2000) and a teachers’ survey (administered to the population of teachers in a stratified, random sample of 11 schools in Fall 2001).²

Demographics and policy context of study sites

The state context

California has the country’s largest public school enrolment, with over 6 million students in over 1,000 districts and more than 8,000 schools. Its students are ethnically, linguistically and socio-economically diverse: approximately 43 per cent are Latino, 36 per cent White, 12 per cent Asian, 8 per cent African-American and 1 per cent ‘other’. Nearly half (47 per cent) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 25 per cent are designated English language learners (CDE, 2001a, 2001c, 2001d). The schools employ just over 300,000 teachers.

Once among the highest-achieving states in the nation, California now ranks nationally among the bottom three states in average reading and mathematics achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This decline is not only a function of differences in student population – after adjusting for the demographic characteristics of the student population, California students still

perform considerably worse than those in other states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the tests used in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) (adjusted for participation rates) (Carroll, Reichardt and Guarino, 2000; Sonstelie, Brunner and Ardon, 2000). The decline in achievement occurred while California schools lost ground relative to other states across the country in terms of revenues and expenditures during the 1980s and 1990s.

Following the passage of Proposition 13 in 1979, California's expenditures on public education decreased markedly. Between 1979 and 1994–5, the state's spending per pupil fell about 25 per cent relative to the average for the other states, rebounding somewhat between 1995 and 1998 (Sonstelie, Brunner and Ardon, 2000: 90). Although California has a higher cost-of-living than the national average, it spends well below the national average on education both in absolute dollars and as a share of personal income. By 1999–2000, California ranked first in the nation in the number of pupils it serves but 38th in expenditures per student, 48th in K–12 expenditures as a share of personal income, and 50th in the ratio of students per teacher, despite the influence of class size reductions during the late 1990s (EdSource, 2001: 1). By the late 1990s, California ranked in the bottom decile among states on class sizes, staff/pupil ratios, libraries and most other school resources. Moreover, the state employed more under-qualified teachers than any other state in the country. In 2000–1, 14 per cent of California's teachers did not hold a full credential (CDE, 2001b), in part as a result of reduced supply associated with declining salaries and working conditions since the 1980s, and in part as a result of increased demand for teachers during the implementation of K–3 class-size reduction in the late 1990s (Reichardt, 2000; Shields *et al.*, 2001).

Alongside the class size reduction initiative, California launched the Reading Initiative in 1996 in reaction to the state's poor performance on the NAEP. Based on concern among state board of education members that the whole language approach dominant at that time did not adequately teach decoding skills, new content standards published in 1998 emphasize explicit decoding skills based on phonics and phonemic awareness, within a literature, language and comprehension programme, supported by ongoing diagnosis and early intervention for students at risk of reading failure (CDE, 2001f). The state standards are supported by state-adopted textbooks aligned with the approach embedded in the standards (e.g. Open Court); state-sponsored professional development institutes that eventually encompassed the California Reading and Literature project as well as new reading institutes; and funds available to districts to contract with professional development providers approved by the state for their approach to literacy. Other professional development initiatives have also been linked to state standards and have taken a similar approach: large-scale summer institutes conveying a single curriculum to all teachers in a content area (e.g. Algebra Institutes). These have been implemented alongside policies extinguishing bilingual education (Proposition 227) and tying greater incentives to state tests (see below).

Between 1999 and 2002, the California legislature also undertook a multi-pronged strategy to improve teacher quality throughout the state. In addition to small but growing funds to underwrite teacher preparation for teachers who will teach in high-need schools, increased efforts to establish reciprocity with other states, and a modest boost in salaries, the state invested substantial funding in a beginning teacher induction programme. In 1998, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program – a long-standing pilot programme featuring reflection, formative assessment and more experienced teachers serving as ‘support providers’ (i.e. mentors) – was scaled up to serve all newly credentialed teachers in their first and second years of teaching. However, many observers have suggested that the state’s efforts to improve teaching skills are inadequate in scale and incoherent, with incentives for entering teaching without preparation outweighing those that would assist teachers in becoming well-prepared (Darling-Hammond, 2000; California Professional Development Task Force, 2001; Little Hoover Commission, 2001; Shields *et al.*, 2001). For example, in 2000–1, the state spent twice as much money on supports for those who enter teaching without credentials as on loans or scholarships to support preparation. Meanwhile, new incentives for teaching in high-need schools co-exist with large disincentives for teaching in these same schools, including lower salaries and poorer working conditions as well as less access to mentoring.

While access to well-qualified teachers is extremely uneven across the state, testing tied to rewards and sanctions plays a large role in the state’s drive for standards-based reform. State policy-makers expect high stakes accountability measures attached to student testing from second grade to eleventh grade to focus teachers’ efforts on the state content standards and the progress goals defined by the state. Specific policies include extensive testing, with norm-referenced and standards-based tests every year from second grade to eleventh grade, a high school exit exam in English/language arts and mathematics and end-of-course exams at the high school level. Each school in the state is ranked on relative performance state-wide, as well as in comparison with ‘similar’ schools, and the state defines a two-year growth target for every school. Schools successfully meeting their Academic Performance Index (API) targets shared \$677 million in school and teacher bonuses in 2000; schools that failed to meet their goals were asked to ‘volunteer’ for the Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). With II/USP, an external evaluator from a state-approved list helps schools take stock and propose a plan for improvement, which the state funds at up to \$200 per student for two years. Schools that continue to fail to meet their performance targets court state takeover.

These efforts, in combination with many categorical funding programmes now tied to the standards, assessments and accountability system, have substantially centralized decision-making in a state that had previously been more oriented to local control. As a California Department of Education official remarked:

We had much more local authority at another time in this state. There’s no question that the state, as a state, is taking a much greater role in terms of

state direction. Funds are tied to specific programs that come either from the Governor or the Legislature. And I know that's a struggle for many local [school districts].

The district context

In this intense state policy context, SDCS has launched what might be considered one of the most ambitious instructional reforms in the state, and perhaps the nation. As the second largest school-district in the state, SDCS reflects the diversity of the state, albeit with a lower percentage of White students and higher percentages of African-American students and low-income students. Of the 142,300 students in 2000–1, approximately one-third were Latino, one-quarter Caucasian, nearly one-fifth were African-American, and the remainder were Asian or other. About 60 per cent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, while 30 per cent were designated as limited English proficient.

In summer 1998, San Diego City Schools launched a major reform initiative across its system of schools that continues today. This initiative was led by two individuals – both of whom were new to the district – in what shaped up to be a virtual joint superintendency. The incoming Superintendent of Public Education, Alan Bersin, was a lawyer with a passion for social justice causes who came from the local US Attorney for the Southern District of California and Southwest Border. His hand-picked partner as Chancellor of Instruction was Anthony (Tony) Alvarado, whom Bersin recruited from New York City's Community School District 2, where Alvarado had implemented a highly successful systemic instructional reform initiative (see Elmore and Burney, 1999). While Bersin managed the political, business and organizational aspects of running the district, Alvarado attended to the instructional side of things – focusing on establishing a professional accountability system, concentrating all decision-making around issues of teaching quality, creating an infrastructure of reforms to improve the knowledge and skills of all personnel, and instituting a tightly-coupled instructional change process with a strong focus on equity as well as quality. Together, this pair sought to anchor their system of schools in research on teaching and learning. Their plan resulted in the creation of radically different learning opportunities, structures and fiscal arrangements to support instruction across the district's network of schools. As Alvarado described the reform:

The vision was to try to create an institutional focus on instruction that would begin to put into place the leadership, staff development, assessment [and] curricular supports that would be necessary to increase student achievement. That would actually begin to create the environment for a different kind of teaching that would generate both a narrower and more powerful set of student achievement results. So it's not just about raising reading scores. It's about changing the kind of teaching to get more challenging and thoughtful student work.

(interview from authors' research)

This effort has been a substantial undertaking. SDCS employs approximately 7,400 certificated teachers across nearly 180 schools, 18 of which are comprehensive high schools. Unlike other large urban districts in California, San Diego's aggressive campaign to recruit and retain well-qualified teachers has substantially limited the number of uncredentialed teachers in its schools. Although suffering shortages in bilingual and special education teachers, the district hired fewer than a dozen emergency-permit teachers for the opening of the 2001–2, out of approximately 1,000 new hires.³ Despite the fact that most of San Diego's students are low-income students of colour with wide-ranging English language skills, achievement has been increasing in the city schools during the last several years.

Instructional Reform in San Diego City Schools

This section discusses three integral aspects of San Diego's district-driven initiative:

- the driving principles behind the reform
- a snapshot of the key reforms undertaken, and
- early results as seen from a district perspective.

Principles Driving Reform: San Diego's Theories of Instruction and Change

Tony Alvarado came to San Diego City Schools with a well-developed theory of teaching and learning, grounded in a deep understanding of how children learn and the principles of effective instruction, as well as a clear theory of system change. The latter involves notions about professional development and professional accountability – how to improve the knowledge and skills of educators and create a demand for good practice. These ideas evolved from his work in New York City's District 2 (for a description, see Elmore and Burney, 1999) and were further developed in collaboration with Alan Bersin in San Diego.

Theory of instruction

San Diego's instructional efforts build on several decades of research on learning and teaching by cognitive and developmental psychologists and other education researchers (see, e.g. Resnick, 1995; Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 1999; Resnick and Hall, 1998). Key elements of this work emphasize the importance of:

- setting clear goals and performance standards aimed at higher-order thinking skills and performance abilities
- carefully assessing student learning by evaluating students' thinking, strategies, skills and products and then scaffolding the learning process to ensure that students can achieve these goals, and
- using a mix of teaching strategies that explicitly model and demonstrate key skills, engage students in active production of meaningful work with opportu-

nities for extensive practice and revision, provide multiple pathways for access to content, attend to students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences, and teach students to think metacognitively about their learning strategies.

A companion to this theory of learning is a theory of teaching that proceeds from the premise that student learning will increase when powerful interactions occur between students and teachers around challenging content. In this view, as teachers' efforts become more grounded in knowledge about effective instruction and an understanding of students' needs, their teaching practice better supports student learning. Since learning depends on teacher knowledge of both teaching strategies and of individual learners, and since it requires diagnostic skill in figuring out how best to organize learning opportunities that meet learners' particular needs, this theory of teaching relies on the development of teacher expertise, rather than on the adoption of scripted or 'teacher proof' curriculum. The latter would constrain teachers from adopting strategies that address the individual needs of students, and thus undermine their effectiveness.

Alvarado and Bersin explicitly identify their instructional theory as an attempt to professionalize teaching by grounding decisions in both greater shared knowledge about effective practice and an expectation that teachers will learn to apply knowledge to the individual needs of students. This professional conception includes the notion that practice must be shared and become public so that all can learn. Drawing parallels between the work of teachers, surgeons and lawyers, Bersin observed in a talk to the district's high school principals early in his tenure:

A professional draws on professional skill and knowledge to apply to the changing facts before her. Professionals deal with problems and solve problems based on applying a body of knowledge to a particular case. When we all look back and say, 'What was it that we were experiencing in the opening years of the 21st century in San Diego and then around the country?' I predict it will be the history of the professionalization of teachers and of the educational world, in the sense that teaching no longer is a private preserve. It is a public province of feedback, discussion, interaction, peer review, and constant improvement much more akin to the way in which traditional professions have operate. The notion that a classroom is a private preserve is a value that still exists and is inconsistent with the professionalization of teaching. This does not mean that there is not creativity. In fact, that is the essence of the professional path: to exercise discretion based on the facts of the problem before you and draw from all your training and skill and knowledge and apply it to the case to produce a successful result.

(authors' data collection)

A key component of this urge to professionalize teaching is the notion that, when powerful norms of practice develop, teachers are accountable for operating according to these norms and using the knowledge on which they are based. In

teaching, professionalism has commonly been misunderstood as representing individual autonomy and control over one's own practice rather than a commitment to common norms of practice and methods for improving them. To develop this kind of widespread professional knowledge and skill, Alvarado and Bersin focused their attention especially on the professional development of teachers, principals and other staff, on the assumption that quality teaching can be enabled by structures and opportunities established by the larger district system. Their beliefs about how to achieve this goal rested heavily on research about teacher learning (see, for example, O'Day and Smith, 1993; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; McLaughlin and Oberman, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997b; Evans and Mohr, 1999; Little, 1999), which argues for the provision, development and nurturing of:

- professional development opportunities and networks that support continuous reflection and refinement of practice in communal settings (to dislodge norms of private teaching practice)
- leadership that prioritizes instruction, which is defined as both teaching and learning
- expectations and commitments that all students can learn to high standards
- knowledge about pedagogical strategies embedded in literacy and learning theories, and
- teaching and learning standards that are challenging, coherent and tied to diagnostic assessment tools.

This theory of teaching and learning, combined with a strong commitment to equity and a belief that literacy is a gate-keeping skill from which other learning proceeds, was translated into a strong district-wide focus on literacy development and professional accountability for ensuring improvement among the lowest-performing students, schools and employees. District leaders devised a series of instructional measures to focus district norms directly on these priorities.

Theory of change

To put this theory into operation, district leaders instituted a highly directive change process, prioritizing speed of implementation and fidelity to the instructional theory over mechanisms to solicit input and ensure backing from organizational members about the changes underway (Hightower, 2001). While allowing district leaders to root their system in common design principles, this approach counters views of incrementalism (e.g. Lindblom, 1980) and assertions about the importance of up-front 'buy-in' from organizational members (Fullan, 1991, 1993; McLaughlin and Oberman, 1996). Leaders' theory of change centered around the belief that systemic, instructional reform in an entrenched district system must begin with a 'boom' or a 'jolt' – including the destruction of many pre-existing structures, cultures and norms – before reforms and new support structures can take hold. As Bersin explained:

There was no other way to start systemic reform. You don't announce it.

You've got to jolt the system. I understood that . . . If people don't understand you're serious about change in the first six months, the bureaucracy will own you. The bureaucracy will defeat you at every turn if you give it a chance.

(authors' data collection)

The speed with which the reform programme was designed and implemented was in large part a function of the political imperatives under which Bersin was hired. Following a teachers' strike in 1996, community confidence in SDCS was low. Public perceptions that the district was too bureaucratic, was poorly preparing its students for college and work, and was moving too slowly on needed reforms led to a move by the local Business Roundtable to elect new board members. The new board discontinued the prior superintendent's contract in 1997 and hired Bersin in 1998 with a mandate for immediate change. The board has been split 3:2 throughout most of Bersin's tenure with the key three votes tied to support from the business community, which has strong vested interests in the system, not only because of the local economy but because many send their children to public schools in La Jolla and other affluent parts of the city. To keep this slim majority on his side, Bersin felt the need to act and show results quickly.

Many of the difficulties encountered in implementing San Diego's reform can be traced to the speed with which this complicated and wrenching set of changes was undertaken.

System changes

The 'jolts' to the system occurred in both instructional and operational domains. While we focus primarily on the instructional sphere here, it is important to note that the district's fiscal policies and organizational structures were changed radically to enable implementation of the reform (Hightower 2001, 2002). Resource allocations, organizational structures and personnel policies all changed to focus on the development of expert teaching.

Resource reallocation

Rather than allowing traditional district expenditure patterns to reinforce the status quo (Meyer, Scott and Strang, 1994; Miles and Guiney, 2000; Guthrie and Sanders, 2001), San Diego leaders sought to have instructional priorities drive resource allocation in SDCS. All funds coming into the district – including local funds and those identified through cost-saving measures, resources from foundations, federal monies such as Title I, and state funds for various programmes – were redirected to finance the new instructional strategies. The goal was to focus on improving the core technology of schools – the quality of teaching – and to invest in high-functioning classrooms rather than peripheral programmes.

The large central office, which some viewed as fragmented, bureaucratic and 'top-heavy', was reorganized and downsized to send more money to schools. Bersin's tenure began with a promise to reduce central office spending by 5 per cent and, in the first year of the reform, 112 jobs were eliminated from the

central office, while only 10 were added. Positions that did not directly support teaching and learning were terminated. Displaced employees were either shifted to other more essential roles in the district or discontinued. During the period 1999–2002, 282 positions and \$11.6 million in central office expenditures were eliminated and redistributed to school sites. These reductions freed up dollars to fund the reform agenda and marked a revolution in how the central office viewed its role in supporting student achievement.

Several hundred categorical programmes that proliferated because of federal, state and local initiatives over many decades were consolidated to serve core system needs for professional development and teaching improvement, or were discontinued. Two years into the district's reform initiative, the SDCS school board passed the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards Based System, which codified the new uses of funds. In 2000–1, about \$61 million (6 per cent of the district budget) was spent to support the Blueprint strategies, including peer coach staff developers, extended day programmes, summer/intercession programmes, literacy/maths framework development and implementation, summer institutes for teachers and leadership academies for site administrators. Nearly all of this (\$59 million) went to school sites. Nearly two-thirds of the funding for these initiatives came from Title I funds and Integration programme funds. Other federal and state funds, including a large share from state-funded 'hourly programmes' that are used to augment students' school day and year, accounted for nearly all of the remainder. In 2001–2, the Blueprint was funded at a level of \$91 million (9 per cent of the district budget), using a similar strategy for consolidating federal and state funds, plus a larger share of foundation funding. Chief Administrative Officer Henry Hurley described how 'approximately 80 per cent of the money went directly into services that fit into the blueprint strategies, and then there was a small amount left over, the 20 per cent, that the school had discretion over how to spend'.

An additional major reallocation of resources occurred with a reduction of 600 of the district's 2,800 instructional aides in 2000–1, with the savings invested in teachers and peer coach staff developers – a trade of less skilled for more skilled personnel. These moves created substantial political resistance, including large protests at the board meeting where the budget including massive reductions in instructional aides was voted on. Bersin commented in 2002,

the tumult that came in terms of the implementation of the Blueprint was actually reallocating resources away from existing arrangements and existing programmes to fund a new approach to improving student achievement . . . In a place where you move resources and you take jobs away from people you get the pushback that's going to be natural from that group of people who are affected by the change . . . So it's not 'we're doing this and we're going to throw a few new resources at it and have the Blueprint'. You're actually taking employment arrangements and you're disrupting them in favor of a new approach. So it's not 'well, we wish we could have all gotten along better'. This is what a revolution is!

(authors' data collection)

Restructuring of central office functions

The organization of the central office and its approach to supporting schools also changed substantially as part of the reform. In 1996–7, the SDCS organization chart included seven divisions reporting to the superintendent, only two of which were responsible for educational functions. Five area superintendents, each supervising a set of cluster leaders, oversaw the work of schools. Upon taking office, Bersin immediately ‘jolted’ the district office by reorganizing it into three divisions that gave more prominence to the educational functions: the Institute for Learning; Administrative and Operational Support and the Center for Collaborative Activities. Alvarado led the Institute for Learning, and this division focused on curriculum, teaching strategies and the professional development of teachers and principals. It included the instructional leaders who replaced the five area superintendents. Administrative and Operational Support included business services and operational departments, and the Center for Collaborative Activities, a much smaller division, was designed to facilitate collaboration between departments and programmes. Subsequent reorganizations, which occurred annually, were guided by internal self-examination and the question: how can our work be organized to impact on student learning more successfully?

Reform of personnel policy

A reform built around professional expertise requires major rethinking of how professionals are recruited, supported and evaluated. To build resources for hiring and training high quality teachers, the district re-examined staffing patterns and recruitment strategies and increased the incentives for teachers to become fully prepared before entry. Cuts in central office personnel and paraprofessionals allowed the hiring of a greater number of trained teachers. The personnel office, under the leadership of a new Human Resources Administrator, Deberie Gomez, began to recruit aggressively for well-trained teachers, collaborating with universities on new training programmes in high-need fields and creating smooth pathways with local schools of education. The district began to offer contracts to well-prepared teachers as early as possible (as much as a year in advance of teaching) and reached out to well-prepared teachers in other states. In addition, Gomez streamlined the hiring process, put the entire system on-line, and improved the system’s capacity to manage data, interviews and other components of the selection system that had previously slowed the process and caused many candidates to give up and go elsewhere. By Fall 2001, while districts like San Francisco and Los Angeles hired hundreds of teachers on emergency permits and the state as a whole hired more than 50 per cent of its beginning teachers without full credentials, San Diego filled almost all of its 1,081 vacancies with credentialled teachers.⁴ Through purposeful action over several years, when schools opened, the district had filled all but two special education positions, and it had eliminated all but 17 emergency permits and waivers.

The district also worked to create a professional accountability system that intensified the supervision and development of principals and teachers, and led to dismissal of those who did not meet more rigorous standards for performance.

Many districts feel they cannot insist on high performance from personnel during times of shortage, because they are not sure they can find replacements. San Diego's strategy was to increase incentives for hiring qualified teachers and to focus unremittingly on supporting and evaluating the quality of practice. A number of beginning teachers we interviewed said they sought out San Diego rather than other districts because they felt the quality of professional development would surpass what they could experience elsewhere, and they craved the challenge of developing cutting-edge practice.

Focusing on new instructional priorities

These new funding and staffing emphases helped the district provide an extensive array of professional development opportunities for principals, teachers and other districtwide leaders, which served as the key mechanism for spreading the theory of instruction across the district. New resource allocation patterns also helped establish literacy as an important gate-keeping skill and created systems to raise achievement levels of the lowest performers.

Developing professional practice

By design, all professional development activities in SDCS have incorporated time and structures to interact with peers and reflect about practice; they also have emphasized the role of continuous, context-specific learning networks. Within a couple of years, most professional development opportunities were embedded in schools and classrooms. In order for organizational members to internalize the district's theory of instruction, these opportunities were designed to generate knowledge across the profession as opposed to impart information to individuals (see Hightower and McLaughlin, 2002).

Among the first, most fundamental instructional reforms instituted were mechanisms for principals to learn how to develop and monitor high quality teaching among their staffs. The district's 175 principals were divided into seven learning communities, each of which was led by a newly trained central office instructional leader (IL), who replaced the traditional assistant superintendent positions. Each IL was a former principal who had demonstrated high levels of skill as an IL. Alvarado took these leaders to District 2 to observe schools and to participate in summer literacy activities so that they could lay a foundation for the work they would do with principals and teachers in San Diego.

The learning community groups convened during required, monthly principals' conferences, which offered principals opportunities to learn about leading school staffs in high quality instructional practices. The format of the principals' conferences varied, including both interactive 'fieldtrips' to local classrooms and discussions with local and international experts on relevant topics (e.g. teaching techniques and principals' role as instructional leader). Sometimes site and central office administrators jointly examined student performance data to focus attention on the lowest performers and means for increasing their learning. Principals also interacted individually with ILs through 'walk-throughs', which were occasions

when ILs visited a school to observe classroom practice, evaluate site progress and assist principals in identifying specific instructional support needs. ILs visit each of their schools at least three times a year, although some schools have monthly visits.

San Diego's leaders sought to develop instructional knowledge among administrators because of their belief that instructional alignment requires shared knowledge about the technical core of the work throughout the system. The goal is to enable decisions supportive of good teaching to be made with minimum dissonance. Furthermore, if principals are to serve as instructional leaders, they must know instruction well. The change model assumes that individuals in key positions across the system – both within schools and the central office – are needed to introduce and sustain instructional reform within classrooms. Through this model the larger district system became more equipped to facilitate professional development within each school's community. Principals became more competent onsite leaders, better able to help teachers incorporate professional learning into their everyday routines as a community of learners within their school, and better able to evaluate the quality of teaching in classrooms.

The district also provided for the professional development of teachers, offering extensive professional development during summers and intersessions, amounting to about 150 classes each year that range from one to seven days. Most classes were held on school campuses, and participants received \$15 per hour to attend. At least once a year, principals received lists of their teachers who have attended particular district workshops in order to keep tabs on their exposure to ideas and better calibrate the level of knowledge about instructional strategies among their staffs. Beginning in Year 3, the district combined these training opportunities with the provision of summer school classes for students performing below grade level. During these classes – which, on most campuses, were taught by a subset of the school's regular teaching staff – teachers had opportunities to view demonstration lessons taught by experts and to practice techniques with experienced coaches working by their side. These workshops were intended to mesh with ongoing within-school professional development activities, as teachers met with principals, peers and school-based coaches to discuss instruction.

A key part of teachers' professional development was the creation of a network of trained and certified peer coach/staff developers, who were placed in schools to work directly with classroom teachers on teaching practice. The district intended for coaches to reinforce the district's literacy strategy and theory of instruction within each school site, and to break down norms of private practice. The district arranged for coaches in elementary schools to work with new teachers on induction, in addition to coaching other teachers who were receptive to support. Those at the secondary level worked primarily with English teachers; in secondary schools, induction was handled separately. By Year 2, at least one half-time coach had been placed in two-thirds of district schools; by Year 3, all schools had at least one full-time peer coach/staff developer. Coaches – accomplished teachers who

had been identified by principals and expressed interest in this position – were university-certified and trained by literacy staff from the district. They worked in schools and classrooms four days a week. On the fifth day, coaches trained with their peers and district literacy experts. Staff developers spoke very highly of this training and, through it, were able to form important professional relationships that gave them a means to reflect on their roles and circulate curriculum and pedagogical strategies

In a survey of teachers conducted for this study during 2001, 96 per cent of respondents reported attending professional development workshops, conferences or training and 75 per cent reported engaging in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction. These professional development opportunities for teachers were designed to help make teaching public and to parallel research about instruction, which argues for focusing on ‘authentic tasks’, ‘long-term assistance’ and communal activities (Stein and D’Amico, 2002).

Literacy as the focus

District leaders contended that literacy holds a special place in the learning process: improved literacy skills not only influence test scores (not surprisingly, students generally do better on tests they can read than those they can’t), they also provide the keys to access to higher-level content in other areas. For this reason, the teaching of literacy provides an important, common initial learning agenda for adults as they begin to function in learning communities (Elmore and Burney, 1999) and learn to ‘speak a common language’ about instructional practice. Thus, from the beginning and across all grade levels, literacy instruction was a privileged skill in which teachers were trained and around which professional development activities were oriented. During the 2001 school year, more than 93 per cent of teachers we surveyed reported having attended professional development activities that focused on language arts or reading, and 79 per cent had attended more than eight hours of such activities, noticeably more than any other category. Furthermore, teachers reported this training to be more useful than any other category of professional development: 69 per cent rated the training’s usefulness at 3 or above on a 5-point Likert scale, and a large majority of elementary teachers rated it ‘very useful’.

The district’s reading strategy is grounded in a balanced literacy approach that includes emphasis on decoding skills and phonemic awareness alongside equal emphasis on comprehension and expression through participation in language-rich listening and speaking activities, reading of trade books and extensive writing. The Literacy Framework includes pedagogical teaching components such as Read Alouds, Independent Reading, Word Study, Observation and Assessment, Shared and Guided Reading and Modeled, Shared, Guided and Independent Writing (see Stein and D’Amico, 2002). These strategies translate into practices such as the use of word walls and classroom displays of exemplary student work tied to specific standards, as well as close assessment of student skills through running records, miscue analyses and other diagnostic tools. Supported by specialized professional development activities, district administrators expect

principals and teachers to become knowledgeable about each component of the Literacy Framework and to move in stages toward its full implementation.

Alvarado emphasized that the reform was a professional, not a hierarchical, initiative – that the authority for the frameworks and teaching strategies is the research on which they rest, not the say-so of the central office, as is often the case with centralized curriculum initiatives:

We've organized into frameworks what the profession knows about instructional work. It is the profession that is [the source of] the expectations, not the district. When you speak and work with [your staff], they have to understand this is coming as a function of the profession, not as a function of the district demanding it. If an outside force is focusing me to do something, then I'm an automaton. If I'm responsible for using professional knowledge, then I have a big role in accessing that knowledge and implementing it. You only have a profession when there is a common set of knowledge and procedures that guides the work of the professionals in it. What good professionals do is access that [common knowledge base] and continue to learn about its application in a particular context. The parts that are in there are driven by professional knowledge, not because four people consult and invent it. You're being driven by the canons, knowledge and skill of the profession, [and this is] a function of professional practice.

(authors' data collection)

As we describe below, communicating the sources of the reform and enabling principals and teachers to understand deeply the knowledge undergirding the initiative was a major challenge that took all of the nearly five years in which we observed the reform process and was still ongoing when the research concluded. For reasons of both tradition and implementation, the reform was often perceived, especially in the first years, as hierarchical, rather than professional.

The reform initially emphasized literacy as the primary focus of early schooling. By the third year, the district had added a mathematics focus as well. To support the literacy focus at the secondary level, the district instituted a set of courses called Genre Studies⁵ as a way to bolster students' reading comprehension and writing skills. All sixth-graders and high school students reading below their grade level were required to take these courses, which were designed as accelerated rather than remedial classes. The instructional leaders pressured principals to assign their best teachers to teach Genre Studies courses. To support reduced class sizes and extended blocks of time, the district channelled extra funds to schools in proportion to the numbers of students demonstrating a need for these courses as determined by districtwide diagnostic assessments. In addition, the district adopted a set of local end-of-course assessments to diagnose students' reading levels and, if needed, to place them in Genre Studies classes.

Local accountability: student equity and teacher professionalism

San Diego reforms took place in the context of high-stakes, test-based state accountability policies, and state assessments certainly had the attention of district leaders, principals and teachers. Unlike the state's theory that rewards and sanctions would supply the motivation for raising test scores, however, San Diego's conception of accountability sought to strengthen performance and reduce inequities by improving the quality of teaching received by all students, especially those with the greatest educational needs. District goals for increasing equity were defined operationally as increasing the performance of all students, moving the bottom quartiles up, and reducing the gap between high and low performers. The district closely monitored the percentage of students in the lowest quartiles, arguing that, 'by lifting the floor we also are raising the ceiling'.

The conception of accountability embedded in San Diego's theory of change was tightly tied to notions of professional accountability, that is, accountability of professional staff for the quality of the teaching and schooling practices in which they are engaged and for continual improvements in their professional knowledge and skill (Darling-Hammond, 1997b). This kind of accountability requires educators to take responsibility for using teaching strategies that reflect professional standards of practice, both individually and collectively, and for engaging in professional development. Principals and peer coaches are responsible for developing teaching and for supporting teachers' learning. Through structured Learning Communities, principals are accountable to each other for self and peer learning about how to lead staff development and for their commitment to reduce inequitable student learning opportunities.

The demand for professional accountability of principals and teachers rests on a notion of reciprocal accountability within the system (Elmore, 1996, 2000). In a context of reciprocal accountability, leaders are responsible for enabling the individual and collective learning for which teachers, principals and leaders are, in turn, held accountable. As Elmore (2000) notes, a system aimed at professional learning is predicated on distributed leadership, wherein each level of the system is concerned with the core function – instruction and its improvement – but operates within its bounds of 'comparative advantage'. The district takes responsibility for providing the knowledge supports professionals need to become successful with all students. Thus, in San Diego, all principals participated in Learning Communities, and all schools received classroom-based professional development from peer coaches, while all teachers were expected to engage in professional development, coaching and collaboration.

Furthermore, the district invested disproportionately in the lowest performing schools. In addition to continuous, high-quality professional development for teachers to raise the quality of instruction in every classroom, the district supported the lowest performing students through more focused curricula (e.g. Genre Studies), extended instructional time (summer school and after-school instruction) and parent contracts. The eight lowest performing schools ('Focus Schools', determined by the state Academic Performance Index) received an addi-

tional full-time peer coach, 24 more instructional days each year, enhanced parent training and involvement programmes, four mathematics specialists who worked directly with students and programmes for preschoolers. First-grade teachers in these schools received \$8,000 for purchasing enhanced materials (\$3,000 more than first-grade teachers at other schools). The district also identified 11 other low-performing elementary schools, which received an additional full-time peer coach and increased per-classroom allocations for enhanced first-grade materials.

In short, the district heavily invested in organizational structures intended to foster professional accountability among principals and faculties. While the district focused on developing the practices of teachers and site administrators, it was willing and able to weed out ineffective or unnecessary employees from the top of the system as well. Principals worked closely with the district's Human Resources office in documenting low-performing teachers in order to pave the way for their ultimate dismissal from the district. Equally, instructional leaders reassigned to the classroom a number of principals who did not demonstrate effective instructional leadership. At the end of the first year of the reform (1999), 15 site administrators were abruptly reassigned to classrooms for failure to lead effectively. By the end of the second year of the reform, about 30 of the district's principals (15 per cent of the total) had been counselled out of their leadership positions (Hightower, 2001).

Forging Coherent District Strategy: How the District Mediates and Redirects State Policies

From the perspective of an outside agent such as the state, we might say that the district's primary reform strategies comprise the foundation that external policies must penetrate to have any effect on the district's activities. From an inside-out perspective, we might say that the district's strategies must contend with state and other external policy interventions and conditions that may either impede or support the reform initiatives. In this section, we examine how district leaders in San Diego leveraged, mediated or ignored state policies to further the instructional improvement goals of the district. Three key examples illustrate the district's active management of the broader state context as state-initiated policies hit the ground in San Diego. We explore how the state's teacher development policies, reading initiative and accountability measures intersected with, supported and sometimes diverged from San Diego's strategy for onsite, teacher-driven professional development, strongly articulated vision of balanced literacy and disproportionate investment in the lowest performing students and schools.

District professional learning: leveraging state teacher quality policies

As noted earlier, San Diego City Schools do not suffer from teacher shortages on the same scale as schools in other urban areas in the state. The district's aggressive

recruitment, collaboration and overhaul of the personnel system made it possible for all schools to be staffed by trained teachers. The percentage of uncredentialed SDCS teachers' credentials was less than 5 per cent in 2000–1 (CDE, 2001e), compared to a state-wide average of 14 per cent (Shields *et al.*, 2001) and an average in some other cities of well over 20 per cent. In fields where shortages are particularly severe, such as special education and bilingual education, the district works with local universities to create and operate teacher education programmes. By creating a well-designed set of recruitment, preparation and retention efforts and by leveraging state teacher policies (funding for hard-to-staff schools through the Teachers as a Priority programme; support for teacher education candidates and the creation of preparation programmes, and support for beginning teachers), the district reduced the number of new hires on emergency credentials to fewer than a dozen by 2001–2.

While state policies resembled emergency room triage in the face of a large concentration of under-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools, San Diego put itself in a position to work on improving teachers' professional skills. It took advantage of state teacher recruitment incentives to help achieve this goal, but its efforts were largely locally designed and self-initiated.

San Diego also leveraged the well-funded state Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) programme to serve its reforms, parlaying BTSA funds to augment the onsite peer coaching infrastructure for literacy that it established at the elementary level. Subsuming BTSA activities into the activities of literacy peer coaches in elementary schools was one way the district sought to create coherence across policies. New teachers received the same substantive messages about the district's theory of teaching and learning as their peers throughout the school, while being coached in ways appropriate for their development as novice teachers. Because new elementary teachers were integrated into the overall reform initiative of the district, their students were exposed to the same balanced literacy approach as students in the classrooms of more experienced teachers. Furthermore, San Diego beginning teachers were enabled to learn content-specific pedagogy for literacy instruction, which went beyond the generic approach to teaching supported by the state-sponsored assessment of teaching used in BTSA.⁶ Finally, by using BTSA funds to support new teachers' work under the elementary literacy reform umbrella, San Diego resisted fragmenting the focus of teachers, peer coaches and district leaders. Within the literacy initiative at the elementary level, the district did not conceive of BTSA as a separate, disparate programme as many other districts might.

Districts can also ignore or marginalize external policies to protect their reform agendas, as San Diego did with the state Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programme. In the late 1990s, California replaced the highly popular California Mentor Teacher Program with the PAR programme, which focuses on peer assessment and review of under-performing veteran teachers and can also support mentoring for novice teachers to supplement BTSA. The enabling legislation mandated that PAR must be negotiated locally between every district and bargaining unit. In the context of a highly acrimonious relationship between

the district and the local teachers' union, San Diego PAR became a separate and more marginal programme, providing funds at the school-level for the support of mentors who assist teachers on request and discretionary funds for professional development supports not provided by the district's literacy initiative. District use of both BTSA and PAR provisions – in one case aiming at integration and, in the other, at programmatic distinctiveness that kept it from interfering with the reform – were intended to protect the coherence of the literacy initiative in San Diego.

Despite the inevitable difficulties of implementing new programmes like BTSA and PAR, San Diego was well ahead of many other districts in its efforts to ensure that beginning teachers received mentoring. State-wide, only 39 per cent of Year 1 and 2 teachers participated in BTSA in 2001, and a smaller number participated in other support programmes, including PAR. A state teacher survey in that year found that 70 per cent of beginning teachers were assigned a mentor, but fewer than a third received regular coaching from mentors (Shields *et al.*, 2001). In San Diego, 86 per cent of teachers hired between 1998 and 2001 (including experienced teachers moving from other districts) reported having a formally assigned mentor during their first and/or second year of teaching, and at least 54 per cent saw their mentor for classroom observations and/or discussions about their teaching at least monthly. This compared to 16 per cent of other beginning teachers state-wide (Shields *et al.*, 2001: 102).

Reading initiative

The ways in which San Diego's leaders leveraged aspects of the California Reading Initiative to support their own balanced literacy approach is a lesson in strategic opportunism anchored in a theory of instruction and of change.⁷ The approach to balanced literacy in San Diego, as embodied in its Literacy Framework – which encompasses a broad array of pedagogical strategies and expected outcomes from students, including extensive, high-level strategic reading and writing; evidence- and reason-based discussion and other forms of oral discourse; as well as basic decoding and comprehension – is arguably richer than the state's vision of literacy as embodied in the state standards, framework and current tests.

The carefully-developed Literacy Framework served as an anchor against the pendulum swings in state reading policies – from 'basic skills' to 'whole language' to 'phonics' and back again. The specificity of its framework and the purposefulness of its strategy allowed San Diego to take advantage of state funds available for literacy training to support the portions of teachers' learning that mapped onto the state's goals, such as the teaching of phonemic awareness and decoding skills. The district's other professional development work extended beyond the state reading initiative using the multiple components of the Literacy Framework. Thus far, San Diego has been able to keep the richness of its balanced literacy approach and maintain the breadth and depth of literacy training the district believes its teachers need.

Accountability

San Diego schools are subject to the same accountability rules as other districts in the state. It is worth noting that the state's measures largely skirt districts and rest heavily on the schools themselves, which are rewarded and sanctioned based on their performance. Particularly in the II/USP programme for underperforming schools, this can cause a rift between district and school reform directions. Attempting to pre-empt this potential conflict, San Diego City Schools selected one firm as the external evaluator for all of its 42 II/USP schools and negotiated the evaluator's approach to ensure that it would be consistent with the district's theory of instruction. District administrators strongly believed that the lowest-performing schools were the ones that most needed to keep their focus on literacy and that the district's literacy approach would prove successful for these students. Rather than allow the schools to spin off on potentially disparate paths, the district worked to subsume this state policy into its overall reform initiative.

Although the state accountability policies generally circumvent districts, the role of the district was instrumental in mediating a largely punitive accountability approach and transforming it into one based on professional support and an explicit priority on equity in student learning. Rather than dealing with testing pressures by retaining large numbers of students so that their scores look better or pushing out those with low scores to special education or Graduation Equivalency Diploma (GED) programs so that the average improves, San Diego used multiple strategies for investing in low-performing schools and low-performing students so that they have real opportunities to improve. Not only did this orientation recognize that building capacity in the lowest-performing schools requires more investment than at high-performing schools, but the investment was also undergirded by a coherent theory of instruction and professional development. In this sense, the district actually focused and sharpened state policy to develop a more rational performance-based accountability system than what the state itself had enacted.

To further mitigate the punitive nature of the state's accountability measures, the district intervened on behalf of the schools under threat of state takeover. It developed a plan for those schools, gave them additional human and fiscal resources, and won a waiver from the state for a self-monitoring effort. This effort, again, kept schools from becoming out of step with the district's theory of instruction. In mediating state policies in these ways, San Diego had some advantages not available to some other districts. First, its lack of emergency permit teachers allowed it to use its BTSA funds to better advantage. (BTSA cannot be used for emergency credentialed teachers.) Second, because of its size and its purposeful management, San Diego was able to use state professional development funds to meet its own needs. These advantages, coupled with its strategic approach, allowed San Diego to manage the state's initiatives and use state resources to further its instructional goals.

Early results

Improvements in student achievement

San Diego witnessed substantial increases on the state assessments (SAT-9 tests) after the reform's inception; district leaders viewed these increases in student performance as validating the reform. The proportions of students scoring above the 50th percentile increased from 41 per cent to 47 per cent in reading and from 45 per cent to 53 per cent in mathematics (see Appendix 7A). Furthermore, gains were most dramatic in the grade levels specifically targeted by the reforms: the early elementary grades and middle school literacy. For example, the proportion of second-graders scoring above the 50th percentile in reading increased from 43 to 55 per cent over the four years and, in mathematics, from 50 to 61 per cent. While scores increased state-wide during this period, neither average scores nor participation rates increased as steeply as in San Diego. Furthermore, San Diego's student body included a much larger proportion of low-income students and students of colour than the state as a whole. (The district student population is 75 per cent 'minority', 60 per cent of its students are free and reduced-price lunch participants, and 30 per cent are designated as limited English proficient.)

Importantly, gains in average scores and in the proportions of students scoring above the 50th percentile were accomplished while the number of students taking the test also increased. Participation rates grew by more than 20 per cent on both the reading and mathematics tests between 1998 and 2001 as an additional 8,000 students were tested. In most schools, more than 98 per cent of students were participating in the tests by 2001. A sizeable number and proportion of students moved from the lowest two quartiles to the upper two quartiles in both reading and maths between 1998 and 2001, especially in the early grades where the literacy initiatives have most consistently taken root. For example, the proportion of students scoring in the bottom quartile in reading dropped from 36 per cent in 1998 to 29 per cent in 2001, while the proportion scoring in the top quartile increased from 20 per cent to 24 per cent. Based on four years of SAT-9 data, by 2001, 7,800 more 'Q1-2 students' (students initially scoring in the bottom two quartiles) scored above the 50th percentile in reading, and over 9,000 more 'Q1-2 students' were above the 50th percentile in mathematics.⁸ Increases occurred across all grade levels but were much larger at the elementary and middle levels than at the high school level, especially in reading, where high school students performed noticeably less well than younger students. As we discuss later, lagging secondary school achievement drove a new high school initiative undertaken by the district.

Changes within the central office

Within the central office, budget and operations managers learned to collaborate with instructional administrators to specify and prioritize educational needs and to direct district dollars toward instructional priorities. Both instructional and

operational administrators commented on a shift *away* from letting the available money guide programme decisions, and *toward* having instructional needs govern the budget. Alvarado described the shift as getting ‘operational departments [to] become the handmaiden of instruction’, noting that the reform:

created a group of people working together for the first time in which the . . . instructional issues drove [decisions], and the budget people and the operational people knew that their job was to make the budget thing happen. That’s a *very* important thing to happen in districts. It almost never happens.

(authors’ data collection)

Substantial shifts in the allocations of funds occurred, enabling much larger investments in professional development, teacher recruitment, mentoring and coaching, and other factors that enabled the district’s increasingly successful efforts to hire and develop well-qualified teachers who are well-supported in their learning and teaching.

There were also short-term costs to these focused changes. The district initially lost a National Science Foundation grant, because the Blueprint focus did not include maths and science in the first year. The \$6 million grant was later reinstated, and the district also secured a \$3 million grant from the Foundation for the Improvement of Mathematics and Science. Central office capacity in mathematics was initially reduced until a new person was hired to lead the district’s maths division, and the Math Framework guiding new investments in curriculum and professional development was approved by the board in 2000. Science support also languished until new curriculum initiatives were launched in 2001. Special education was left out of the reform until efforts to bring the district into compliance and to build capacity brought it under the wing of the Institute for Learning and led to the placement of 49 site-based diagnostic resource teachers to support this function in schools.

The prioritization of instruction over operations also had short-term costs, as it was more difficult to get attention to repairs and other non-instructional items in the early years of the reform. Over time this imbalance, too, was redressed. Instructional leaders described how their roles evolved over the first three years of the reform, gradually taking on more aspects of instruction and, ultimately, operations as well, reincorporating aspects of the former assistant superintendent roles. As one noted:

When we first started we were almost exclusively focused on instruction – and exclusively on literacy. Over the course of the three years we moved into math and took on other operational issues, first with a focus on the second language programme and special education, then the school budgets, to the point now where we’re clearly responsible, through the

principal, for whatever happens at the school. Although we don't get into a lot of details on operational issues, if there's a crisis or a particular issue, then we're expected to step in and help to solve it, and it seems like that echoes back more to what the assistant superintendent's role was prior to the reorganization.

The expansion of the IL job was not, however, a return to the status quo, because, in contrast to earlier years, these instructional leaders were chosen for their deep knowledge of teaching and learning, were assisted in learning how to oversee and develop instructional programmes and support principals as instructional leaders, and were held accountable for improving instruction. Thus, as they assumed other functions of the previous organizational roles, they did so with a different foundation of knowledge, with new structures in place to support schools and the change process, and with a new mandate.

School-level reactions

As noted earlier, leadership in a context of reciprocal accountability is not intended to be a zero-sum game of power in which different role incumbents win or lose control with varying governance schemes. Instead, the combination of complementary strengths should make possible strong roles for district personnel, school leaders and teachers. However, the process of developing a sense of shared accountability can be uncomfortable in an organization that has not previously experienced a strong press for focus and results. Survey data collected during the second and third years of the reform (2000–1) indicated that principal and teacher reactions exhibited both an appreciation for new supports and discomfort with changed norms of practice.

Principal reactions

Principals were mostly pleased about the district-initiated changes, but were also wary of the increased scrutiny of their work. More than 75 per cent of those surveyed felt that the district holds high expectations and is committed to high standards, holds priorities consistent with those of the school, helps the school focus on and nurture teaching and learning, and promotes principal and teacher development. More than two-thirds of principals at each level felt that 'the district supports my school's efforts to improve'. At the same time, just over half (55 per cent) said that they saw the district as centralized and hierarchical, creating mandates without providing adequate support. This sentiment was strongest among high school principals. Only 56 per cent felt that 'the district inspires the best in job performance'. Nonetheless, more than two-thirds of principals at each level felt that 'the district supports my school's efforts to improve'.

The enthusiasm of many was expressed by this principal after the first year of the reform:

It's very exciting [to hear conversations at] the staff meetings and grade level meetings [at our school], or just conversations in the teachers' lounge. [It's exciting to hear] the very different questions for the reflections they have, or the conversations around curriculum or instruction. It's really quite amazing to see the change in teachers.

(authors' data collection)

The commitment of other principals to the reform tended to increase over time, as their deeper understanding of the reform's intentions increased with greater communication. Many grew more supportive as they saw how the professional development available to them and their teachers enabled them to develop stronger practice. In many cases, a view of the reform as hierarchically imposed shifted as the professional basis for the work became clearer. One principal described her own evolution this way:

I resisted Alvarado because I don't like being told what to do, and who knows better than I do, for crying out loud! So there was resentment there. But I think [Alvarado] is sincere, and I think he's got a very simple plan, but it makes a lot of sense: focus on good teaching; support good teaching, and learning will come. And he's absolutely right . . . And so I shared with [my staff], 'We're going to do this, this, and this, and they said, 'Why?' And I said, 'Because we're being told to do it, that's why'. *Because I didn't get the 'why' either, and there were missing pieces. Information came out piece by piece.* We had this attitude of we'll be saluting and we'll do it. Then when I finally heard Alvarado talk to the middle-level principals in a forum where he just talked to us, I came back here and said to the staff, 'I need to tell you that I've finally heard the whole plan, the whole picture, what it's about, and each and every one of us would be happy to be chancellor and mandate this if we could . . . It makes absolute sense . . .' It's common sense; it's a good thing. Who doesn't want a kid who will read and write in grades 8 and 9 because we've addressed it in grade 7? So they agreed with me.

(authors' data collection)

The vast majority of the 40 principals we interviewed recognized the structural supports for their learning. They appreciated their instructional leader, liked the learning community groupings, and noted the monthly principals' conferences as a source of professional growth and inspiration as well as an important conduit for information between schools and the central office. They viewed 'walk-throughs' – a practice in which principals and instructional leaders walk through the school stopping to assess teaching in each of the classrooms – as positive, non-threatening opportunities to interact with the IL on a more personal, context-specific basis. One principal noted that the IL model made the district more responsible for teaching quality:

There's a sense that they [the Instructional Leaders] really know what's going on at our schools, where I didn't really feel that as tightly in the old model. So it feels like the *system* is becoming more accountable. Each piece is making the whole organization more accountable.

(authors' data collection)

In addition, a majority of principals spoke favourably about the reform's 'equalizing' quality and its focus on helping principals get access to professional knowledge. They noted that everyone – not just specific schools, as in the past – got access to comparable information about effective teaching and learning strategies. One veteran elementary school principal explained:

It strikes me that the clusters were totally dependent on the vision of their leader, the Assistant Superintendent. So each cluster lived or died by that individual's futuristic goal or vision about education. Now, that doesn't exist. Our immediate Instructional Leaders gets the vision from the top; we all hear the same thing . . . the same message. And that consistency helps me to know that when I look at someone who's on the other side of town, they're trying to do the same thing I'm trying to do. And that's very reassuring, rather than to think: 'Gosh, they've got the corner on the market for something I haven't even heard about'. At least we're all in the same sailboat.

(authors' data collection)

These perceptions are corroborated by surveys of principals (see Table 7.1). More than 90 per cent cited as valuable the school- and district-sponsored staff development, instructional leader school visitations, the district's focus on low-achieving students, and the three-hour Literacy Block. However, elementary principals valued supports like the principals' learning communities, the monthly principal conferences, and the discussions with other principals and institute staff much more than secondary principals did. Elementary principals valued reform strategies that most impacted their schools, such as the developmental reading assessment. Meanwhile, secondary principals highly valued the Genre Studies courses, which were implemented in sixth grade to twelfth grade, affecting most middle and high schools.

In the initial years of San Diego's districtwide reform, leaders intentionally pursued a system-wide strategy with little differentiation by grade level or subject matter. Learning communities, the district's variation on clusters established in 1998, were heterogeneously grouped by geography and school level. While Alvarado recognized the potential value of grade-level groupings, he feared that creating such groups would minimize 'the K–12 thinking that has to go on' (Hightower, 2001: 137). Increasingly, however, high school principals bristled at the apparent 'one size fits all' approach. They felt that district reformers lacked knowledge related to the particular needs of high schools and that the K–12 instructional conferences largely failed to meet their learning needs. A sizable

Table 7.1 Principals' view of San Diego reforms (2000–1)

<i>Percentage rating item highly valuable or positive¹</i>	<i>Overall (n = 180)</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
School-sponsored staff development	99	99	100	100
Institute-sponsored staff development	96	99	91	87
District's focus on Q1–Q2 students	94	95	86	93
Instructional leader school visitations	92	94	91	80
Discussions with my instructional leader	92	93	91	80
Three-hour literacy block	92	98	66	60
Principals' learning communities	88	96	69	54
Discussions with my school staff developer	85	80	100	100
Developmental reading assessment (used in elementary schools)	84	90	58	33
Genre Studies Course (used in grades 6–12)	83	57	100	84
Monthly principals' conferences	83	89	70	46
Discussions with principals in my learning community	81	93	50	46
Portfolio assessments	60	66	53	23
Discussions with institute [district] staff other than IL	58	66	32	27

Note

¹ Percent responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale where '5' is extremely valuable or responding 3 or 4 on a 4-point Likert scale where '4' means very positive.

Source: CTP, May 2000.

minority of secondary school principals (39 per cent) felt that the district did not *understand* their school's reform agenda. As one high school principal commented: '[W]hen Bersin says that literacy is going to be . . . the only game in town, it's *not* . . . at the senior high school. At the other [level]s, it *can* be the only game. But at senior high, it's only going to be a piece of it' (Hightower, 2001: 42).

In response to these sentiments, district leaders decided to reorganize the learning communities to create two high school-only groups. Following board approval, Bersin and Alvarado announced this restructuring at a principals' conference in Fall 2000. In making this change, however, they underscored that it was not a retreat from K–12 thinking; rather, it was an attempt at being responsive to the expressed needs of high schools. As Bersin explained:

High schools, in fact, require not separate treatment but *different* treatment. There is a difference, and we have to take it into account . . . Without cutting ourselves adrift from our [K–8] colleagues and understanding that what happens in the elementary school is absolutely critical to the success of our students in high school, we also will confront the fact that high schools require their own approach.

(Hightower, 2001: 248)

This change represents an important recognition by the district that, in the context of system-wide reform, high schools may require reform strategies specific to their level.

Teacher reactions

Teachers' reactions to the district's instructional reforms were more mixed. In general, they voiced appreciation for the district's emphasis on professional development and improving instruction; however, many disagreed with the implementation of the reform initiatives, claiming the process was 'too cut-throat' (elementary teacher), 'top-down' (elementary teacher), and 'bureaucratic' (Genre Studies high school teacher). Elementary school teachers appeared more comfortable with the reform principles and literacy focus than were middle or high school teachers, who raised questions about the literacy initiative's relevance for all schools and students. A common theme, also raised in a recent American Institutes for Research (AIR) study of the San Diego reforms, is that most teachers agreed with the goals and substance of the reform agenda, but many had discomfort with centralized implementation that seemed not to take their views into account. Their responses illustrate some of the challenges associated with a large-scale reform strategy that turns on establishing common norms of practice that defy the traditional individualistic culture of schools. The responses also reveal some of the felt trade-offs among competing uses of time and resources in the reform strategy.

Views of professional leadership and support

Consistent with the district's goal of enabling teachers to succeed at what they are held accountable for – professional learning – most teachers had positive perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership and their own opportunities for professional development. A majority of teachers surveyed saw their principals as leaders in school reform who set high standards for teaching and for student achievement (82 per cent), and who maintain a strong focus on student learning within the school (68 per cent). More than three-quarters also reported that their principals were involved in professional development with teachers (see Table 7.2). This is an unusually high vote of confidence in local school principals. However, reflecting teachers' sense of centralized decision-making, a minority (38 per cent) said their principal was strongly committed to shared decision-making. Their comments suggest that collegial work was focused more on professional learning than participatory governance.

Table 7.2 Teachers' views of principal leadership (Spring 2001)

<i>Percentage of teachers agreeing¹ that the principal:</i>	<i>All teachers (n = 404)</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
sets high standards for teaching	82	89	70	61
participates in professional development activities with teachers	77	84	69	60
ensures that student learning is the 'bottom line' in the school	68	79	60	50
is a strong leader in school reform	62	67	54	60
is strongly committed to shared decision-making	38	41	36	30

Note

¹ Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale where 5 is 'strongly agree'.

Teachers also reported engaging in substantial amounts of professional development, with 96 per cent having engaged in workshops or other training and 25 per cent having offered professional development to colleagues (see Table 7.3). Whereas a minority of teachers nationally report spending more than eight hours in professional development activities on any given topic (NCES, 1999), most San Diego teachers reported spending more than eight hours in professional development regarding reading (79 per cent), methods of teaching (62 per cent), and new curriculum and instructional materials (54 per cent).

That teaching was becoming more public is also reflected by the fact that 75 per cent of San Diego teachers engaged in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and 61 per cent participated in mentoring or peer coaching. More than half (57 per cent) had participated in observations in other schools. Within their own schools, observations were even more frequent: 82 per cent of teachers reported that they observed another teacher teaching, and 75 per cent reported that they had been observed by another teacher at least several times a year. Teachers reported further substantive collaboration on a regular basis (i.e. at least once a month), such as working together to develop curriculum materials or activities for particular classes (60 per cent), discussing lessons that were not particularly successful (54 per cent), teaching with a colleague (33 per cent), and analysing student work with other teachers (39 per cent). Embedding professional learning into the everyday activities of a school is far more difficult than mounting formal professional development activities. Half of San Diego teachers surveyed agreed, 'our stance toward our work is one of inquiry and reflection', although this average reflects the positive responses of 60 per cent of elementary teachers as compared to fewer than 40 per cent of secondary teachers.

Table 7.3 Teacher participation in professional development

<i>Percentage of teachers engaging in professional development in the last 12 months</i>	<i>All teachers</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
Attending workshops, conferences, or training	96	98	92	93
Regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers on instructional issues	75	83	63	69
Mentoring or peer observation/coaching	61	70	56	41
Observational visits to other schools	57	64	56	34
Presenting at workshops or conferences	25	25	24	33
Individual or collaborative research	55	58	49	60
University courses (beyond initial certification courses)	30	30	35	33
Participating in a teacher network	27	24	26	34

San Diego teachers' view of their formal professional development experiences were, on the whole, more favourable than averages found in recent state-wide studies of California teachers (see Shields *et al.*, 1999 and 2001). Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed agreed that the professional development they engaged in presented new information, increased their knowledge of instructional and assessment techniques in their teaching field, increased their effectiveness with students, and deepened their subject matter knowledge. Once again there was a divide between elementary and secondary teachers. For example, 61 per cent of elementary teachers, but only 36 per cent of high school teachers, felt the professional development they experienced caused them to seek additional learning opportunities (see Table 7.4).

Beginning teachers seemed especially enthusiastic about the training and the creation of schoolwide practices. As one noted:

For me, being a newer teacher, this has been great. The first two years I taught, I felt really lost . . . I'm here, brand new, trying to create everything myself . . . It was really stressful and really difficult. And so when the District came in and said, 'here this is what you're supposed to do' and I started getting some training . . . All of these things for me have been great! I'm finally given some direction. Everybody's doing the same thing. And I'm feeling more in touch with everybody else.

(authors' data collection)

Table 7.4 Teachers' views of professional development

<i>Percentage of teachers stating that professional development:¹</i>	<i>All teachers (n = 404)</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
provided information that was new to me	66	77	58	50
increased my knowledge beyond basic instructional and assessment techniques appropriate for my subject matter	64	73	58	50
increased my effectiveness at promoting student learning	64	72	58	56
deepened my grasp of subject matter	63	76	58	45
improved my skills to meet instructional needs of a diverse student population	52	59	53	50
improved my ability to identify instructional goals appropriate to the subject matter I taught	52	63	53	47
caused me to seek further information or training	52	61	45	36

Note

¹ Percentage of teachers replying 3 or 4 ('somewhat' or 'a lot') on a 4-point Likert scale.

Source: CTP, 2001.

Consonant with these generally positive views about their professional learning, San Diego teachers expressed efficacious views about their ability to influence student learning. Large majorities agreed that 'by trying different teaching methods, I can significantly affect my students' achievement' (81 per cent), and 67 per cent reported that their expectations for their students' learning had been increasing. Comparable proportions took issue with statements suggesting that their 'students cannot learn the material they are supposed to be taught' (68 per cent disagree) or that there is 'little I can do to insure that most of my students achieve at a high level' (80 per cent disagree). Many teachers – particularly in elementary grades and the Genre Studies courses at secondary level – offered examples of how the reform had changed and deepened their own practice and how they were incorporating many of the strategies in their classrooms.

Views of the school environment

Most teachers also felt that their colleagues were providing a high quality of instruction and were committed to improving student learning. Their views were more divided as to whether the emphasis on standards had translated into coherent curriculum plans that are relevant to all students and consistent across grade levels and classrooms. Middle school teachers reported the least confidence about the coherence and clarity of their school's curriculum and standards. Across

Table 7.5 Teachers' views of their school environment

<i>Percentage of teachers agreeing¹ that</i>	<i>All teachers</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
the school staff is committed to helping students learn	89	91	88	86
teachers provide high quality instruction	88	90	81	78
this school has high standards for students' academic performance	70	77	53	65
this school has well-defined learning expectations for all students	59	67	40	63
students are well aware of the learning expectations of this school	57	62	50	59
standards for student achievement are challenging, attainable and measurable	56	64	43	55
our stance toward our work is one of inquiry and reflection	51	60	38	39
this school has high quality schoolwide curriculum plans	50	55	33	57
this school has consistent standards from classroom to classroom	45	57	25	28
the curriculum is relevant for the population of students	37	45	26	39
resources are distributed equitably within this school	37	45	29	24
the curriculum is planned between and among grades to promote continuity	32	36	21	36
the resources available to me are sufficient for me to do my job	30	27	38	29

Note

¹ Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale where 5 is 'strongly agree'.

the board, relatively few teachers (30 per cent) reported that they had enough resources for their work (see Table 7.5).

In interviews, teachers voiced concerns about:

- a lack of curriculum materials to accompany the literacy focus
- the homogeneous tracking of lowest performers into Genre Studies, which appeared to contradict some research on learning, and
- lack of attention to other subject areas beyond literacy.

Some teachers also complained that the reform had eliminated school-level programmes they felt were successful as resources were pulled in different directions. Others noted incompatibilities with their personal conceptions of good teaching. This sentiment may be a reflection of the tension between an emerging view of professionalism as collective responsibility for standards of practice versus the view of professionalism as individual autonomy that has predominated in teaching.

A paradox is that, while most teachers agreed that the district holds high expectations for schools and felt the district invests in high quality professional development for teachers, many also voiced mistrust of the district's motives and support for school-level reforms. In this sense, distributed leadership – that is, complementary district and teacher roles based on comparative advantage – was slow to take hold. In the second year of the reform, almost three-quarters of the teachers surveyed felt the pressure of mandates and perceived inadequate support. While recognizing that the district holds high standards for their schools (71 per cent), fewer than half agreed that the district helps schools focus on teaching and learning (45 per cent), emphasizes academic standards at all levels (41 per cent), or has consistent standards across schools (40 per cent). A very small minority agreed that the district inspires teachers to perform their best (12 per cent), and learns from (11 per cent) or consults with (4 per cent) school staff. Although the district's theory of instruction locates professional accountability with teachers, teachers had little sense of district efforts to institutionalize their participation or promote teacher leadership. In these areas, as others, secondary teachers were least optimistic (see Table 7.6).

One instructional leader explained how the reform collided directly with the strong emphasis on site-based governance that had been negotiated in a previous contract under the prior administration:

The last contract from the union with the district gave the site governance teams the most power they've ever had in years: to look at budgets, to look at master schedules, to look at teacher placement . . . If the principal said 'no' to what the governance team said, it would go through an appeals process at the district level. They had negotiated the most powerful site governance package that had ever come down the pike. And that was last year [1997–8]. This year [1998–9], here comes, 'Central Office will tell the sites what to do'. And that's not the fault of the teachers or the school. Someone else brought that site governance culture to us. I mean, it was pervasive throughout the United States, and we were told repeatedly, 'The sites know best; the sites will make the decisions about budgets, decisions about staffing, decisions about programs; the sites will interview for principals; the sites will interview for teachers'. So here comes the new one that says, 'We are the Institute for Learning. We will approve or disapprove what comes your way. We have a new process for selecting principals. We may or may not get your input at some stage'. There was a little to-do about that.

(authors' data collection)

Table 7.6 Teachers' views of district support for teachers and schools

<i>Percentage of teachers agreeing¹ that:</i>	<i>All teachers n = 404)</i>	<i>Elementary school</i>	<i>Middle school</i>	<i>High school</i>
this district creates mandates without providing adequate support	74	77	70	71
the district holds high expectations for our school	71	77	62	60
this district helps schools focus on teaching and learning	45	45	22	18
the district emphasizes academic standards at all levels of the system	41	50	25	25
this district has consistent standards from school to school	40	46	34	31
the district is committed to high standards for every student	37	45	26	23
this district invests in high quality professional development for teachers	34	47	21	9
the district ensures that student learning is the 'bottom line' in schools	27	38	11	9
this district helps schools use information about students achievement relative to standards in order to improve instruction	21	27	8	13
this district provides support to enable teachers to adjust curriculum and instruction to meet all students' individual needs	13	18	7	5
this district inspires the very best in the job performance of its teachers	12	15	8	5
this district provides all schools the same level and kind of support for reform	11	10	14	13
district administrators visit and learn from school administrator and staff	11	15	6	5
the district promotes teacher leadership across district schools	9	11	7	2
the district office consults with schools on issues that affect schools	4	4	4	3

Note

¹ Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert Scale where 5 is 'strongly agree' or 'a great deal'. Source: CTP, Teacher Survey, Spring 2001.

District–union relations

Teachers' views about the process of change reflected the deteriorating relationship between the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) and the district management. Tensions between the district and the union were initially made public in the protracted conflict over the new peer coach position that Alvarado wanted to create during the 1998–9 school year. District leadership and the union disagreed on selection and reporting procedures for these new positions. The teachers' union wanted input into the selection of coaches and feared that coaches would play an evaluative role with respect to their colleagues. The district leaders wanted to select the peer coaches to ensure their quality. This disagreement postponed the implementation of peer coaches until the Fall of 1999 and set the stage for later conflict over the Blueprint.

By March of 2000, when Bersin and Alvarado presented the final draft of the Blueprint to the Board, they were greeted with large protests by teachers, classroom aides and some parents. Among the issues was the large reduction in the numbers of paraprofessionals as part of the plan to redirect resources to teaching and professional development. One of two board members who requested (unsuccessfully) to postpone the decision to adopt the plan commented: 'Anything that gets implemented (in the fall) will be hampered from the onset by this climate . . . There are a lot of unhappy, suspicious and unsatisfied people'.⁹ The teachers' union president, Marc Knapp, asserted, 'This plan as presented will not achieve the success we all want for our students because the people that know how to make it go were not asked'.¹⁰

While Alvarado and Bersin regretted the teacher and parent opposition, they asserted that the district needed to do what was best for improving instruction, not what was best for the classroom aides. They confronted critics with SDCS's troubling statistics. Alvarado argued:

When we have 65 percent of our students not meeting grade level standards, over 30 percent of them dropping out, and fully 75 percent of those who graduate and go to community college and the state system not being able to take a college course because they have to take remedial reading and math, we have to change that. The burden of proof is [on] someone who wants to defend the existing system because it's not even close to what an American urban system has to be in order to promote some kind of justice to its students.¹¹

(authors' data collection)

The responses of many teachers who felt, at once, both professionally invigorated and stunned, can be seen as a result of the district's 'act now, explain later' approach that prioritized speed of implementation over up-front buy-in from stakeholders. Reflecting on this approach, one top-ranking district official explained:

One of the things that is important about having people participate in change is that they give their buy-in right from the start. But on the other

hand, trying to get buy-in sometimes sacrifices the reform or the effort that you're trying to do. So, [we've been] challenged to figure out a balance between the buy-in and the speed of the change, the importance of the innovation, keeping the innovation itself pure so that it isn't compromised . . . I think that we had to make a decision about which was more important and urgent. And the urgency was to do something about student achievement and to get the innovations and interventions in place. And so what was sacrificed might have been a lot of the time it takes for buy-in and a lot of the compromise [that results] from buy-in.

As a consequence of this strategy for change, in the first three years of the reform, the teachers association often felt that the district included them only after major decisions already had been made. In our interviews and document review, we saw a growing similarity in how teachers talked about reform implementation and what the union publications said against the reform; at times the responses seemed almost scripted. One outside observer noted that the dissenting teachers' union, which has a myriad of mature communications networks, 'is writing the story because the district doesn't have the resources or skills to write it itself'.

This fractured relationship ultimately complicated and sometimes thwarted various aspects of the reform, at times impeding the district's attempts to reallocate fiscal and human resources toward its instructional agenda. For instance, San Diego has been unable to redesign its internal assignment processes or introduce incentives for individuals teaching in hard-to-staff-schools to fully address the tendency that San Diego shares with most other urban districts for more experienced teachers to flock to the least needy schools. Similarly, the district would have liked to create additional peer coaching roles using state resources associated with the state's PAR programme. However, union negotiations around PAR resulted in a more traditional allocation of these funds, most of which went directly to schools to use as they saw most appropriate, within broad guidelines established by SDCS and the SDEA.

Furthermore, the acrimonious relationship between the district and union influenced teachers' views about the change *process* as one that was top-down and non-inclusive of teachers' views. This is reflected in our survey results. However, our results also indicate that most teachers voiced significant support for most of the particular instructional changes introduced by district officials, as well as for outcomes of the reforms, such as greater principal skills, peer collegiality and high-quality professional development. Focused central office attention to the details of instruction – with the subsequent accountability measures in place to remove inadequate performers – created a delicate blend of emotions including excitement, efficacy, fear, pride and sometimes resentment from those within schools.

The change from a local control model of school management to a more centralized approach was not an easy one. During the first two to three years of San Diego's reform implementation, our research suggests that principals and teachers valued structural changes such as learning communities, walk-throughs, the

Literacy Block and professional development activities. However, the survey data did not portray the kind of strong distributed leadership that is intended to undergird reciprocal accountability. Teachers' negative reaction to the district's centralized reform was based on their view that district leaders dismissed their professional knowledge. As the reform unfolded, teachers increasingly demanded to see research upon which the strategies were built. They also expressed interest in reading about New York's Community School District 2 (upon which many aspects of the San Diego reform was modelled) and learning about its structure and operations. Additionally, they wanted to see research and cases of exemplary practice from *within* SDCS, where policy and professional contexts were immediate.

The district has begun to make these local exemplars available, selecting teachers to become staff developers and coaches who conduct demonstration lessons and creating special 'lab' classrooms outfitted with multiple video cameras and a two-way mirror where teachers can watch expert teachers conduct their daily teaching and evaluate their moves as well as debriefing their decisions. We documented a trend toward greater consistency in teaching practices and greater comfort with the practices being modelled over the three years of this study, although important variations across schools suggested that the reform did not have uniform effects.

While the survey data reviewed above provide a snapshot of how staff felt about the reforms early on, case study work extending further into the reform period indicated that professional accountability and distributed leadership gradually took root at the school level.

In school-level observations, we found strong evidence of growing professional accountability, including:

1 *Increased professional peer support and collaboration to improve instruction*, including shared expectations that teachers read professional literature and learn from experts as well as sharing their professional expertise with one another. Teachers increasingly experienced support and pressure *from one another* to improve instruction. For example, in one of our case study schools, professional study groups are led by teachers, and many of the groups require teachers to do some professional reading. When a complaint came to the union representative regarding the 'requirement to read', she decided to help her colleague understand the importance of meeting this professional expectation rather than grieving it. The principal noted, 'The cool thing about it around here is that peer pressure is something that's working for this, because when you go into [teachers'] rooms, for the most part, you can see evidence of professional reading that they've done in an area'. At another school, we saw teachers struggling with aspects of their teaching, ranging from general classroom management to the structure of Readers'/Writers' Workshop, asking other teachers they perceived to be strong for help.

2 *Greater accountability for teaching through formal and informal observations and evaluations*. We saw more informal observations by both administrators and peers

and an increased number of teachers documented for ineffective teaching than in previous years. Most teachers at our case study schools experienced more frequent observations by site and district administrators, and some experienced frequent observations by other observers as well (e.g. peers, peer coaches, instructional leaders and candidates for administrative positions performing walk-throughs to prove their abilities to critique instruction and articulate next steps for teachers). Many principals began to evaluate teachers on a continuum for specific skills in order to assist in planning staff development. Principals at our case study schools encouraged teachers to develop formal evaluation goals related to student outcomes in literacy. As the following exchange between a principal and her instructional leader indicates, teachers were often the ones to suggest ambitious learning goals for students for which they would be held accountable:

Instructional leader: What are you holding your teachers accountable for in terms of their progress? I mean, where do you expect those kids to be at the end of the year?

Principal: Well, typically, the general thing is that they need to have made at least two years' progress in their reading.

Instructional leader: Good. Good.

Principal: And you know what? The teachers decided. The Literacy Block teachers are the ones who told me that they thought that would be a good goal.

Instructional leader: Good! Excellent.

Principal: And some of them have written them into their [teacher evaluations].

Instructional leader: Excellent . . .

Principal: Well, you can't just make one year of progress, and I think two years is minimal.

One of our case study principals noted:

I think I did a much better job evaluating people this year. Part of it is because I know more about language arts . . . And so, of course, now that I know more, I'm able to provide them with a little more feedback than I could last year . . . The way I do principaling at a school will never be the same . . . Because what we're doing is really important work that impacts on kids' lives. We weren't in classrooms before . . . No one ever came in my room even when I was [a teacher being evaluated]. So I think that's one of the reasons that's been hard for older teachers to change. So just all of the training I've gotten, and [Alvarado's] position around kids and the needs of our kids and our responsibilities as educators, all the discussions around professionalism. I'm not just a manager of an operation, but I have the instructional piece and the accountability piece that is more important than the operational piece.

3 *Use of student data to hold teachers accountable for their teaching*, especially student work and test scores in reading. The use of data is yet another element in increasing

professional accountability. In some cases it involves teachers evaluating student work against a performance rubric, in accordance with district or state content standards, a practice we saw in our case study schools. Principals in these schools met with teachers to review student reading levels. For example, during the 2001–2 school year, one principal required language arts teachers to track student reading levels according to the books they were reading while she provided teachers with an analysis of their students' reading test data, sharing with them reading level improvements by class, by group as it applied (e.g. English language learners, GATE and grade level), and by individual students. Other principals provided student test score data to teachers individually and used them as the basis for discussions to figure out ways to support students who were struggling. In addition, we saw a prevailing expectation that teachers use standards to guide their instruction and evaluation of students. In a growing number of classrooms we saw teachers assessing where students are in order to plan how to get them to standard, rather than merely teaching the content standards as outlined in the state framework.

4 *A growing sense of principal accountability to other principals* and to their learning communities, both formally and informally. In formal or structured settings – such as principal conferences, walk-throughs scheduled to include peers, meetings between coaching principals and their mentees – principals discussed professional reading, observed each other's videotaped staff conferences and critiqued them, discussed their school's instructional needs and professional development priorities, and discussed their efforts to evaluate teachers. Informally, principals formed their own book clubs, visited one another's schools and provided support to one another. One principal noted:

I would say that informal relationships with other principals [is where I seek support]. And also, interestingly enough, the middle level principals group is a strong support. I am thinking about [one principal who] said [this summer], 'You know I am having a difficult time finding time to read *Non-Fiction Matters* and think about it some kind of constructive way. Maybe if we get together a little and make ourselves do it, that would be beneficial. And I said, 'Sign me up!' because I'm experiencing the same thing. And we basically excluded anybody higher than a middle level principal from coming, even though people asked, and we met at [the aforementioned principal's] house. I felt more obligated to do it for my colleagues. I knew I needed to do it for myself, too, for the learning community. It really provided the real world opportunity to do that.

Meeting the Needs of High Schools: Reforming the Reform

With all of the strides evident in the elementary and middle schools, San Diego's high school students continued to be the lowest performing group in the district.

Whereas just over half of the district's students in second grade to eighth grade scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading by 2002, only 37 per cent of students in ninth grade to eleventh grade did so (see Appendix 7A). In addition to the very slow rate of improvement for high school students, the achievement gap was also extremely large, with only about 20 per cent of African-American and Latino high school students scoring at or above the norm, as compared to about 60 per cent of White students.¹² Reformers noted a disjuncture between students' grades and their college readiness. Significant proportions of graduates from San Diego high schools receiving grades of 3.2 and above still required remediation at the college level. Also of concern was the decline in the number of students per grade at the high school level, beginning after students enter the ninth grade and continuing throughout high school (SDCS, 2000).

All of these factors, plus the fact that the K–8 reform strategy did not adequately reach into high schools, propelled a system-wide high school reform effort. To address the problem of low performance at the high school level, district leaders created new administrative structures and pursued grants to support focused work on high school reform. The stated mission of the effort was that, 'what the best and most exclusive schools do for their students, we will accomplish for all students' (SDCS, 2002: 2). As difficult as the initial reforms were in San Diego, these high aspirations for secondary school change posed even greater conundrums.

No model to follow

High schools have presented a perennial challenge to school reform efforts. In a study of system-wide K–12 reform efforts in Chicago, Sebring, Bryk and Easton (1995) found consistent patterns of lower student achievement, lower engagement with reform, and lower ratings of self-efficacy among teachers in high schools when compared to elementary schools. And while Alvarado's work in District 2 has been described as an 'existence proof' that districtwide instructional improvement can happen (Elmore and Burney, 1999), District 2 serves a predominantly K–8 population with no comprehensive high schools under its jurisdiction.¹³ Widespread reform of high schools began as a more bottom-up process in New York City led largely by networks of reformers and philanthropists with the help of an Alternative Schools division within the board of education (Darling-Hammond, 1997). While the role of the district was crucial in the expansion of the small-schools movement in New York, the long-term history of small schools and the structure of the New York City board of education for supporting such schools is unique. So unlike the field-tested reform approach for San Diego's elementary (and, to a lesser extent, middle) schools, there are no directly analogous 'working models' for instruction-focused, district-led, multi-school reform at the high school level.

In addition to the lack of reform 'models', comprehensive high schools are complex social institutions. Their large size, subject-based departmentalization, extensive extra-curricula activities, internal stratification (tracking), and lack of

instructional focus stymie reform efforts that attempt to target the teaching and learning core. Further, the notion of a neighbourhood high school is deeply culturally ingrained; thus, efforts to change these schools encounter institutional pressures that typically reinforce the status quo.

A high school reform group, along with a new high school reform coordinator, planned and conducted two kick-off principals' retreats and applied for and won two sizeable planning grants, totalling \$500,000. Using these grants to conduct research and gather stakeholder input, the district established three key areas for improvement, aligned with the district's overall strategy:

- increased academic pressure, achieved by reshaping instruction and course-taking patterns to challenge and motivate students
- improved instructional leadership among high school principals, and
- provision of more personalized educational settings for students.

Unlike other attempts at high school reform, such as Philadelphia's and New York's across-the-board moves to create smaller learning communities (see, e.g. Fine, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997b), San Diego reformers emphasized improving instruction more than changing school structures. This move was deliberate on the district's part, as Alvarado believed that reculturing high schools is a necessary precursor to making structural changes that may support overall improvement. However, there was ultimately a movement to create smaller learning communities, greater personalization and longer blocks of learning time in the high schools to enable stronger success. Alvarado endorsed this approach but cautioned that 'restructuring' is not the primary goal, but a means to an end:

Structure cannot, does not, make reform happen. When you restructure a school, you cannot reform it. We have evidence of that in the literature. You actually have to re-culture a school and then you can actually get some reform. But, but, there are structural issues that get in the way of reform because the improvement of instruction and the work that you need to do bumps up against these things that are there created by the system. So we need to start addressing those structures . . . [But remember] this is Tony one-note, okay? [laughter] The one note is the improvement of instruction, leading instructional improvement. This should not be interpreted as changing that basic theme. [Structure] is something to look at that we can change to enhance the ability to actually do that . . .

Using state policy as warrant for high school reform

As the district moved further into the work of high school reform, leaders discovered a need to build a sense of urgency among principals to advance the reform goals. Once again, Bersin and Alvarado leveraged the external policy environment to make the case for change. Across the nation, heightened graduation

requirements and proficiency exams are becoming increasingly commonplace as states attempt to ratchet up the performance of their high school graduates. California enacted a high school exit exam, which students must pass in order to receive a diploma.¹⁴ State content standards and related course-taking requirements are approaching those of the university system. As in other areas of the reform, San Diego's leaders attempted to harness these initiatives and use them in the service of their overall goals.

Starting with the first high school-specific reform retreat in February 2001, the district provided principals with disaggregated student performance data on a range of measures: standardized test scores, drop-out rates, college eligibility and so on, in order to help principals see the patterns of chronic underperformance in their schools. Further, leaders of San Diego's high school reform initiative tethered local benchmarks for improvement in an \$8 million Carnegie Corporation grant to the state university course-taking requirements. Often referred to as the 'A-G' requirements, these expectations in seven content areas¹⁵ are the baseline requirements for admission to the state's public universities. The district pledged to increase the share of district graduates eligible for the state university system from the current 38 per cent to 66 per cent by 2004, and to ensure that all of its students would pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) by their senior year (SDCS, 2001). The district instituted support programmes for students not on target to pass the CAHSEE, although reform leaders expect the number of under-prepared students to decline sharply as the work of reform deepens at the K-8 level.

Another example of the district's 'active use' (Firestone, 1989) of state policy was the change in its science course of study. Citing the state's content standards, the district increased the local requirement to three years of laboratory science for all high school students. This move aligned district policy with both state standards and university entrance requirements, yet also presented the district with the puzzle of how to provide rigorous laboratory science to all of its students, regardless of performance level. To address this challenge, the district reordered its sequence of science courses and adopted a curriculum, developed by the American Association of Physics Teachers, called 'Active Physics' to be used with all ninth-grade students. While contentious, this change advanced the district's agenda of providing access to improved pedagogy, as Active Physics incorporates the type of hands-on, learner-centered approach advocated by the district. It also served the district's equity goals by increasing access to challenging, college-preparatory content across the system of high schools.

Inching toward shared professional accountability

As we've noted, a frequent criticism of school reform in San Diego under Bersin and Alvarado was its top-down nature. As Hightower (2001) observes, San Diego's reform strategy has created a tension between the 'what' and the 'how' of reform, with teachers and principals generally admitting value in the content of the changes brought about by district leaders, but finding the way they were

introduced unsettling. At the high school level, however, principals and teachers were more likely to question both the *what* and the *how*, raising concerns about the appropriateness of district strategies for high school improvement. For these reasons and others, San Diego's efforts to build professional accountability in the district's high schools, enacted largely through literacy-based reforms, found limited traction.

District leaders supported courses for low-performing ninth-grade students in literacy (initially Genre Studies, now Literacy Core and Block courses) and maths (Algebra Explorations). These changes, in addition to those made in science, created some opportunities for the development of teacher collaboration and professional accountability, through extensive on- and off-site professional development and the provision of common planning time. But they also fragmented schoolwide high school reform efforts, as the majority of additional resources and accountability pressures were placed on the teachers of these support courses and on the core subjects. So, for example, a teacher of a ninth-grade literacy block or active physics course might be visited multiple times during a school year, but a teacher of an eleventh or twelfth-grade 'regular' or advanced course was far less likely to have visitors to her classroom.

In addition to criticisms about the reach of the literacy and maths reforms, there was resistance to the science curriculum change among principals, teachers, parents and community members, and, as with any new programme, there were implementation problems. The fact that the science reform 'detracked' science courses to a substantial extent was one source of concern voiced by some teachers as well as affluent parents who did not want to disturb the more segregated system that they felt had served their children well. The change also necessitated a reordering of the course of study in science, from the traditional biology-chemistry-physics sequence to physics-chemistry-biology, a change long advocated by much of the professional science community, but one that came as a shock to local principals and teachers. Although the district did engage some science teachers in discussions prior to making the change, not everyone perceived this inclusion. As one principal explained:

Another example [of the speed of reform implementation in San Diego] is two weeks ago we changed the science instruction and curriculum in San Diego City Schools. The change came as a surprise to everyone. Not one science teacher knew that a discussion was on about how science was implemented in San Diego City Schools, let alone there was going to be a change. And one day it's the way it's always been for the last 50 years, and the next day they said, 'Okay, we're going to reverse this. The 9th grade is going to do this, the 10th graders are going to do this. This class is out. Change this name'. And it just caught us off-guard. It feels as if there's a disconnect between the practitioners at the sites and the district leadership. And there doesn't need to be, because most of the things – the science thing, the things that we got yesterday – are good things. These are things

that need to happen. These are things that, with minor modifications, we all believe in. But when they come without any involvement, without any input from the teachers, without any input from the counselors . . . they're just difficult to deal with.

Nonetheless, by 2002–3, there was a sense of progress among many at the high school level. As one instructional leader noted:

The changes I have noticed at the high school that are positive are: teachers becoming less resistant, many teachers really wanting to figure it out and adjust not only for the implementation issues but looking at needs of students, and not just teaching the course or the curriculum or the book, but really trying to adjust to the needs of students. The [other] major change I've seen at the high school level is that I don't think there's any doubt in anyone's mind that the major responsibility [principals] are being held accountable for is to lead the improvement of instruction . . .

Changing the tone of reform: doing 'with' instead of doing 'to'

If high school educators have been striving to find ways to work with reforms that challenge the traditional secondary school culture, district leaders seem to be adopting a more collaborative approach to the work of school improvement. Although it is too early to characterize the impact of this change, district leaders are attempting to engage high school principals in the *process* of reform in new ways, which could provide a platform for the development of a different kind of professional accountability.

Increasingly, district administrators began turning to the schools themselves – and the expertise that exists within them – for more guidance as the high school reform initiative unfolds. For example, at a high school principals' conference at the end of 2001, Alvarado asked a group of principals to conduct research and prepare recommendations regarding changes in daily schedules and school-year calendars that might better support instruction. The principals seemed willing to do the work, but were also sceptical that their input would be heeded by district leaders. Alvarado reiterated the position that neither he nor other district administrators had an answer in mind and that their request for input was genuine. One of the principals attempted to express the sentiment of the group about how being viewed as resources to inform change would, for them, present a departure from the district practice to which they had grown accustomed:

So now to have us engaged in this kind of discussion to, if we go forward, understand that there's got to be some fundamental trust and that you're reaching out and you're trying to work with folks as opposed to 'you are going to do it or else' . . . that's when people will want to work harmoniously

together. That would be great and might help you out quite a bit, because there is some intelligence in this room that's pretty doggone good . . . So if your intent is to do that, then I applaud you for that. I think it's a big step in the right direction, but I don't want to be led down the path, down the road and we come to some consensus about things that we want to do and then, ultimately, we can't do them. So I applaud you for allowing this dialogue to occur. And hopefully we'll continue to have it so we can continue to feel that we are in this thing together . . .

A more recent move to regroup the high schools into 'study groups' designed around common reform issues was another step toward engaging high school principals in the development of context-relevant reform approaches. These moves – looking to the schools themselves for expertise on high school improvement and allowing conversations about the role of school structures in mediating instructional reforms – have the potential to advance San Diego's high school reform agenda. They could even foster the development of school-based professional accountability as principals and teachers design context-specific reform approaches. Building on a sustained, multi-year focus on improving instruction, particularly in courses serving the lowest performing students, and a district-led push to reculture the high school principalship into an instructional leadership position, the district may be positioned to begin to make the real improvements in secondary student performance that have thus far eluded them.

Conclusion

When looked at from multiple perspectives within the system, the San Diego reform provides a fascinating case of district leadership that prioritized high-quality instruction and professional learning through a forceful district-led agenda that turned upside down many traditional notions of the relationship between bureaucracy and innovation. The reform sought to empower teachers and principals at the 'bottom' of the system to solve problems more effectively by organizing intensive professional development and shared norms of practice from the 'top' and 'bottom' simultaneously. It has wrestled with 'outside' policies to use them to the advantage of 'inside' purposes so as not to be deflected by the force of their momentum.

Negotiating district and school relationships

Whereas early advocates of site-based management saw bottom-up decision-making as a panacea for the ills of bureaucracy, by itself, this strategy led to schools with high capacity becoming stronger and those with limited capacity often languishing, buffeted by the winds of external forces. Meanwhile, centralizers have often sought to enforce teacher proof (and student proof) curricula that preclude local decision-making, often preventing the classroom adaptations

that many students need to learn and chasing the most capable professionals from the system. Alvarado and Bersin sought to implement the sophisticated notion that a district can build professional knowledge and skill that enable teachers to make more nuanced, personalized and *well-grounded* decisions about how to help individual children, and can proactively organize resources (dollars, ideas and people) that will enable schools to improve while shielding them from distractions and impediments. The reform put on the table questions of *which* decisions should be made at the top, *what* should be standardized and what can be flexible, and *how* various actors should relate to one another in a professional system. While the road thus far has been rocky, it is clear that in many respects the district's theory of learning, theory of teaching and theory of change are succeeding, although to different extents in different parts of the system. At the heart of San Diego's approach has been an insistence on seeing the district as a system of schools. Part of Alvarado's theory of action is that a system-wide approach is essential to improve quality and equity. As he described at a meeting on the school district's role in building instructional capacity: 'One thing I think I am right about is that if you do something right, you have to do it across the board. Otherwise, the other part of the organization continues, and it eats away at the innovation'.

The system-wide approach has created new norms and understandings of practice, has disrupted patterns of inequity and begun to improve the quality of teaching as well as the level of learning for the students who were previously least well served, and has created the beginnings of new capacity and infrastructure for teaching in the district in a very short period of time. The district's human capital has improved, and its capacity for offering professional learning has been expanded through the district's reallocation of funds, its development of new vehicles for learning among principals and teachers, and its partnerships with universities and other organizations. Our school-level study suggests that the district has responded to school needs in much the same way it asked schools to support students: support those with the greatest needs first. The successes have been most obvious at the elementary level, where the reforms are also most accepted, but they have also made a dent in the middle schools, supporting improvements in previously failing schools, those with uneven practice and even those with greater strengths. The high school agenda, at this writing, is in large part yet to come.

Schools' responses to district and state reforms have varied, as each strives to maintain and develop its perceived strengths. School mediation of state and district policies is defined, enabled and constrained by individual and organizational school capacity – capacity to support new teachers, learn new ways of teaching, and demonstrate student success. When policy goals and means are not consistent across various levels, schools cannot always support their own school visions. Schools with greater capacity are more able to withstand and profitably use outside interventions. For weaker schools, especially, districts are needed to leverage certain resources, including people, time and expertise, so that the

school can respond to policy demands, on the one hand, and develop an internal coherence, on the other.

The district's reforms extracted some heavy costs, especially in terms of local participation and in terms of the homogenization of some structures and practices that were previously successful, at least in part (for example, one middle school's close-knit student and teacher teams). There are signs that the district is becoming more comfortable with negotiating flexibility in some aspects of implementation with local schools and more responsive in listening to both concerns and ideas from those in the field, as long as these are within the parameters of professional practice and equity set out as the goalposts for the work.

This increased openness may be occurring in part as a response to strong voices from the field, especially the secondary schools, about the need for adaptations. It may be in part possible because of the 'jolt' that created a sense of clarity about purpose and mission and that initiated the process of re-culturing. Organizational theory predicts that, to the extent there is a stronger set of common norms and values and a deeper level of shared professional knowledge and competence, greater flexibility and professional autonomy can be granted without jeopardizing quality or equity (Benveniste, 1987). As that common knowledge and set of commitments take root, it would follow that more discretion can be granted without concerns that decisions will be made in idiosyncratic ways, uninformed by professional knowledge or a commitment to equitable inputs and outcomes.

Part of the 'jolt' was a redefinition of professionalism from the notion of *individual autonomy*, even in the absence of professional standards of practice, to a notion of *collective responsibility* for knowledge-based practice that presumes shared authority by members of the profession. While some of the concerns voiced by local practitioners have been associated with the discomfort of making practice public and the insecurity of change, three years into the reform, we heard very few teachers or principals suggesting that their goal was to revert to a version of individual autonomy that would permit idiosyncratic, frequently ineffective practice. Most were quick to applaud the intent of the reforms and the notions of practice they put forward, even if they simultaneously voiced concerns about the speed of change and the processes by which input is sought. The norms of collective responsibility appear to be taking hold. This notion is accompanied by the idea of reciprocal accountability for professional practice, voiced by Superintendent Bersin at a principals' conference in 2002:

Professional review and evaluation is an art and a science, and it requires fairness and it requires precision and it requires insight and it requires confidence. And it requires that we learn to use the humanity that is within us as good leaders not to leave bruises, to be able to make a critical comment in a way that helps the person move forward rather than slide back. The whole essence of what we have attempted to do and will continue to do more strongly is to introduce a notion of reciprocal accountability. You

cannot hold someone accountable unless you provide that professional with the skills and knowledge of the tools that they need to have a chance to improve their practice. A person is obligated to improve their practice.

And, by inference, the system is obligated to help them. As the work has taken hold, more and more school-based professionals feel the district's goal is a worthy one and that the direction of the reform is improving their practice. The next steps of the reform will determine whether they also feel they are being heard about what they feel they need and how they feel they can best make that collective journey.

As we have noted, high schools present particular challenges to system-wide reform. If the district is the relevant 'implementing system' (McLaughlin, 1987: 175), there remains the question of how to address the needs of a subset of schools while maintaining districtwide coherence. Reformers in San Diego have managed this within-system variation by keeping high school changes within the parameters of the district's overall reform theory. Even though high schools meet in separate learning communities and have more subject areas to attend to, the message remains the same: the goal is to improve student achievement by supporting teaching and learning in the classroom.

The changing tone of the reform at the high school level – one of working with schools rather than doing to them – raises a few important questions. First, is this change in strategy a result of district leaders' learning from experience the importance of engaging principals in reform work? Or recognition that there is no real model for multiple school instructional improvement at the high school level? Second, by working closely with a subset of high schools – six of 18 – on whole-school reform, is the district creating a divide within the high school ranks that may hamper further efforts at improvement? At each juncture, the district has to balance the issues of system-wide change with local preferences, needs and initiatives. This is an ongoing dilemma to be managed, not a problem that will be forever solved.

Mediating state policies

Where state policies threatened to shift the focus of the district or its schools away from locally defined goals, San Diego City Schools subsumed the state policy within the local reform. The district used BTSA at the elementary level to support the literacy initiative, and it applied portions of the state reading initiative to its own work without compromising its research-based theory of instruction in literacy. With a strong, well-articulated theory of change against which to evaluate state policies, San Diego was able to counter the risk of expending energy in divergent directions to keep up with a state environment of rapid-fire policy mandates.

Instead of being thrown off-course by state calls for high school improvement, reformers in San Diego tied their local improvement goals to state mandates and university requirements. Indeed, San Diego's leaders appear to be using these state policies as a warrant to engage schools in the difficult work of high school

change. By connecting local goals to those of the state and university system, reformers have been able to use exogenous policies as rationale for improvement and as a weapon against local resistance to reform.

Our study suggests that the district's efforts to forge a coherent reform and mediate state policies was most successful with respect to the Literacy Framework, and somewhat less successful in leveraging and mediating the state's accountability policies and beginning teacher support, at least at the secondary level. However, the district's theory of change allowed it to ameliorate the state's relatively punitive high stakes accountability measures to a substantial extent. The way in which the district recast the state accountability policies and intervened to support its neediest schools reaffirmed its commitment to *tangible* equity in learning opportunities for all students throughout the district. Rather than relying on the sanctions embodied in the state policies, San Diego City Schools activated the knowledge, material and human resources necessary to enable the lowest performing schools to better teach their students.

We also saw that by holding fast to its own theory of instruction in literacy, the district improved upon the quality of induction and reading policies put forth by the state. The district's understanding of what it means for students to become engaged readers, the types of learning experiences they must have to become readers, and the pedagogical knowledge teachers must develop to create those learning opportunities are research-based and internally consistent, as well as broader than the state's conception. Importantly, the district's theory of instruction provides a rubric against which to assess the opportunities available from the state (or other providers) and a unifying force with which to bring coherence to external influences. San Diego's bet is that if the district is strong enough to enforce this coherence through professional learning in the first instance, the knowledge base and skills of the profession will strengthen the ability of local schools to forge their own meaningful learning and teaching agendas that strengthen them from the inside out.

Appendix

Appendix 7A San Diego City Schools districtwide student performance, SAT-9 – percentage of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile

Year	Total reading					Total mathematics				
	1998 n = 35,543	1999 n = 38,899	2000 n = 41,763	2001 n = 43,343	% change 1998–2001	1998 n = 39,919	1999 n = 44,577	2000 n = 49,002	2001 n = 48,931	% change 1998–2001
Grade										
2	43	50	57	55	+12	50	56	63	61	+11
3	41	47	52	49	+8	46	57	64	61	+15
4	41	42	48	49	+8	42	46	56	52	+10
5	44	44	44	47	+3	45	47	50	52	+7
6	43	45	47	48	+5	47	50	53	52	+5
7	44	44	48	48	+4	42	42	46	47	+5
8	45	48	51	52	+7	40	43	45	43	+3
9	36	36	40	38	+2	48	49	55	53	+5
10	34	35	37	38	+4	42	46	52	48	+6
11	37	38	40	37	+0	45	49	56	49	+4
2–11	41	44	47	47	+6	45	49	55	53	+8

Appendix 7B Total reading: number and percent of students scoring in each quartile on the national distribution (SAT-9), Grades 2–11 combined

Year	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
1998	29,867	36	19,739	23	17,654	21	17,090	20
1999	28,280	32	21,058	24	19,047	22	19,106	22
2000	24,901	28	22,242	25	20,292	23	21,511	24
2001	26,737	29	22,661	24	21,541	23	21,677	24
Total	–3,130		+2,922		+3,887		+4,587	

Appendix 7C Total mathematics: number and percent of students scoring in each quartile on the national distribution (SAT-9), grades 2–11 combined

<i>Year</i>	<i>Q1 no.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Q2 no.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Q3 no.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Q4 no.</i>	<i>%</i>
1998	26,549	31	21,006	24	18,440	21	20,723	24
1999	23,914	27	21,203	24	19,778	22	24,054	27
2000	19,686	22	21,192	23	20,954	24	28,180	31
2001	22,375	24	21,935	23	21,289	23	27,703	30
<i>Total</i>	<i>-4,174</i>		<i>+929</i>		<i>+2,849</i>		<i>+6,980</i>	

Notes

- 1 Longer versions of this chapter have been published by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington and, in book form, by Scarecrow Press. The authors would like to acknowledge the very insightful comments and suggestions of Richard Elmore and Patrick Shields on an earlier draft of this piece. This manuscript was greatly strengthened by their contributions. Of course, the authors take responsibility for any remaining shortcomings.
- 2 The principals' survey was sent to 180 schools; responses were received from 161 schools for a response rate of 89 per cent. The teacher survey was sent to 581 teachers in 11 randomly selected schools and to an additional 114 teachers in our three case study schools. The response rate for the random sample was 70 per cent, and the response rate for the random sample plus case study schools was 69 per cent.
- 3 In 2000–1, the district had a total of 403 teachers working on emergency permits and six working on credential waivers, as well as 149 on intern or pre-intern credentials, according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2000–1). In 2001–2, among 9,369 professional staff, the district records showed only 15 working on emergency permits and 2 working on credential waivers (about 1/10 of 1 per cent). This sharp reduction in emergency credentialed teachers was in part a function of recent reforms that increased recruiting power and aimed to support and retain qualified teachers, described later in the report. In addition, San Diego moved many under-prepared teachers previously working on emergency permits into more structured programmes. In 2001–2, district records showed 182 teachers working as interns and 204 as pre-interns – individuals who are teaching while in training. Including all of these classifications, the proportion of under-qualified teachers working in San Diego totalled only 4.3 per cent as compared to about 25 per cent in Los Angeles, for example. The number of

- under-qualified teachers decreased by 28 per cent between 2001 and 2002, even as the size of the teaching force grew.
- 4 While the district has increasingly emphasized the hiring of fully-credentialed teachers, there are still teachers in the system who have not completed their credentials. Some of those previously teaching on emergency permits were placed in pre-intern or intern programmes to complete their training, so while the total number of emergency permits and waivers dropped from 409 to 17, the number of interns and pre-interns increased from 149 to 386 (San Diego personnel records, tabulations, 2 July 2002).
 - 5 Genre Studies courses later were renamed Literacy Block courses and then two-hour or three-hour Readers/Writers' Workshop courses.
 - 6 The state-sponsored formative assessment, California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST), is not required of districts, but used by the majority in lieu of developing their own materials that would have to be approved by the state.
 - 7 No claims can be made about relationships between the state's development of its reading initiative and the development of the balanced literacy initiative in San Diego. They developed on different tracks with different time frames and under different immediate influences.
 - 8 <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sandiego/mai>, downloaded on 8/1/01.
 - 9 Maureen Magee, Sweeping school reform is approved; 3:2 decision made despite thousands of protesters, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 15 March 2000, p. A-1.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. A-1.
 - 11 Magee, San Battle over the 'blueprint'; school overhaul plan, up for vote today, splits district, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 14 March 2000, p. B-1.
 - 12 Data from Spring 1999 SAT-9 administration.
 - 13 In New York City, each borough's comprehensive high schools constitute their own separate district. However, Alvarado sponsored a number of small high schools of choice in both Districts 2 and 4 when he was superintendent.
 - 14 Implementation of this policy has been delayed until the class of 2006 as of this writing.
 - 15 The seven areas are social science, English, mathematics, laboratory science, languages other than English, visual and performing arts, and college preparatory electives.

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Standards-based Reform and Small Schools of Choice¹

How Reform Theories Converge in Three Urban Middle Schools

Chrysan Gallucci, Michael S. Knapp, Anneke Markholt and Suzanne Ort

Urban school reform strategies diverge sharply over the role that school and district leaders or central offices can play in stimulating, guiding and supporting substantive changes in teaching and learning. In fashioning these strategies, leaders at both levels struggle with what high-quality teaching in urban settings looks like. Questions centre on the locus of authority (how much to encourage and nurture school-level discretion and innovation?), variable capacity (how to accommodate the substantial differences across schools in capacity to realize reform?) and equity (how to ensure all children get served well?). District leaders overseeing schools with substantial inequities, highly varied capacity and endemic low performance, while functioning within state reform contexts often preoccupied with testing and accountability, not surprisingly lean toward a theory of action with regard to reform that centralizes control and initiative and seeks to assert a clear and compelling theory of instructional improvement. To find at work a classic example of this theory of reform – in which change is driven by strong leadership from the ‘top’ and guided by the district leaders’ explicit theory of learning, instructional improvement and system change – one need look no further than the dramatic attempts to renew teaching and learning in San Diego (Hightower, 2002).

Interestingly, San Diego’s district-driven reform was led, in part, by Chancellor of Instruction Anthony Alvarado, who earlier in his career had embraced a reform theory that emphasized *differentiation* at the school level. As superintendent of District 4 in New York City during the late 1970s, Alvarado promoted school-level innovation and the creation of ‘small school’ communities, a theory

of reform strikingly different from that mentioned above though one thought to be especially good at engaging young children and developing strong teacher and parent commitment to the renewal of teaching and learning. During his tenure in District 4, marvellous examples of powerful urban school communities emerged (Fliegel, 1993; Meier, 1995). But later Alvarado rejected this strategy of ‘letting a thousand flowers bloom’, on the grounds that not enough of them did bloom. In well publicized work within New York City’s Community District 2, and in what would be a precursor to his San Diego strategy, Alvarado switched gears and opted for an approach designed to promise greater equity, guided by a strong, district-level vision of learning and professional work.

While Alvarado moved on from a strategy that placed great reliance on school-level innovation and differentiation, others have not. Throughout the 1990s, experiments have continued with reform strategies that feature decentralization, choice and encouragement of initiative in schools (e.g. Henig, 1994; Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1995; Bryk *et al.*, 1998; Hill, 2002). Such strategies place their faith in the devolution of decision-making authority to the school site, the sharing of decision-making among school-level stakeholders, and the benefits of a local-level ‘market’ for good schooling. Central to all these efforts is the assumption that, given discretion and strong incentives, educators can develop innovative, responsive school programmes that serve the needs of urban children well.

More recently, reformers have begun to explore a third possibility: hybrid strategies that combine school differentiation *and* strong central leadership. Emerging from a line of thinking that seeks a merger of top-down support and bottom-up change, such strategies assume that different reform theories have complementary strengths (Fullan, 1994, 2001). An instructive example – and one that is the focus of this study – resided in another of the New York’s community school districts, which we refer to hereafter as District M (pseudonym).

Two Urban Reform Theories in Conception and Practice: District M

District M pursued a standards-focused instructional improvement strategy with many resemblances to the San Diego and District 2 approaches, but it also touted a policy emphasizing parental choice among the District’s 14 middle schools, most of which were small alternative schools, reminiscent, indeed, of the thousand flowers approach that Alvarado once championed.

District M’s juxtaposition of apparently opposite theories of reform – the development of innovative, small schools of choice versus centralized control for standards-based instructional improvement – raises immediate questions that we attempt to answer in this chapter: can these two seemingly-at-odds reform theories coexist, or do they get in each other’s way? In what ways, if any, do the two complement each other? Separately or together, how do they affect instructional practice and the school-level conditions that support teaching and learning?

These questions are best answered in the context of the school, for there educators faced with the daily urgencies of educating urban children make sense of the conditions under which they work and forge their own theory-in-practice. These conditions are, in part, a reflection of policies and leadership exercised from outside the school. The ultimate question is whether two such different reform theories can provide mutually supporting conditions for teaching and learning in urban schools.

This chapter takes us inside three middle schools within District M to understand, from the schools' vantage points, how the two reform theories converged and interacted with one another, to the benefit or detriment of teaching and learning. The schools we describe were studied over three years (1998–2001) in the context of the Study of Policy Environments and the Quality of Teaching, an ongoing investigation conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP).² This chapter draws together data collected at schools and from the district over that time period.

Our thesis is that the two reform theories (again, the development of innovative, small schools of choice versus centralized instructional improvement) can and do coexist in this instance and, to some extent, complement each other's strengths and, likewise, compensate for weaknesses. Even so, it is clear that, when juxtaposed, these two theories of reform can and do create tensions in the system and, thus, obstacles for educators' work. On the whole, however, we argue that this is a constructive tension.

We unfold our argument in several stages. First, we examine in more detail what the two reform theories presume about instructional improvement and systemic change and consider how each might complement or interfere with one another. Next, we look at how the two reform theories manifested themselves in the district in question by offering brief portraits of the three schools we studied. In this section, we also give examples of how instruction reflected the district's insistence on standards-based practice and evidence that student learning has improved over time. We then explore and discuss reasons why the two reform theories appeared to coexist comfortably in this case, yet we note as well difficult-to-resolve tensions that the interaction created. We conclude by offering observations about the meaning of reform convergence in this case and suggest what may be implied for other attempts to combine strong district leadership with school-level discretion and innovation.

Two Urban Reform Theories in Conception and Practice

Our analysis concentrates on two sets of ideas about urban school reform that have at their heart the same, or similar, goals – that is, they both aim to provide equitable and high-quality learning experiences to traditionally underserved urban students. But they go about the task in very different ways. The first theory of reform, emphasizing small schools of choice, seeks to capitalize on the ener-

gies of teachers, students and parents who form distinct learning communities through voluntary association and collaborative work. The second reform theory, featuring centrally-defined learning standards, professional development and accountability, places its bets on clear guidance from authoritative sources, along with supports and incentives for improving learning and teaching performance.

Sources and Assumptions of the Two Reform Theories

The idea of small schools of choice has deep roots in New York City and in the district we studied. With the encouragement of district leaders such as Alvarado (when he was in District 4), innovative school leaders across the city started small schools in the 1970s as alternatives to what they saw as overcrowded, bureaucratized and failing inner-city schools (Fliegel, 1993; Meier, 1995). As a response to the challenges of urban education, these attempts rested on four interlinked premises.

- *Personalized relationship between teacher and learner* – central to this theory was the notion that students must be known and appreciated by adults, and this would only happen in settings that ensured extensive contact between learners and teachers, with whom the learners could form lasting relationships.
- *Teacher collaboration in, and ownership of, school design and curriculum* – teachers would engage learners more deeply, it was assumed, if they participated in creating the curriculum – and indeed, the design of the school as a whole. In this way, this approach to urban schooling sought to tap into teachers' creative energies and their sense of ownership over the work of educating an often-challenging school clientele.
- *Distinctive school character and mission* – by virtue of the teachers' involvement in creating the school curriculum and in order to attract students, the school would develop a distinctive character that reflected a clear and compelling mission.
- *Parental engagement and choice* – at the same time the school would reach out to parents, who often feel alienated from city schools, and attempt to draw them into the school community in various ways. In addition, as alternatives to conventionally organized schools, the school would seek to attract a voluntary clientele, and would only be able to do so if the school offered what parents and students valued; conversely, if they failed to attract 'customers', the school would be, appropriately, 'out of business'.

The theory of action that underlies a strategy emphasizing small schools of choice says little about teaching and learning per se other than to assume that engaged teachers who collaborate in the development of curriculum in relation to a distinctive school mission will likely teach well. Similarly, students who aren't allowed to 'slip through the cracks' and who develop relationships with adults in the building are likely to learn more than they otherwise might.

Alongside the first reform theory, a second and very different theory of reform evolved in District M and elsewhere during the 1990s; it addressed more explicitly questions of learning and teaching. At the heart of the second reform theory is active instructional leadership from the district level (Murphy and Hallinger, 1986; Peterson, 1999; Resnick and Glennan, 2002), wedded to notions of 'standards-based reform'. The district's efforts aligned with initiatives by both city and state, which were actively promoting high learning standards, associated assessments and accountability mechanisms since the mid-1990s, in step with a national wave of standards-based reform activity (McLaughlin and Shepard, 1995; Fuhrman, 2001). The district's reform strategy featured ambitious learning standards, assessments related to these standards, and strict accountability mechanisms that track performance on mandated assessments and other indicators (such as attendance), alongside extensive investment in professional development. The following features characterize currently popular versions of this strategy:

- *System-wide commitment to high learning standards for all students* – the linchpin of this theory is consensus across the district on the importance of bringing all children to a set of demanding learning standards. These standards make clear the goals for instruction and (through assessments linked to the standards) the desired levels of learning in relation to each.
- *Priority on foundational, 'gateway' subject areas* – by concentrating attention on subjects on which future learning in many subjects depends (especially language arts and, to a lesser extent, mathematics) educators across the district, it is assumed, will be able to maximize their effort at improving essential learning experiences for students.
- *Investment in teachers' professional development* – teachers up to speed in the priority subject areas, the theory holds, need extensive and varied opportunities for professional learning.
- *Attention to the professional learning of school leaders* – the theory further holds that strong, school-level instructional leadership is essential to realizing and sustaining instructional improvements (Fink and Resnick, 2001). The district is assumed to be in a good position to structure and provide opportunities for school leaders to sharpen their instructional leadership skills.
- *An emphasis on professional accountability* – finally, the emphasis on standards, professional development and instructional leadership communicates a sense of responsibility for improving professional work. District leaders and staff are an essential part of the accountability structure, and all members of the system (school and district) commit to holding each other accountable for their respective roles in helping students learn.

This reform theory rests on a logic that posits a greater role for the district in directing the activities of school-based educators and providing them with support for their work. In short, it presumes that school staff want and need a clear sense of direction and incentives (other than those that originate within the school or in its relationship to a client population).

Potential Interactions between the Two Theories

The two reform theories converge in schools, where educators approach their work within the conditions created by broadly espoused reform theories and associated actions. This convergence was alive and well in District M's middle schools, and it is here that we situated our study. As a product of the small schools of choice policy that had been in place for a number of years, each middle school we studied was guided by structures and traditions that had become well established within New York City's small schools movement. At the same time, teachers and leaders within these schools were receiving repeated messages and various forms of support from district leaders aimed at nurturing standards-based practice across the schools. Teachers and other school staff were in a position to integrate, accept, reinterpret or reject these messages. The net result was the working theories-in-action embodied within the efforts of individuals and groups within the schools.

Given the substantial differences between the reform theories, there is a distinct possibility that their two sets of ideas for improving urban education would collide. As an earlier line of research has established, multiple reform programmes and policies from the federal level can interfere with one another at the local level (Kimbrough and Hill, 1981). We also know from studies of ambitious state and local reforms implemented in recent years that teachers can find multiple agendas frustrating and confusing (Hatch, 1998, 2002); recent work on the 'multiple accountabilities' facing local educators reinforces the point (Firestone and Shapps, 2003). Teachers embracing the first theory will be likely to play a critical role in developing the school's curriculum and mission and, in doing so, may run afoul of the common, districtwide instructional improvement mission and curricular priorities pushed by the second reform theory. Similarly, while the first theory encourages schools to become different from one another, the second urges them all to aspire to the same goals and pursue the same or similar practices. The first reform theory leaves the details of teaching and learning up to the school staffs; at the same time, the second gives district leaders a major voice in consideration of these details. The first is likely to encourage a great deal of school-initiated professional development; the second, professional learning experiences designed for teachers across the district.

It is also possible that, within these three schools, the two sets of reform theories simply coexisted or even complemented each other. Synergistic effects of multiple government programmes have been documented (Knapp *et al.*, 1991) and, in principle, the school-level activities set in motion by the two reform theories could be compatible with one another. Seen this way, the first set of reform ideas might create a 'shell' in which standards-based practices promoted by the second reform theory might develop. By this argument, small, flexible structures that enable teachers to fashion alternative ways of meeting high learning standards, while drawing on the resources of the school and district, might actually enhance the chances that these standards would seep into practice.

Whatever the effects, it is clear that teachers and others in schools are faced

with the prospect of sorting out ‘converging reforms’ (Knapp *et al.*, 1998). How the two reforms come together in the minds and practice of school staff and leaders depends on various things, among them, the way the district sends messages about desirable practice, the sophistication of its notions concerning ‘good’ teaching and learning, and the manner in which the school staff receive and interpret them. The interaction between the theories also pertains to how the schools configure themselves to address the problems of daily work, the kinds of staff the schools are able to attract, and the ideas about reform these staff bring to their work. Another crucial element in the teachers’ sense-making and response – and, indeed, in the overall balance of top-down and bottom-up supports for instructional improvement – is the manner in which district players *engage* the school in matters of teaching and learning. Here, the balance struck by the district between flexibility and directive guidance is likely to influence the interaction of reform theories. Inflexibly or mechanically applied, a standards-focused improvement strategy can surely negate the benefits of differentiated small schools of choice. But carried out with close attention to the strengths and weaknesses of each school, and to the possibility that the schools themselves may be able to realize the district’s goals in heretofore unconsidered ways, such an improvement strategy may bear fruit.

Methods

Over the three years of this study, we visited each of our three schools³ three times per year for three to four school days each visit. During the site visits we interviewed the principal (two to three interviews per year), classroom teachers and other specialized school personnel (between 14 and 23 total interviews per school). We collected field notes in classrooms (between 14 and 33 classroom observations per school) and in other school settings, and we collected a variety of documents including items such as Comprehensive School Plans, test score data, master schedules and staff rosters, as well as a variety of curriculum artefacts and student work. Simultaneously, time was spent during each of our field visits interviewing district staff, observing their work and examining a range of documentary evidence assembled by the central office. This data collection focused on a number of topics – at the school level, predominant patterns of instructional practice, students’ access to content and response to instruction, as well as teachers’ engagement in professional development and instructional planning, the allocation and use of resources in the school, school leadership and organizational issues confronting the school, and the interface with the district central office. To get at patterns of instruction and student response to it, we visited a variety of classrooms and returned repeatedly to a small number so that we could understand how instructional practice evolved over time. At the district level, we concentrated on learning about the reform strategy, the roles and activities of central office personnel (especially those involved in direct work with the schools), the allocation of resources to support reform, and other salient leadership issues confronting the district.

Data analysis was ongoing over the three to four years that the study was conducted. Individual case summaries were developed annually for each school case and for the district case study. The summaries were descriptive in nature and were developed using a common framework (referred to as a data ‘debrief guide’) based upon constructs that were drawn from the overall CTP Core Study research questions.⁴ This chapter is based upon a cross case analysis of school data and comparisons of those findings with the findings from case analysis of the district level data.

Implementing the Two Reforms

In District M, the two reform theories were implemented sequentially and gradually in such a way that each was realized in daily practice within the schools with apparent positive effects on student learning. In this section of the chapter, we briefly introduce the schools that we studied, providing evidence that the first reform theory (the development of innovative, small schools of choice) was present in District M. Next, we describe the ways that the second reform theory (the district’s centralized push for standards-based instructional improvement) was playing out in the schools.

The First Reform Theory in Action: Establishing Small Schools of Choice

In the District M case, the innovative, small schools of choice theory preceded the centralized instructional improvement theory. Making a serious effort to institutionalize the premises of a small schools of choice model on a system-wide basis, District M, since the early 1990s, had encouraged and supported the development of small, alternative schools within its boundaries, in part to draw middle-class and white families back into their public schools. In fact, since 1991 small schools had been sanctioned through an official choice policy that operated across all middle schools in the district, whereby all fifth-grade students applied by indicating ranked preference for up to four middle schools. District leaders reported that approximately 80 per cent of the students were placed in either their first or second choice school. By 1992, 24 schools of choice had been established (Fliegel, 1993), and by 1998, when we began our study, all middle schools in District M were choice schools. The three middle schools on which our research concentrated illustrate the range and unique character of the schools – and the contrasts among them – that had resulted.

The James Bryant Conant Education Complex⁵

The James Bryant Conant Education Complex was simultaneously a single school and collection of four semi-autonomous mini-schools under the same roof. Each mini-school acted as a ‘school of choice’, with its own name, thematically

organized academic programme and distinctive student population. The building's mini-school organization, well established over several decades, helped to preserve the separate identity and largely separate operation of the small programmes. In many respects the school was the sum of its parts and no more. Yet there was a constant tension between the parts and the whole that played out in many aspects of the school's leadership and organization, teachers' work and students' learning experiences. The four mini-schools were housed in a large and significantly overcrowded city school building that was also shared with two other completely autonomous schools. There were a total of 1,300 students in the building, and each of the two mini-schools that we describe served about 300 students.

In keeping with District M's choice policy, the students at the Conant Complex came from all over the district. The programmes drew differentially from more and less affluent sections of the district. As a whole, the student body was relatively poor – about three-quarters of the students received free or reduced-price lunch – and comprised predominantly students of colour (about 86 per cent African-American and Latino; 10 per cent White).

The Conant Complex could also be understood as a sharply tracked group of mini-schools, with programmes and curricula representing differentiated and stratified tracks. To best reflect the range of what the Conant Complex as a school had to offer, we focused our study on its two largest mini-schools – the Alvin Ailey School and the Discovery Institute (both pseudonyms). Alvin Ailey served mostly African-American and/or Latino students who came disproportionately from the northern ends of the district in and near Harlem. In contrast, the Discovery Institute (DI) drew the majority of its students from the middle and southern portions of the district, home to a somewhat more affluent population with a larger proportion of White students. Alvin Ailey offered performing arts courses and other arts offerings that attracted some talented students, but, overall, it was a rather typical example of a low-performing urban middle school. The DI, on the other hand, had a long tradition as a small school of choice that offered a strong science education. It was generally considered a good option for students who had shown strong abilities in maths and science during their elementary school years.

Cisneros Middle School (CMS)

The third school in our study, CMS contrasted sharply with both Alvin Ailey and the Discovery Institute (and indeed the whole of the Conant Complex). Created 10 years ago under the direction of a strong school leader with a vision for providing academic rigour for bilingual students, the programme combined instruction in both Spanish and English in a school atmosphere that valued close relationships between students and teachers. Housed on the third floor of a large school building located in a desirable section of the district, space had been a perennial problem for CMS – teachers were often without their own classrooms and the small office served as office, faculty room, planning room, copy room and reception area. The school served approximately 200 students. Nearly all of

the students were Latino children who typically heard Spanish spoken at home, although the majority of students were English language dominant. All of the students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch.

The atmosphere at CMS was 'warm'. The emphasis on personal relationships was readily apparent in the students' casual and friendly demeanour. Special organizational attention was paid to classes and activities that fostered the family-like tone of the school (such as advisories, Friday clubs and weekly whole-school community meetings). Simultaneously, the teachers held high expectations for their students' academic success (especially in the traditionally important content areas of reading, writing and mathematics), and they functioned as strict task-masters. Overall, Cisneros was considered one of the better choice middle schools in the district – particularly for students who would not expect to enter the more accelerated programmes.

Parkside Alternative Middle School

Parkside Alternative Middle School, the final of our researched schools, had yet another character, emphasizing the restructuring of time and other resources to support both smaller class sizes and increased teacher collaboration. While turnover among the young staff had created some gaps in expertise in areas of classroom pedagogy and management, the school was characterized by a strong professional culture and high standards for practice. Like CMS, Parkside was nestled on the third floor of a building that also housed an elementary school. It was located at a midpoint in the district between the low-income neighbourhoods to the north and the gentrified sections to the south. Parkside served about 200 students including about 50 per cent Latino and 40 per cent African-American students. Approximately 80 per cent of the students received free and reduced-price lunch. The students came from primarily stable housing projects and working class neighbourhoods.

Parkside's principal was brought into the school in 1995 to revitalize a 'chaotic' programme that was then a middle school extension of the elementary school. The principal, and a core group of four teachers that she brought to the school, spent the next three to four years restructuring the programme with a mission of serving students of colour in the tradition of progressive and humanities-based curriculum.⁶ In a manner similar to CMS, the staff at Parkside placed priority on close relationships with their students. This small school was one school within the district generally considered to be successful with a typically underserved population of students.

Layering on a Second Reform Theory: a Centralized Push for Standards-based Instructional Improvement

The second reform theory grew gradually over time, as District M's central office increasingly sought to assert instructional leadership from the district-level. The district elaborated its standards-based, instructional improvement strategy by

drawing on ideas about learning, instructional improvement and system change often associated with Community School District 2 and the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh (Elmore and Burney, 1997; Resnick and Glennan, 2002). Drawing on these sources, among others, District M fashioned an approach to the challenges of urban education that emphasized system-wide commitment to high learning standards for all students, especially in literacy and mathematics. Referencing New York City standards primarily, this district placed emphasis on standard-bearing work and on a set of learning principles that asserted all learners' capacities to meet such standards. The district had a particular form of literacy and mathematics curriculum in mind: it promoted 'balanced literacy' and a conceptually-oriented, experiential form of mathematics teaching (exemplified by the text series *Connected Math* favoured by the district at the middle school level). The priority between the two, however, was clear: literacy came first.

To help establish standards-based ways of approaching literacy and mathematics teaching, the district invested heavily in professional development. It provided resources to the schools (e.g. school-based coaches), accompanied by periodic districtwide in-service activities and support for participation in teacher education courses in nearby training institutions. At the same time, the district went to considerable lengths to work with principals (and often assistant principals) through monthly all-day meetings devoted largely to instructional issues. Also, an additional study-group for leaders of lower performing schools was made available. Professional development was tied explicitly to an accountability system that emphasized professional responsibility for student learning aligned with New York City and state standards. To set the tone, district leaders conducted highly visible 'walk-through' visits to each school and its classrooms once a year, followed by extensive and detailed written feedback and often accompanied by other forms of coaching. Schools that were struggling were generally visited more frequently. The large cadre of onsite professional developers further reinforced the messages that district leaders were trying to transmit concerning the improvement of instruction.

How did all these district messages regarding curriculum and instruction play out in actual practice? Our data suggest that all three schools had responded, at least to some degree, to District M's focus on standards-based instruction in English language arts. For example, across all the language arts and literacy classes that we visited in the schools, we observed instruction that contained elements of balanced literacy (such as students reading independently, participating in guided reading sessions and responding to literature through group discussions and writing assignments). We saw evidence of classroom 'libraries' in most of the rooms that we visited, and schools had generally organized their schedules to include up to two hours of literacy-related instruction. School leaders and teachers reported that these practices were a response to the district's explicit and oft-stated desire to see evidence of these and other elements of balanced literacy in all schools and classrooms. Even at Alvin Ailey, where the tendency toward isolated practice and idiosyncratic attention to reform attempts was quite

prevalent, messages from district professional developers were getting through to teachers. For example, according to one English teacher, choral and round robin reading were not favoured, class sets of books were 'verboden', and classroom libraries were in.

At all of the schools, bulletin boards both inside classrooms and in hallways displayed curriculum standards and examples of standard-bearing (student) work. In general, staff expressed annoyance with what they perceived to be a *directive* from the district to use their wall space to facilitate student performance toward standards. In all cases, the schools primped and spruced these displays prior to the superintendent's infamous 'walk-through'. However, the bulletin boards in all schools offered clear evidence that principals and teachers were paying attention to the district's messages about curriculum and instruction.

Across the schools, there was less evidence of concern regarding the instruction of mathematics, in part because maths instruction was not as much of a focus as was balanced literacy. Although the district had promoted the use of 'constructivist mathematics' through its use of *Connected Math* curricular materials, the schools lagged in terms of their capacity to implement these instructional strategies. Although there were scattered attempts to use constructivist techniques across the classrooms that we visited, these attempts were mixed with test-oriented and traditional mathematics instruction using curricula such as *Sequential One*. School leaders and teachers described the choice of *Sequential One* materials as a response to parent requests and to the pressure to prepare especially eighth-grade students for the upcoming New York State High School Regents' exams.

The district's attention to issues of teaching and learning in literacy, and to mathematics, through its focus on complex instructional techniques coupled with strong messages about professional learning had yielded results in terms of student performance on state and city assessments. Over a decade from about the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, District M moved from a ranking of 31st out of 32 community school districts in reading achievement to 16th place in 1997 and to 15th place in 1998. In mathematics achievement, District M moved from a ranking of 29th (of 32 districts) to 15th place by 1998. In January of 1999, District M was ranked 10th in the city on a new fourth-grade English language arts performance-based assessment. These impressive results, district leaders reported, were achieved through a combination of strong centralized messages about instructional practices, as well as consistent attention to school-level professional accountability.

For their part of the larger district picture, the four schools that we studied performed reasonably well in terms of student learning outcomes. As shown in Table 8.1 (displaying scores for 2000) performance levels in each instance were at or above the median for the district, with one clear exception in language arts and several in mathematics, which can be accounted for by looking more closely at the priorities, leadership, and nature of instruction in these schools.⁷

Table 8.1 City and state test scores, 2000: four middle school programmes

Percentage of students at Level 3 and Level 4			
<i>Language arts</i>	<i>Grade 6 (CTB-R)</i>	<i>Grade 7 (CTB-R)</i>	<i>Grade 8 (State ELA)</i>
Cisneros	20.4	34.0	48.1
Parkside	39.6	51.1	43.1
Conant: Ailey	20.3	10.3	19.8
Conant: Discovery	51.8	60.2	38.8
<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Grade 6 (CTBM)</i>	<i>Grade 7 (CTBM)</i>	<i>Grade 8 (State)</i>
Cisneros	20.8	34.0	48.1
Parkside	18.5	34.0	14.0
Conant: Ailey	20.5	5.8	0.0
Conant: Discovery	36.8	44.8	38.1

Why the Reform Theories Coexist

At first glance, these reform theories appeared to coexist comfortably with one another. There were few signs of subversion or overt resistance at the school level. By and large, teachers sought to implement a version of balanced literacy with which they felt comfortable and that fit with their school's particular vision of instruction. The district's maths curricula were less completely implemented, with many teachers feeling unsure how to realize this in the classroom, though overall, each of the schools had heard the district's messages about constructivist practice and was at minimum engaged in conversation with professional developers regarding the district's agenda for mathematics.

To get at the heart of our inquiry, we asked ourselves, 'exactly how do these two reform theories coexist or complement each other in the middle schools we studied?' What might explain a response pattern to different, potentially competing sets of reform activities? A closer look at particular features of these schools and the manner in which District M engaged each school supports the following claims. Overall, as understood and acted upon at the school level, each reform theory set the stage for the other in guiding attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, the result was not the same in each school: the degree to which the two reform theories complemented one another varied across schools in ways that could be traced to how fully the reform theories were implemented. Specifically:

- The schools managed the interaction between the two reform theories in proportion to how they *organized themselves to support professional learning* in order

to support and enhance student learning. The variation in the schools' management reflected the quality and focus of school leadership activity, the professional culture and capacity among staff, and the presence of structures for professional interaction.

- The schools' *focus on knowing students well* and taking joint responsibility for their learning facilitated their attempts to teach to high standards while tailoring instruction to students' individual needs. Here, the variation across schools reflected the clarity of mission, the creation of advisory structures, the organizational use of their school size and teaching schedules, the strength of professional community (once again reflecting school leadership) and the use of classroom time for high quality teaching and learning.
- The *sophistication of the district's ideas about teaching and learning, and the flexibility with which it promoted them*, enabled schools to make the most out of both reform theories. Here the district's relationship with each school varied and did not necessarily reflect a consistent investment in the relationship. The performance level of the school, the nature of the school leadership, and the extent to which the schools sought and made use of the extensive variety of professional support mechanisms that the district made available to them all were factors that shaped this relationship. This relationship was not without tensions.

We discuss these assertions more fully in the following sections of the chapter. We draw on our extensive observations and discussions with principals and teachers at the schools introduced above in order to illustrate the ways in which the two reform theories coexist – with varying degrees of success – across these very different small school programmes.

Leadership and Organizational Support for Professional Learning

Here we proceed under the assumption that *leadership* is an important component for the establishment of a strong professional culture within a school community. One might consider, as has Murphy (2002), three broad leadership functions that have the potential to enhance school professional culture: moral stewardship, or leadership toward a strong sense of school mission and values; educative leadership, or the development of a focus on professional learning; and community building, or empowering leadership and sense of mission among faculty and the broader school community (e.g. parents). In order to accomplish these important functions, the theory of small school reform suggests that the organizational use of size and time in support of professionals is critical (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2003).

In terms of leadership and organization for strong professional cultures, we saw considerable variation among the schools we studied. For example, at the Conant Complex, leadership was fractured and responsibilities were dispersed

among a mix of personnel. Each mini-school maintained its own mission, admissions criteria, teaching faculty and programme leadership. However, the larger organization was led by a building principal whose primary responsibilities seemed to fall in the realm of management and operations (not, for example, mission-setting, educative leadership or community-building). Not surprisingly, there was significantly less clarity of purpose at the schoolwide or building-level than within the individual mini-schools.

Each Conant Complex mini-school was led by an assistant principal who reported to the building principal. Beyond the general thematic focus of each school (Alvin Ailey had a performing arts theme and the DI focused on science education), at neither of the two mini-schools did we get the sense of a vision for practice, an image for a school philosophy or adherence to a type of pedagogy. At Alvin Ailey, assistant principals traditionally had a friendly and supportive relationship with their staff, but they had played little role in conceptualizing or developing programme-wide curricula or pedagogy. The DI had a more focused and purposeful programme that had achieved significantly more success on standardized measures of achievement (in part attributable to a more academically selective student population). At the DI, we observed the assistant principal to be focused and business-like, but similar to Alvin Ailey, programme leadership at the DI was detached from curricular and pedagogical issues at the school.

Given the fractured leadership structure and the lack of schoolwide mission and focus, the conception of professional learning at the Conant Complex was fixed and limited – teachers were considered either experienced and capable or not – and there were few opportunities for veteran teachers to continue developing their skills. This view was in direct contrast to the district's view of the teacher – indeed, of all educators – as evolving and continual learners. Teachers at the Conant Complex generally taught five periods a day and had two periods of preparation time. None of the teachers interviewed reported that they used common prep time (or common lunch) to plan collaboratively. The individualistic culture at the Conant Complex (especially evident at Alvin Ailey) and the lack of support structures to nurture collaboration resulted in a relatively stagnant curriculum, and pedagogy offers one plausible explanation for the generally lower level of performance in the Conant Complex small school programmes. (Here, the DI is somewhat of an exception, but its higher performance levels probably reflected differences in its student population as much as on the power of its instruction.)

Contrast that scenario with the strong and stable leadership story at Parkside. There the faculty, an in-house professional developer and the principal were focused on a strongly articulated and widely held mission: to provide a progressive, humanities-based, project-oriented education that met the needs of their students. To ensure that professionalism and strong norms for collaborative work and professional learning were realized, the principal organized the school such that the faculty had time each day to meet in grade-level teams and/or as subject teams. Teams of three to four teachers per grade level met during their prep periods, during their common lunch periods and often after school hours. The

teams were responsible for developing curriculum and instructional strategies for the core humanities course as well as for managing the overall educational programme for their grade level.

Staff meetings at Parkside were largely devoted to sharing instructional strategies (teachers shared their work, for example, on the development and use of rubrics or a literacy unit on memoirs). The principal assigned common reading related to middle school education during the summer months; teachers discussed and planned curriculum based on these commonly developed understandings. At Parkside, the faculty scrutinized and supported each other's work – both newcomers and old timers – through the course of the school day (as well as during extensive team meeting time and faculty meeting time). The team structure allowed the school, in the view of the school principal, to successfully socialize the new teachers, even those who were not traditionally prepared teachers. The principal also relied on staff developers, both in-house and district 'coaches', as well as on her own energies to bring her new teachers up to speed.

If the Conant Complex was characterized by individualistic practice and a lack of leadership that focused on teaching and learning, and Parkside by collaborative practice, strong sense of mission and high standards for professional learning, then the third school that we studied presented an interesting contrast that placed it somewhere between the two other schools. CMS had lost its school principal through reassignment the year before we began our study. During the years that we visited the school, a succession of three interim acting principals came and went. Even under those conditions, however, it was clear from our interviews and observations that the largely Latino and well-qualified staff at CMS had internalized the strong mission of the small dual-language programme. Two of the acting principals during this period came from the Cisneros faculty and, together with strong informal leadership exercised by members of the school's teaching staff, these individuals maintained the overall mission of the school.

The professional community at CMS was grounded in *individual* competence and a collaborative sense of mission (to provide a high quality education for the Latino student) that existed among the staff. Although we did not see team structures, rescheduled time for meetings or specific instructional foci at faculty meetings (as we did at Parkside), the strength of the CMS community was apparent among the individual teachers' commitment to their students and pride in the Latino culture. The strength of the faculty was something that the first principal had ensured through the hiring of well-prepared Latino teachers.

Although responsibility for curriculum and instruction was less a collective process and knowledge sharing tended to be serendipitous at CMS, our data suggested that the faculty was collegial. Perhaps driven by their collective mission that focused on students, the teachers often shared instructional strategies and information about student learning needs in the hallways, during breaks and before and after school. Further, the district provided staff developers who worked closely with the faculty at CMS, especially in the content areas of maths and science and tended to fill the leadership void in the areas of curriculum and instruction.

The interaction of the two reform theories worked well, it seems, when

school professionals were predisposed to ongoing learning and engaged with the improvement of teaching and learning at their schools. On some level, faculties at all of the schools we studied knew of and were responding to the ideas promoted by the district. However, in the schools with the stronger sense of purpose, such as at Parkside and CMS, there was fertile ground in which high standards for teaching and learning could take root. At the Conant Complex, where the staff was struggling to grasp a sense of mission or overall purpose, the district policies were often perceived by individual teachers as troublesome directives that were difficult to implement given the isolated conditions under which they worked.

A Focus on Knowing Students Well

Flowing from the logic of small schools reform theories, all four schools in this study were deliberately organized to be relatively small learning communities aimed at fostering relationships among students and teachers. In line with the research on small schools (Lee, Bryk and Smith, 1993; Darling-Hammond, Aness and Falk, 1995; Lee and Smith, 1995; McDonald, 1996; Newmann, 1996) and the middle school movement (Atwell, 1998), these schools took as a precondition to successful operation that students have the potential to be known by their teachers and that in small schools a clear sense of purpose can develop. In other words, the schools operated from the assumption that *size* matters.

In addition, all of the middle schools that we have described had made some structural changes (beyond the given of small size) with the intention of building stronger student–teacher relationships, influencing patterns of instruction, and consequently improving student learning outcomes. Our data suggested, however, that in order to support the integration of the district’s vision for high quality teaching and learning, the structural changes had to be made with coherence and purpose in mind (supporting the mission of the school and the learning of both students and professionals). For example, at both CMS and Parkside, daily schedules were altered and class sizes were reduced in an explicit attempt to ensure that students were known well by their teachers, thereby enhancing the possibility that they would be successful with academic tasks. In both cases, these decisions were made with the schools’ overriding sense of mission in mind.

At CMS, the organizational groupings of students were constantly evolving – sometimes students were grouped by grade and/or by ability, sometimes completely heterogeneously – but decisions were always guided by the drive to build strong relationships among teachers and students. Classes tended to be small for maths and literature (about 14–18 students), and teachers were also responsible for a 45-minute weekly advisory class for 12 to 15 students. The focus of the advisory class, in keeping with the school mission, was on the affective needs of students, parent contact and socialization and academic support. Classes at CMS were generally 45 minutes long, although literature and maths classes lasted 50 to 60 minutes. There were weekly whole-school assemblies, which were likewise designed to reinforce and build connections among students and teachers.

At Parkside, students were organized along grade-level teacher teams for most subjects and class periods extended to 90 minutes although there was flexibility based on curricular priorities (for example, a maths test prep met for only 35 minutes on three days of the week, and the project-based, 90-minute classes did not meet daily). Teachers saw fewer students per day and they changed classes fewer times during the day than in a traditional middle school structure. Within teams, teachers were given wide latitude to develop grade-level schedules. They were generally responsible for 70 to 75 students per day, although some of that responsibility was shared among team members. Class sizes varied with agreed-upon configurations, generally ranging between 15 to 20 students per teacher or 30 to 40 students for two teachers.

Team-taught classes gave students a home base, which the principal believed functioned like an advisory class (though they did change year to year); some classes were heterogeneously grouped (such as social studies, arts and science) and some were ability-based (there were three levels of maths and literacy classes). Support was provided to students informally through close relationships with teachers and through 'extra' classes for strugglers and for students who were accelerated. These classes were offered both during and after school (for example, lower ability classes were generally smaller than were those for middle and high ability achievers).

In contrast to the purposeful changes made at CMS and Parkside, decisions at the Conant Complex lacked consistency and often appeared to be management-oriented (such as organizing rowdy, entering sixth-graders into self-contained classes at Alvin Ailey). Across the mini-schools at Conant, students were organized by grade levels and cycled through teachers and subjects in traditional 42-minute periods. Teachers generally taught five periods a day of 30 students each for a daily total of approximately 150 students. There were some exceptions, notably at Alvin Ailey, where there was some experimentation with double-period humanities classes and the self-contained sixth-grade classes mentioned above. And, at Discovery Institute students travelled weekly per grade level to a nearby natural history museum for a two-hour session. However, these attempts to modify the traditional schedule were truncated by the tendency to use time during the extended class periods as if the original schedule were still in place (for example, within an extended block of teaching time, teachers at Alvin Ailey tended to change activities based on the 42-minute class schedule, even when they had the option to extend projects or activities into longer time periods).

By virtue of the size of the mini-programmes, teachers and students knew each other but not well. Besides the self-contained sixth-grade classes at Alvin Ailey, teachers at the Conant Complex faced large student loads as well as large class sizes. There were few schoolwide structures to support teacher and student interaction outside class and virtually no support mechanisms for struggling students. These supports were sometimes provided informally by individual teachers who 'took needy students under their wing', but there was no systematic way that all such students were attended to. While there were some exceptions overall, the organizational structure of the mini-schools did not appear to support the development of strong relationships among teachers and students.

District M went to some length to offer expertise and support to these mini-schools in order to help them realize high standards for instruction and for student learning. To the extent that the structural changes made by the schools were part of a coherent attempt to support student learning, the reform theories complemented each other and the result was enhanced teaching and learning. In practice, it turns out that this was not always the case.

In the absence of a strong sense of purpose and curricular coherence, the teachers at the Conant Complex tended to fall back on their individual interpretations of the materials they had available. Although there were discernible differences at the mini-school level between the DI and Alvin Ailey, overall teaching practice across the two programmes tended to be traditional – teacher-driven and text-reliant – and highly individualized by a particular teacher's strengths or goals. The teachers at the DI were loosely guided by a set of ideas emphasizing interdisciplinary study of thematically related subject matter that promoted student investigation and project-like assignments. However, the standards for these practices were not consistent and depended on the expertise of individual staff members.

Highly structured and teacher-directed instruction was the pedagogy of choice for most teachers at Alvin Ailey, based on a perceived need to teach a 'basic' curriculum.⁸ The ability to manage student behaviour was generally perceived as the sign of a successful teacher at this mini-school. One teacher did say that she thought good instruction occurred when students were 'engaged' – that is, focused, participating and interested – during a lesson. However, the same teacher commented, 'there is no schoolwide vision for pedagogy in the building'.

By contrast, the core of the curriculum at Parkside was a social studies course that was designed to integrate the humanities subject areas of history and non-fiction literature with political and social sciences. The project-based course, which was at the heart of the school's vision for progressive education, was developed and taught by grade-level teams of teachers (with close guidance from the principal). It consisted of three to four long-term student-centered projects per school year that focused on consecutive periods of US history.

Literacy was also highly prioritized at Parkside – in part as a response to the district's push for literacy instruction. The Readers and Writers course was taught in small extended-period grade-level classes (about 15 students to one teacher). The curriculum was geared especially for the middle school learner and was developed through the staff's shared understanding of *In the Middle* by Nancy Atwell (1998). The emphasis in these classes tended to be on student interpretations of literature and on the development of writing skills. For example, in one Readers and Writers class of eighth-graders, the students read a memoir chosen from a number of selections previewed by the teacher. Over a period of a few weeks, the students developed a list of 'criteria' for writing memoirs based on their reading and then wrote a series of their own. Selections were published in a class book of memoirs made up of the students' best work. In general, the pedagogies of choice at Parkside tended to favour student responsibility for knowledge-building or problem-solving activities.

Although in practice about two-thirds of the curriculum was taught in English at CMS, there was a strong feeling among staff for the lived experience of the Latino student body. The development of students' Spanish language abilities was therefore an explicit goal, alongside instruction for literacy and other subjects in English. Much of the instruction at CMS was focused on 'rigorous academic training' and preparation for the state and city tests that were the markers for academic success. The staff prioritized access to and success in traditional academic language and texts. And, as there was in the other schools described here, there was a focus at CMS on English language arts and mathematics curricula.

Language arts content at CMS ranged from basic skills curriculum for struggling readers to classes that focused on advanced writing across multiple genres. The staff articulated and practised the widely held belief in rigorous instruction and much of the instruction at the school was organized and delivered in a rather traditional manner. Observations of lessons in sixth-grade social studies, writers' workshop and eighth-grade social studies indicated that teachers relied on either a textbook or a photocopied page from a textbook as the foundation of the lesson. The lessons were accompanied by teacher guidance, direction and plenty of talk. The teacher talk that we observed, however, was not characterized as much by traditional-style lecture as it was by building upon and expanding students' use of content and academic language. In essence, teachers' talk focused on providing a language 'bridge' – comprehensible input – from the academic texts to students' understanding of the content. As one teacher explained, she believed that students need to know the English language of textbooks and she wanted to help them have access to that language and cultivate the ability to use the [textbook] language themselves.

There was, then, considerable variation among the small schools that we studied. District M, for its part, faced several challenges in this attempt to layer one reform theory upon another. How to successfully impose a standardizing set of instructional ideas upon schools that had traditionally taken responsibility for such matters? And how, as a district, to account for the variability among the schools and their practices in crafting an approach to standards-based instructional reforms?

The District's Approach: Sophistication and Flexibility, with Some Tensions

As described earlier in this chapter, since the mid to late 1990s, District M had endeavoured to improve the quality of its (middle) schools by coupling its small schools of choice strategy with its clear messages about curriculum and instruction. This effort was not a complete departure from past district practice because this was a district which had long had a reputation as having an 'activist' central office. What was different about this strategy was (a) the scale of the emphasis (this effort was far reaching and was perceived as 'serious' compared with previous efforts), and (b) the exclusive focus on the learning experience for students,

teachers *and* principals – what were considered good practices to promote children’s learning now were viewed as good practices for adult learning as well. These were not formulaic attempts to improve classroom practice *or* to promote professional growth. They were sophisticated and well-developed notions regarding powerful learning for both students and adults.

Flexibility was an important part of District M’s approach, especially given their commitment to small schools of choice. The superintendent undertook the push for standards-based instruction because she believed in the instructional practices – indeed, as the district’s former assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction during the first half of the 1990s, she had been responsible for the development of the in-house staff development model. It was during those years that District M institutionalized the choice policy for middle school students. Inherent in that policy was the assumption that small schools, each with its own character, would provide the student population with greater opportunities than they would receive in their neighbourhoods from traditional, large urban middle schools. The superintendent looked at the second reform theory (centralized push for standards-based instructional improvement) as a means to enhance the first theory. As she put it: ‘school cultures are important, but you also have to embrace a districtwide effort, and develop a community of learners – or, pride in your community’. Thus, the small schools of choice were valued by the district, and new initiatives were implemented with flexibility.

To the extent that the schools were performing well (i.e. reasonably good student learning outcomes) and could make a case with district leaders for their specific approach to teaching and learning (here, strong school leadership was a factor), the district took a hands-off approach toward them. In cases like this, the district seemed to pause to allow schools time to develop a response to their centralized initiatives.

In this case, for example, the staff at Parkside spent much of their collaborative planning time developing and critiquing their own performance assessment systems. Therefore, their response to the district’s standards-based portfolio system (during the second year of our study) was qualitatively different than the responses at our other schools. Parkside’s capacity in this area provided an interesting example of the way in which district-initiated, standards-based policies interacted with locally developed standards for practice.

The staff at Parkside (including the principal), after attending several summer institutes at Harvard University, had developed and implemented a process-based portfolio system for the school. When the district participated in a city-sponsored pilot of a standards-based portfolio system, the staff at Parkside strongly resisted the change. They felt that the district’s presentation of the new system was a poor fit with their well-developed understanding of performance-based assessment systems. However, the principal at Parkside saw an opportunity to think deeply about the school’s portfolio process. Under her leadership, they reconsidered the standards-based system and worked hard over a two-year period to integrate it into their own process. Students in all grades were guided in presenting two portfolios at the end of the school year. They were aware of the

difference between the two portfolios and able to articulate that one system was about their 'best (standard-bearing) work' and one highlighted their learning in several thematically based areas of growth.

The district, to its credit, exhibited respect for Parkside's efforts. District leaders let Parkside's principal take the lead with her staff in developing a response to the district policy. In the end, the district invited the school to present their process to school leaders and staff developers across the district as a model for thinking deeply about assessment practices. This example highlights two important points about the district's policies: (a) the policies upheld and promoted complex ideas about teaching and learning, and (b) the district approached the implementation of these ideas with flexibility across the schools, depending on the schools' needs, responses and capabilities.

As suggested by the discussion of the variation among our case schools, including this example regarding Parkside's portfolio system, the interaction among the two reform theories was not tension-free. In fact, tensions manifested themselves in particular ways across all of the schools that we studied. Perhaps inevitable – but not by our estimation crippling – the tensions seemed to arise in at least the following areas:

- the developing assessment and accountability pressures, in large part city and state-level pressures, interrupted and perhaps overloaded the district's single-minded focus on instructional improvement in literacy and mathematics, and
- the ongoing struggle to spread limited resources (especially human resources) across a large number of urban schools with typically high needs.

At first glance, there were several important congruencies among policies emanating from state, city and district offices. All three levels, for instance, had actively promoted high student learning standards and aligned assessments and accountability for student performance against these standards. All three levels were actively seeking to improve school and classroom performance and to ferret out obvious pockets of incompetence. For example, at the state level, low performing schools were at risk of placement on the Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) list and at the city level that meant placement in the chancellor's district – and takeover by the city of all instructional practices. At the district level the superintendent also focused on the high 'priority' schools, which received increased district attention.

During the time of our study, several new state and city tests were implemented. These included new state-level performance assessments in fourth and eighth grade (first, English language arts and mathematics and later social studies and science). The city also administered standardized assessments in fifth, sixth and seventh grades and performance assessments in third and sixth grades. The net result of these assessment and accountability pressures was evident at both the district and school levels, creating mixed messages regarding the importance of complex instruction in the face of pressure for test preparation activities. The district was caught in the middle here, mediating state and city messages with its own.

We saw evidence of that increasing accountability pressure in the changing tenor of comments by district leaders regarding their focus on instructional practice. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and professional development faced new demands each year that drew time and resources away from her desire to focus on literacy and mathematics. One year it was the standards-based portfolio system, and the next year she noted:

I think the biggest shift for us is that we're focusing on social studies this year. Three years ago we focused on literacy almost entirely. Last year we started including maths more deeply in our thinking. This year it's social studies, and it's really a state initiative. They are going to test in social studies, and we need to be in alignment with the testing.

The superintendent and her assistants also changed the way they spoke about 'success' over the course of our study. One assistant said early on, 'What I look at is school environments, teaching practices, student engagement. I look at practices of assessment. Ongoing. I don't mean standardized tests, but assessment that is embedded in instruction'. A year or so later, the superintendent noted:

The [state] test scores came back about a week and a half ago and they did not yield the results that I expected and that I demanded. And I went crazy . . . we did increase by 11 per cent last year in fourth grade, but just 1 per cent this year. It's in the right direction, but I'm devastated by it.

This pressure also played out in the schools that we studied. Especially in the last two years, the schools focused on social studies and science as the new eighth-grade state tests in those subject areas were brought on line. At Alvin Ailey, the science teacher spent nearly a month preparing students for the new state test in science, which covered a broader set of science knowledge than is typically taught at the school. At CMS, there was a considerable amount of time spent on test preparation curricula, including after-school classes devoted to such activities. Teachers commented in our interviews that the tests were affecting their decisions about instruction. At Parkside, the grade-level schedules had been manipulated to intersperse short (generally, 35 minute) periods for maths test preparation across the grade levels. Teachers were rethinking their core humanities course to make sure that it prepared their students for the new social studies test. During the 2001–2 school year, the principal at Parkside began serious work with a district maths staff developer with the intention of rethinking instruction in that content area.

Although schools such as Parkside, CMS and the DI were staying at least in the middle of the pack (of district schools) on test scores and thus felt less district pressure, school leaders and teachers expressed tension regarding these policies. A teacher at CMS said, for example:

Unfortunately, one of the things that helps organize the priority is all this testing that the kids get. It's always in the back of my mind. I want to do

all these great things in writing workshop, but they have to pass that maths and literature exam.

At Parkside, the principal felt supported by the district leaders. However, when a test preparation ‘test’ arrived unannounced one morning requiring immediate attention, she uttered, ‘this year the system is just squashing schools’.

Another source of tension in the interaction between these two reform theories was the inevitable lack of resources to meet the many needs of some very troubled schools. The district prioritized its neediest schools (based on student assessment results) providing additional leadership meetings and professional development for them (some schools had twice as many onsite professional development days as others). However, even with this increased attention, schools such as the Conant Complex were difficult to penetrate to the district’s satisfaction. District staff developers found it hard to work with the veteran teachers at Conant. Teachers there disliked the district’s push for constructivist mathematics instruction, for example, and complained about the lack of attention to basic skills. They perceived *Connected Math* as weak on the rote repetition of algorithms necessary for their students to succeed in maths. One district staff developer said that the only teachers she could work with were new and the content of her support was primarily classroom management.

From its viewpoint, the district faced a constant turnover of teachers (for example, teachers leave the district to go to suburban districts which offer higher salary schedules) and a lack of qualified school leaders. The superintendent noted in May of 2001 that she would face nine vacancies for principals the next year for her 33 school programmes. Even given these dilemmas (typical in urban settings), this district felt that they were providing more than typical support for their schools. Given the independent mentality and built-in variability of the small choice schools, however, a tension existed between what the district provided (the school faculty often complained about increased district requirements) and what the schools produced in return. Among the middle schools that we studied, the flailing Alvin Ailey programme provided the starkest example of this tension. It is possible that the district was not direct enough in its work with the Conant Complex and that a more direct intervention regarding the school’s organizational features was in order. At minimum, it seems that the provision of two district staff developers was insufficient to make a difference in either the school’s instructional practice or its poor student performance. And, at the level of the whole school, District M policies were far from solving the obvious ability-based (and, to an extent, race- and class-based) tracking that existed among the mini-programmes.

Conclusion

We present here compelling evidence that two different and potentially conflicting theories of educational reform can and, indeed, did coexist together in an

urban school district. We argue that, as conceived and enacted in this instance, the two theories-of-action complemented each other, each compensating in particular ways for the other's weaknesses. This phenomenon took place in a mid-sized city school district that struggled with the challenges of many contemporary urban settings (such as teacher turnover, shortages of well-prepared school leaders, the 'flight' of middle-class families and changing governance structures), but here the purposeful combination of reforming ideas coincided, over the decade of the 1990s, with substantial districtwide gains in student learning outcomes. While our analysis cannot demonstrate a conclusive causal connection, it is plausible that the joint effect of these reform activities contributed much to the improvement trend.

The way that the theories were implemented was critical in realizing these successes. The introduction of the reform theories in this instance was accomplished gradually, sequentially and with some degree of sophistication and care. The first theory – emphasizing small schools of choice as an answer to the needs of urban schoolchildren – grew out of broader New York City school reform traditions and was officially sanctioned in the early 1990s by District M through a choice policy embracing all of its middle schools. Taking care to respect the tenets and sustain the accomplishments of its small alternative schools, the district layered on a second set of reforming ideas in the mid-1990s – through a centralized set of standards-based reform policies aimed specifically at the improvement of teaching and learning. Using three middle schools as our test cases, we demonstrate that this purposeful combination of reform theories in large part *worked*, with each theory setting the stage for the other in guiding educational reform efforts across the district's schools and classrooms.

These cases make tangible an emerging argument concerning the power and limits of urban educational reform strategies. This line of analysis asserts that reform strategies are inherently limited: by highlighting certain actions and conditions as essential to the renewal of teaching and learning, they simultaneously assume that other conditions (not targeted or touchable by the reform theory) are supportive of the targeted changes (Hill and Celio, 1998). In effect, the strategy in question – whether it emphasizes Comprehensive School Reforms, vouchers or intensive investment in professional development – presumes a 'zone of wishful thinking' in which events that the strategic theory does not consider work for or against the theory's premises. A voucher strategy, for example, shifts the allocation of resources from institutions to 'consumers' (parents), thereby empowering them to select and support schools that are responsive to their preferences, and thereby creating a compelling set of incentives for schools to perform well. But it presumes 'an adequate supply of teachers willing to work in competitive environments, parental diligence in choosing schools and mechanisms to guarantee a supply of good schools in areas serving less-demanding parents' (Hill and Celio, 1998: 22). These conditions, the zone of wishful thinking for this strategy, are not included in its theory of action, yet without them, a voucher strategy is very likely to fail. A similar analysis can be done with virtually any reform theory.

This line of thinking leads naturally to another conclusion: 'Some reform

proposals are specifically designed to cause the events that are found in other proposals' zones of wishful thinking' (Hill and Celio, 1998: 23). Thus by combining reform theories, leaders may be able to create mutually reinforcing conditions for improvement. Though there is no guarantee that this complementarity will pertain in all instances of converging reform theories, it appears to be the case in the instance we have been examining.

In each of the four small-school programmes that we observed over this three-year period, we saw evidence of the combined effects of these reform policies. The district had pushed a set of standards-based ideas vigorously, making strategic use of a cadre of professional developers and insisting on professional accountability on the part of all personnel in the district. In response to district-level leadership, educators in these schools directed a great deal of energy toward teaching a form of 'balanced literacy' they deemed appropriate to middle school students, and more powerful forms of mathematics teaching that fit their views of what diverse middle school students needed. Where the small schools' efforts had been most successfully implemented, school leaders and staff made the greatest use of the requirements and resources afforded by the second reform initiative. That energy resulted, at minimum, in a high degree of content alignment across the schools (such as the balanced literacy practices). It was clear that staffs had made, at the very least, surface-level attempts to implement the district's curricular messages. And, in some cases, the combination of small-school reform energies and district-initiated mandates and instructional support resulted in productive, synergistic improvements in instructional practice. Recall the ways in which the staff at Parkside Alternative Middle School integrated the district's standards-based portfolio system into their already well-developed use of performance assessment systems.

Constructive coexistence, it seems, requires a balancing act between district and school initiative and sources of ideas about good teaching and learning. Although we argue here that both of these reform theories have at their heart the same goal – the improvement of learning outcomes for a typically underserved population of urban students – in neither case does one reform theory presume the necessity of the other for the accomplishment of its goals. In other words, the proponents of small schools assume that such things as personalized relationships between teachers and learners and strong teacher collaboration in the development of curriculum will lead to improved student outcomes. The choice policy is intended to ensure that failed schools would do just that: *fail* to attract a parent and student clientele. And, likewise, the district's set of strongly articulated initiatives regarding instructional practice does not, in and of itself, require the small schools structure in order to succeed.

What is unique about this case is that District M realizes benefits from these theories by combining persistent pressure for results, attention to standard-bearing work, and districtwide support for professional learning, on the one hand, with flexibility and respect for the different characters of the schools, on the other. This is a case of the *flexible* combination of a set of potentially competing reform theories. The success of the combination, then, reflects a balance

between district and school initiative, a balance between the inherent strengths of each individual theory of action, and the fact that each theory's weaknesses can be offset by the other's strengths. Both sets of reforming ideas are fully articulated in this district. This is not a classic case of educational pendulum swinging in which the small alternative programmes were mandated to uniformly take up a prescribed or narrowly defined set of instructional practices. Rather, these schools were encouraged to make local sense of complex instructional ideas and to take advantage of the district's support in that process.

Our data suggest, however, that the potentially positive effects of this combination of theories were not realized equally across the schools that we studied. The unequal outcomes can be traced to

- differences in the ways that the schools organized themselves to support professional learning
- variation among the schools in their use of small size and restructured time for knowing their students well, and
- the degree to which the district and the schools were able to successfully resolve the tensions between the competing reform theories.

At the Conant Complex, for example, we observed less organizational use of size or time and less overall professional capacity-building. We saw more individualized and variable efforts on the part of classroom teachers and considerable variation among student outcomes. A variety of forces and conditions accounted for these problems, among them, ineffective leadership structures and the difficulty of district professional developers in penetrating the individualized professional norms that reigned in this school's hybrid organizational structure. Conant was a large, urban school redesigned to accommodate four mini-school programmes. District staff developers struggled at Conant to engage in productive work because the conditions that promote whole-school involvement in professional growth and development – the taking up of complex new ideas about the work – were largely absent at that site. This was a point at which the district could rightly have pressed harder for school-level structural changes, facilitating the liaison-like role of the professional developer, and insisting upon school conditions that encourage ongoing conversations among teachers, school leaders, professional developers and district leaders.

By contrast, both Parkside and CMS made considerable effort to shape their school practices in ways that supported professional growth and development, knowing their students well, and taking advantage of district supports and initiatives. These school staffs balanced their own interests, skills and preferences, on the one hand, against the demanding expectations of the district, on the other. This required of school staffs the willingness to treat demands from the outside as opportunities, a potential resource, as much as an intrusion. As District M maintained a flexible and respectful stance, the schools, on their part, treated that stance as an invitation to interact with, and adapt, the reform messages coming from the central office, shaping them to work most effectively for their particular

conditions and clientele. In order for the balancing act to result in high-quality outcomes, however, it was incumbent upon strong leadership exercised by school administrators (as at Parkside) or teacher-leaders (as at CMS) to engage with the complex ideas espoused by the district. This required staffs at both schools to examine materials, communicate with staff developers, and produce compromises that maintained the integrity of local programmes while working toward the kinds of student outcomes desired by the district.

On balance, the approach taken here – the launching of a centralized, but complex, set of curricular and pedagogical ideas along with support and encouragement for small schools and restructured school conditions – challenges urban policy approaches that offer packaged formulas for achieving immediate (and perhaps short-lived) increases on student outcome measures. The case suggests caution, even resistance, against the urge to fall solely in one camp or the other between strong centralized theories of reform and highly decentralized schemes. Given these data, we note, for example, the possibility that neither the strengthening of centralized accountability policies *nor* abandoning them in favour of a wholesale market approach will achieve the overall goals of urban school reform. The caveat, and a key lesson suggested by this case, is the critical nature of the district's role in flexibly guiding the creation of school conditions that can support the professional growth necessary for realizing the powerful instructional practices espoused by the second reform theory.

The longer-term implications of this convergence of reform theories will never be known. In the year following our study's conclusion, the New York City schools were reorganized once again, with all community school boards dissolved and districts such as District M subsumed into larger regional groupings. Yet the District M case stands as a provocative demonstration that widely differing reform theories may coexist, and may even productively complement one another, in urban settings. Whether such a merger is possible on the much larger scale of the New York City regional 'districts', or in large unitary systems is hard to say. But, in principle, a productive merger, that avoids sole or heavy reliance on a centralized strategy of reform, on the one hand, or that presses for a 'market' among largely autonomous schools on the other, is possible. In such a merger, however, tension is inevitable between a district-driven instructional improvement agenda and one that promotes small schools of choice. Maintaining sufficient flexibility in meeting the needs of the schools *and* keeping the pressure on for high-quality standard-bearing work is a tricky balance for district leaders to strike, one that is only complicated by the often turbulent context of urban districts. And for educators working in small schools of choice, the work of negotiating district demands must be accomplished simultaneously with local creative endeavours and the day-to-day urgencies of classroom teaching. To simplify their lives, if nothing else, educators might tend to reject one theory in favour of the other. The challenge is to engage both, accept the tension and to struggle productively within it.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was previously published as a Research Report (Document R-03-2) at the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) at the University of Washington (Gallucci *et al.* 2003). The Center's Research Report series presents the findings of CTP studies, analyses, reviews and conceptual work. In addition to internal review by the center's members, each CTP research report has been reviewed externally by a minimum of two scholars and revised accordingly. CTP reports are available at www.ctpweb.org.
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- 2 The CTP Core Study was a five-year study of four state teaching policy environments that includes the study of an urban district in each state and a set of schools in each district. The four states are California, New York, North Carolina and Washington.
- 3 Since the late 1990s, the New York City Board of Education has made official distinctions between (a) 'small schools' that are run by a principal, but serve small numbers of students (such as Parkside and CMS); (b) 'big schools' that are run by one principal and may (or may not) be divided into smaller programmes that have co-ordinators and that are created by the principal (such as the Conant Complex); and (c) academies that are semi-autonomous schools run by an assistant principal.
- 4 The reader is referred to www.ctpweb.org for a description of the broader CTP Core Study.
- 5 Pseudonyms have been used for this and all subsequent schools discussed here.
- 6 The term 'progressive' is used here to describe an educational tradition that emphasizes the discovery of knowledge, the development of habits of mind and problem-solving skills, and favours student-directed, project- or problem-based, hands-on learning experiences. The role of the teacher in this tradition tends to be that of a facilitator of a mix of individual or small group, student-directed learning experiences interspersed with teacher-led small or whole-group discussions of relevant materials.
- 7 The trends across the three years of our study indicate considerable volatility in these schools' scores: the substantial shifts in scores from year to year, both up and down, were inconsistent across subjects and grades within school. This probably reflects the relatively small number of students in the testing pool, among other things, and the difficulty of getting a stable school score with such small samples, in addition to any 'real' trends that were occurring.

Therefore, these trends are probably not a clear indication of the evolution of the instructional programme over time.

- 8 Here, 'teacher-directed' instruction refers to practice in which teachers provide whole groups of students with extensive explanations and factual information; knowledge is treated as fixed, to be transmitted from teacher to student. Generally, the teacher structures class time to include teacher-led, whole-group discussions and/or individual completion of teacher-assigned lessons.

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9

Education District Development in South Africa

A New Direction for School Improvement?¹

Brahm Fleisch

Introduction

During the past few years there has been increasing momentum in South Africa, as in many other education systems, toward developing education initiatives that focus on districts or local education agencies. In part, this development has come from two fundamental changes: the decentralization of school governance and demands for higher learner achievement. The current dichotomy facing schools, and by extension, districts is one of greater central accountability and control from above, alongside increased demands from schools to assist them to become self-managing and ultimately self-reliant. Given these somewhat contradictory demands, it is not surprising that education districts have struggled to meet the challenges presented.

The body of international research focusing on programmes and projects to improve education districts is not extensive but is on the rise with the recognition that the local government agencies are the key to large-scale and sustainable change in schools. The literature has mainly focused on establishing, evaluating and classifying strategies for district improvement. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to review the major district development projects in South Africa and to categorize the different approaches. In doing so, the chapter will also distil lessons about what works in district development. It will also consider some of the limitations of current initiatives, and suggest ways in which the field can move forward.

In summary, the aims of the chapter are:

- to review the district development programmes currently or recently in operation in South Africa
- to explore the various change models employed by these programmes
- to highlight the lessons learned and limitations of district development programmes and
- to consider the future directions of district development, premised on the assumption that programmes are developed on the basis of what works rather than what exists.

Background

District development has become a major point of discussion in South Africa because of its location at the confluence of two separate streams in the education sector. From within the community of service providers, programme managers and funders of school improvement initiatives, it is the inevitable next step in the evolution of thinking and practice. For the provincial departments, which are constitutionally responsible for the provision of education, district development is similarly the next logical step as the government shifts gears from construction of grand policy frameworks to fast-tracking delivery. As Massell (2001) reminds us 'efforts of districts to build the capacity of students, teachers and schools are often the major, and sometimes the only, source of external assistance that schools receive'.

Non-government organizations (NGOs), programme managers and funders have come to district development through an analysis of the weakness of an earlier generation of school-by-school projects or through experimenting with multi-level innovations. While important work was done by NGOs in school-by-school initiatives, the isolated interventions seldom led to system-wide change and more importantly they seldom translated into sustained improvement because the provincial and/or district offices did not 'buy-in' or participate in the change initiatives. For many district/circuit offices, the earlier generation school improvement projects were add-ons running parallel to the core operations of policy implementation driven by provincial head offices. To avoid or overcome the problem of district office indifference or obstruction, the current generation of multi-level programmes have begun to work with district offices to align service delivery.

While the failure of the earlier generation of whole-school improvement projects framed the logic of the next generation of education development initiatives, restructuring within the provincial education departments added additional urgency to the call for capacity building and support to the education departments at the sites where they interact with schools.

Since 1998, provinces in South Africa have embarked on comprehensive organizational changes in response to both internal and external threats. The public perception of the weaknesses of the provincial departments and the chaos in education circuit, area and regional offices created a fertile ground for change.

But it was the implementation of Section 21 (self-managing provision) of the South African Schools Act (1996), as well as local government amalgamation that has hastened district office restructuring. With the exception of the province of KwaZulu Natal, all provincial education departments have embarked on major organizational changes mainly concentrating on developing new customer-level delivery structures, most commonly referred to as district offices. Gauteng Province took the lead with the amalgamation of the 18 original districts into ten larger districts and two mega-districts. What distinguished these districts from their predecessors was the addition of a range of functions formally carried out by the closed regional offices. The new district offices in Gauteng were tasked with facilitating and supporting the implementation of the national policies such as school governance reform and curriculum change, responding to the specific needs of schools, and ensuring efficient provision of routine administrative services.

Struggling with mission overload, lack of adequate personnel, vehicles and other essential resources, the absence of administrative systems and internal controls, the district offices not surprisingly failed to fulfil their mandates. The new restructured district offices continued to be the weak link in the delivery of routine administrative services to schools (personnel and procurement), in policy implementation (school governance and curriculum reform) and improved learners' performance.

This background is important as it provides insight into the emergence of district development models. From the perspective of external agencies involved in school improvement, the major concern was that the absence of effective district offices made changes at the lower levels more complex. From the perspective of provincial head offices, ineffective district offices impeded policy delivery.

Changes in the Education District Development Field

During the past seven years, and to some extent even prior to the first democratic election in 1994, substantial resources have been committed to school improvement initiatives. While the majority of these initiatives have emerged out of the non-government sector, an increasing number have been either sponsored or managed directly by the provincial departments themselves. The scope of these interventions is significant both in the number of schools that receive services, and in total amount expended on these initiatives.

Three waves of education improvement initiatives are evident. With the growing recognition that pre-1990 small-scale educator directed initiatives failed to address system-wide weaknesses, new approaches in a second wave of education improvement were initiated in the early 1990s. Drawing on the literature of whole-school development, these programmes focused on bottom-up development either through building collaborative organizational cultures at school level, or through structured processes associated with school development planning. While these projects played an important role in rebuilding the social fabric

of schools that had experienced endemic and chronic conflict (Fleisch, 2002), they seldom translated into substantial gains in learner achievement.

As a result, a third wave of education improvement initiatives (Harvey and Peacock, 2001; Harvey, 2002) have emerged that focus either at multi-levels, i.e. classroom, teacher, school management and district, or explicitly at the level of district office management. The assumption behind the third wave of education improvement initiatives is that improvement, in order to be at-scale and sustainable, must focus on consensus building, management improvement, curriculum and teaching improvement at all levels of the system. While the third-wave initiatives vary in approach or method, mix of activities and scale, they share in common recognition that district offices and district officials are pivotal, a 'crucial nexus' (Prew, 2002) to large-scale implementation and the sustainability of change.

Table 9.1 shows the scope of the district development initiatives that have been operating in South Africa in the past half-decade. The table suggests the diversity of the projects not only in terms of scope; from one district in one province; to multiple districts in all the provinces, the variety of funding sources and service providers and approaches.

The only comparative data available to gauge the prevalence and scale of the district development approach in relation to other modalities has been gathered by the Provincial Education Development Unit (PEDU) of the KwaZulu Natal Department. Table 9.2 shows KZN had five integrated district development projects with a total value of R47 million. This type of project is the third largest in monetary terms after spending on school building and subject specific teacher training. It clearly has superseded an earlier generation of 'whole-school' improvement projects in terms of scale of operation.

The KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture (KZNDEC) definition of integrated district programmes is largely based on its scope of operation. It defines these projects as 'designed to build system capacity to achieve district goals'. These projects are likely to include the following components, district level education management development, upgrade of district level management and administrative systems, circuit level education management development, School Governing Body training, school-level management training and professional development (KZN, 2002).

Types of Programmes

In terms of categorizing education development projects in South Africa, Roberts (2001) has recently developed a classification framework. Unlike the North American or European distinctions between top-down or bottom-up, inside-out or outside-in (Fullan, 1999), outcome or process focused approaches, Roberts notes that none of the traditional distinctions sufficiently differentiates projects in South Africa. She offers a new distinction between project approaches based on levels of operation and activities.

Table 9.1 Education improvement projects with district development components or foci

<i>Name</i>	<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Funder</i>	<i>Service Providers</i>	<i>Province(s)</i>	<i>Number of Districts</i>
Canada South Africa Education Management Project	CSAEMP	CIDA	OISE	Gauteng, Free State	
District Development Support Programme	DDSP	USAID	LCD, MSTP, READ	Limpopo, Eastern Cape, KZN, Northern Cape	
District Improvement Project	DIP	DoE	Multiple	All provinces	
District Office model project		Delta Foundation	Consultant	Eastern Cape	
Education Quality Improvement Project	EQUIP	NBI, Donors	Multiple	Gauteng, KZN, Western Cape	
Imbewu Project		DfID	University of Pretoria et al.	Eastern Cape	
Kgatelopele District Improvement Project	KDIP	Open Society Foundation		Limpopo	8
Soshanguve School Development Project	SSDP	DoE through the DIP	LCD	Gauteng	1
Mahlahle District Development Project		JET		Mpumalanga	
Quality Learning Project	QLP	Business Trust	CIE, MSTP, Sacred Heart, SMA, Sameka, HSRC, MCTP, LINK, UPE	All provinces	17
School Quality Improvement Project	SQIP	Business Trust	Promat	KZN	3
Systemic Enhancement for Education Development	SEED	NOR AID	TIP	Western Cape	All

Table 9.2 KZN district development projects

<i>Project type</i>	<i>Number of projects per type (in 2000)</i>	<i>Number of projects per type (in 2001)</i>	<i>Projects with funding values disclosed</i>	<i>% of projects with funding values disclosed</i>	<i>Funding value per type (R million)</i>
Education management development	27	29	21	72.40	11.4
Educator development: learning areas	39	40	21	52.50	47.3
Educator development: professional competencies	12	13	9	69.20	11.7
Equipment, materials and resource provision	15	20	8	40.00	8.8
Information and databases	8	9	4	44.40	3.2
Integrated district development	4	5	5	100.00	47.1
Learner development	8	11	9	81.80	6.8
Research and surveys	9	9	8	88.90	0.7
Resource centres	8	11	5	45.50	33.6
School infrastructure development	10	21	20	95.20	60.9
SGB training and development	4	5	0	0.00	Not provided
Whole-school development	22	29	18	62.10	32.2
Totals	166	202	128	63.40	263.7

Source: <http://www.kznpedu.co.za/wordfiles/Table2.doc>

- *school development planning approach* (where there is a singular focus on organizational development and no engagement with curriculum-related matters)
- *combined approach* (where there is a simultaneous focus on management and curriculum-related matters), and
- *multi-level approach* (where projects simultaneously work with institutions at different levels of the education system – e.g. schools and districts offices, district and provincial structures).

Roberts' study, while it did include a number of district development projects, was not exclusively focused on projects that assisted at that level of educational change. For our purposes it would be preferable to use the distinction between:

- multi-level approaches, and
- district focused/district-based approaches.

This categorization framework focuses primarily at the level at which the activities are located, but does not speak to the approach or methodology of the projects themselves. Drawing on the international debate, Muller and Roberts (2000) and Taylor (2001) have begun to differentiate between programmes that are supply-pushed and programmes and projects that are demand-pulled. This distinction draws on the notions of support or capacity building versus pressure or accountability. They argue that the central distinction that differentiates projects is whether or not they have strong or weak accountability mechanisms.

Case Studies of District Development Models

This section of the chapter highlights seven case studies of district development programmes and their models of change. The choice of sites or programmes was not based on independent evidence of effectiveness as few of the programmes have been in existence long enough to have produced definitive results. Rather the criterion used for selection was that each initiative or district should stand out as having something unique or original in its implicit or explicit theory of change. The contexts, problems they were designed to solve, and the levels of resources have gone into shaping the change model that has emerged. While it would be convenient for a researcher to have clear and distinct models linked to specific programmes or districts, the world-as-we-find-it is seldom that compliant. While I have described case studies as distinct entities (for heuristic purposes), in practice some of the programmes contain multiple models and are part of and link together by common service providers and/or funders. This is particularly true in the Northern Cape and Soshanguve case studies. I have also deliberately chosen to highlight specific features of programmes that may serve to further the debate. For example, the backward mapping/integrated planning component of Soshanguve School Development Planning (SSDP) and District Development Support Programme (DDSP) projects is only a small component of larger complex models.

Systemic Enhancement for Education Development (SEED) in the Western Cape: learning organizations model

One of the earliest projects that had a district development focus was initiated in the Western Cape. The project was conceived as part of the original restructuring and amalgamation of the former departments into the new Western Cape Department of Education in 1998. The focus of the SEED project was on transforming the organizational culture of the new department, referred to

as ‘reculturing’. Driven by the Teacher In-Set programme of the University of the Western Cape and funded by NORAID, the three-year project aimed to work at all levels of the system: the provincial head office, the area offices and circuit offices and schools. In addition, there was an explicit focus on changing the department’s organizational values and style in order to improve the quality of service delivery to schools.

Conceptually, the initiative had a strong theory of change and theory of learning. Underlying the project was an analysis that suggested that the key weakness in the education system was the hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational culture. This culture thwarted change at institutional level. The project aimed to transform the department from a centralized and rule-bound organization into a ‘learning organization’, which in turn it was believed would make it far more responsive to the needs of the schools.

To develop this new culture i.e. the learning organization, the external service providers focused their activities around shifting the Department’s ways of working from line-function toward a more interdisciplinary and integrated approach in which experts and managers across post levels would work as teams. It was thought that the new team approach would assist the districts (former area offices, later Education Management Development Centres) become more proactive in responding to schools and break the rule compliance oriented organizational culture.

The project has a number of activities. The NGO worked with and consulted both senior management and a change management team at the provincial head office. It provided strategic advice around organizational restructuring as well as insights into the new organizational approach, i.e. developing WCED into a learning organization. One of the key interventions that promoted this learning organization was the establishment of training programmes that included officials from multiple levels within the organization. This helped build new kinds of relationships and fostered new kinds of learning. Much of the ‘training’ appears to have been more about communication and interaction.

The more intensive work of SEED seems to have been in the pilot area offices. At the start, the focal point was on area managers and circuit managers, with the later inclusion of subject advisers. The activities focused on raising the consciousness of participants through critical reflection, theoretical input and working with participants to solve problems. In addition to formal training, the SEED team worked with individual district offices and provided onsite support and advice. The training, onsite support and advice was part of the strategy to make districts into learning organizations, inter-disciplinary teams that would monitor schools, but primarily provide support and guidance so that schools themselves would become learning organizations.

District Development Support Programme (DDSP) in Kimberley: data, data, data

One of the earlier large-scale improvement initiatives to focus on districts, the theory that underlay the DDSP project, was that improved district offices are the key to improving schools. The improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness

would complement or hasten the slow pace of change at school and classrooms levels. As such the service providers delivered specific district training to improve overall district administrative efficiency. An important added dimension of DDSP was the emphasis on experimenting with a different approach in each of the four provinces, to add to the pool of knowledge on 'best practice'.

In some respects, the accounting mechanisms imposed both by the donor (USAID) and the overall project management organization (RTI) has been the catalyst for a new approach to improvement, one that focused on data utilization. While the KTP initiative in the Kimberly district of the Northern Cape had all the typical activities, i.e. management development, teacher development, district training and so on, it developed an extremely innovative education information management system, which became central to district and school development.

Although other projects have extensive data gathering activities around indicators that range from learner performance to school inputs and administrative systems, what distinguishes the KTP project is the quality of the database at the district office. LCD has established a very powerful database on each and every school in the district with information updated on a regular basis.

Project managers at district office collect, interpret and plan with the data on a regular basis. By tracking the various indicators, the project managers and district officials are able to make strategic decisions about daily priorities. The focusing on data also allows the project to prioritize schools for monitoring and support. A user-friendly indicator system allows district officials to precisely anticipate the level and type of school needs. Schools that demonstrate adequate basic levels or substantial improvement may then receive fewer visits and lower levels of support. Similarly schools that have failed to respond can be prioritized and additional resources focused on these institutions. The reports generated from the database of school-level indicators can assist the district intervention teams to identify the priority activities for the visits. For example, if mathematic scores remain low, this may alter the composition of the teams to visit a particular school. The systematic information utilization also provides important opportunities to give detailed feedback to schools on their improvement record. This is an important part of the accountability system and how schools themselves can identify weaknesses and strengths. Finally, having regular and reliable information on schools also provides the districts with an opportunity to prioritize their work with the schools concerned.

While Harvey (2002) notes the difficulties in establishing and maintaining a high quality data system as a mechanism to track and monitor school improvement, it forms an important tool to change the ways in which district offices do business. The database becomes the focal point of planning, monitoring and ultimately accountability.

District Improvement Programme (DIP) in Benoni/Brakpan: teacher development

The origins of the Department of Education's District Improvement Programme (DIP) can be traced to concerns that the department had with the weaknesses in service delivery at the level of the interface between the provincial departments

and the schools. One of the main instruments that the national department has at its disposal to influence provincial departments is categorical grants. The DIP, which consisted of grants to districts on the basis of approved business plans, was viewed as a mechanism to assist provinces to improve the quality of services at the local level.

Each province was allocated funds for a certain number of districts for the purposes of upgrading the level of services and skills. There was some ambiguity about whether the funds were to be earmarked exclusively for district offices, or offices and schools within the district boundaries. As the programme unfolded into the second funding cycle, changes were made to accommodate provincial priorities.

How did the DIP promote district development? A substantial portion of funds was spent on equipment and consumables such as computers, computer training and other resources that could be relatively easily procured. Notwithstanding the bulk of uncreative projects, a few innovative initiatives demonstrated the ways in which department-driven initiatives could drive district improvement.

One recipient of district development funds in 1999 was the Benoni/Brakpan District of the Gauteng Department of Education. Unlike many other district initiatives, the Benoni/Brakpan District Office chose to focus on improving its capacity to support curriculum policy implementation. Emerging out of the weaknesses in the training of the foundation phase OBE training, the district identified the early reading as a priority to make curriculum reform work (Fleisch, 2000; GDE, 2001). While relatively well resourced, the district had limited expertise in early reading teaching. The strategy that was crafted by the district office then focused on building capacity and expertise in the area through a number of activities. The focus was on teacher development, but included systemic assessment of learners, materials development, the provision of learner support materials and parent literacy. The project was driven by vision, to improve the level of reading competence of foundation phase learners.

To address the weaknesses in the district office capacity, two approaches were developed. The district office used the DIP fund to employ two NGOs that had a good reputation in the field of reading. The district also recognized that with the range of other obligations associated with the rollout of the new curriculum and the maintenance of the old, that the existing number of officials could not cope. As such a group of eighteen foundation phase teachers were seconded into the district office for a six-month period, again with DIP funds. While the project was to be managed by fulltime district education specialists seconded teachers working within the district office took charge of the programme. Care was taken to recruit and select the most competent and experienced foundation phase teachers in the district. Over a six-month period, working closely with the NGOs, the group of seconded teachers developed a district specific approach to early reading. New training materials were developed at the district office based on and aligned to the training materials that were developed during the OBE training.

While the processes of gaining expertise in early reading continued with the group of eighteen, the second stage of the process involved going to scale with the district's approach to early reading. The seconded foundation phase teachers

worked closely at school level with foundation phase teachers, introducing them to new concepts, modelling new approaches to teaching reading, making use of assessment data to identify schools with the greatest needs. Once the project ended, the seconded teachers, who had gained considerable competence and confidence, returned to their own schools but remained important resources for the district office to draw on.

Owing to the district restructuring and discontinuation of District Improvement Programme funding, the Early Reading project never completed the planned three-year cycle. The final assessment of learner reading performance was never conducted. Nevertheless, the project was important for a number of reasons. For the purposes of capacity building, the project deliberately blurred the lines between research and development (R & D) and training. Practitioners were brought in on an equal basis with outside consultants to develop approaches that would respond to local needs and build on local expertise. The emphasis on partnership expertise also allowed what Darling-Hammond (1989) called professional accountability to emerge within teacher groups. The project also demonstrated that capacity existed in schools and that the district could effectively mobilize that capacity. Finally, the use of seconded teachers rather than establishing permanent full-time posts was a creative use of the most valuable of all resources, personnel.

Quality Learning Project (QLP) in De Aar: systemic-theory model

One of the most theoretically sophisticated models to have emerged in South Africa in the past seven years is the Business Trust-supported Quality Learning project. The project was self-consciously designed around a coherent theory of change. At the core of that theory is a notion that improvement in learner achievement, the goal of the programme, can only be realized with substantial changes at all levels of the education system. Clearly, improving the quality of teaching and the subject knowledge of teachers is central. The project also recognized that unless teachers receive adequate support and monitoring and that schools are basically stable institutions, the best programmes to improve teachers' subject knowledge and teaching competence would have limited impact. As such, QLP focused on improving management at school level. Just as changes in teaching practice would be unlikely without regular and substantial support and pressure from school managers, school managers themselves require both capacity building and monitoring to play their role in the chain of improvement. At the top of the process, district offices must:

- provide adequate administrative services to prevent schools becoming distracted by the late delivery of stationery or the non-payment of teachers, and
- monitor school management teams to ensure that they are accountable for school performance.

In the QLP, district development activities were not designed as stand-alone components, but were integral to a wide 'systemic' strategy.

The expected outcomes of the district-level activities provide a good sense

of the underlying theory of accountability and capacity building. The external service providers to districts were tasked with improving the district offices' capacity to plan and manage particularly human resources and finances, to monitor schools, and to develop a repertoire to provide educational support to schools. These broad outcomes were further broken down into specific tasks such as helping districts develop internal organograms, job descriptions, management and budget plans, and plans to improve maths and languages, and put in place education management information systems. Along with these tasks, the NGOs working with districts were required to put in place procedures for the district officials to monitor schools.

School Quality Improvement Project (SQIP) in Empangeni: mentoring superintendents

The School Quality Improvement project (SQIP) emerged out of the weaknesses of Promat, a small-scale school improvement initiative in KZN. Although Promat provided extensive support to schools in various initiatives, little progress was made because of the absence of monitoring and support by the district offices. The service providers recognized that if the district offices did not provide adequate basic services and support schools, no NGO intervention could succeed. On this basis, Promat developed a model to improve the quality of the district offices' services. The focus was dual: to improve the overall efficiency and responsiveness of the district office to routine administrative matters and to train district officials to monitor schools.

The project was divided into two parts, the District Office Development Programme (DODP) and the School Development Programme (SDP). The school component was necessary to ensure that monitoring processes could take place and to fulfil other provincial expectations.

The DODP comprised five components: the development of district job descriptions and performance management systems, workshops on school effectiveness, training in school monitoring, the design of a district strategic plan, and the development of a manual for school systems and procedures. The activities focused on two priorities: making the district office more functional, and training and supporting the superintendents of education management (SEM) to do comprehensive school auditing.

The SDP had three activities: helping schools develop school development plans, the training of SMTs and SGBs, and putting in place quality assurance systems to help schools make sense of the third-, sixth- and ninth-grade assessment results.

Much of the first year of the project was spent doing preparatory activities, such as consultation and ensuring buy-in at all levels, establishing systems in the district offices, and building administrative capacity. Improving the administrative functionality of the district office continued to be a focus in the second year with training on Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), customer care, and putting in place key systems and procedures (e.g. pigeonholes in the district office for schools to ensure effective communication). In the second year,

however, the real focus of the programme was on training SEM to monitor or inspect the schools, what is referred to as school audit training. This training process had six stages:

- consultation with the school principal
- consultation with the school staff
- school audit
- drafting an audit report
- consulting with the school's stakeholder, and
- school development planning.

In one of the SQIP reports (2002) the authors point out that

[T]he audit process is a complex one. It requires the SEMs to engage in five or six school visits. During the visits the SEMs will have to practice various procedures and skills such as collecting evidence on the school's administration and leaderships, pastoral care and quality of teaching and learning offered by the school. The audit procedures and skills cannot be mastered in a once-off workshop. The SEMs will also need ongoing support and coaching while conducting the audits and the post audit activities.

The key principles of project were accountability, legitimacy and self-reliance. The accountability principle included the standard of the services provided by the district office, particularly the administrative services such as appointments and procurement. The audit process was instrumental in rebuilding school accountability. The project also hoped to restore the legitimacy of the district officials through putting in place a systematic, transparent and useful system of auditing, and ensuring that the officials used the system effectively. While it was hoped that the project would facilitate a level of self-reliance, this proved to be far more complex than originally anticipated.

SQIP put in place the preconditions for improvement, without directly stressing classroom improvement itself except where standards could lead to improvement. Much of the programme focuses on rebuilding the district offices and training the superintendents to audit and monitor. While the very act of monitoring can lead to improvement as it focuses the institutions on new standards of practice, without additional capacity building around weaknesses identified in the audit, change tends to be at the most basic level.

Another observation relates to the loose coupling of three types of data in the programme. The district administrative systems improvement would put in place more adequate mechanisms to monitor personnel and procurement in terms of the line function of the administrators in the district office. The auditing process would provide rich data on systems and procedures for both administration and teaching in schools. The learner assessment would provide good information on performance. What is missing is a mechanism to put the three data sets together and make use of them collectively for improvement purposes.

Delta Foundation in the Eastern Cape: restructuring district offices

The Delta Foundation has approached the problem of district development in a fundamentally different way. While most district development initiatives focus on improving systems and capacity building, with recent inclusion of aspects of accountability, the Delta Foundation's recommendations focus on structures and staffing.

Like Promat, the Delta Foundation came to district development from experience in a small-scale school improvement project in the Eastern Cape. While schools began to shift with the support of external service providers, Delta Foundation recognized that large-scale change and institutionalization of change would require district involvement. But unlike Promat, the Delta Foundation believed district offices needed to be fundamentally re-engineered.

At the centre of its recommendation is a call for the establishment of a new support structure situated near to schools. This new structure would comprise a powerful small interdisciplinary team servicing a small cluster of schools supported by a strong district office providing corporate services. To make a meaningful impact on schools, the Delta proposal recommendations included substantial increases in the number of education specialists providing support to schools.

The role of the Delta Foundation was to do the original model and to provide support in terms of an implementation plan, with funding and logistics to be taken on by the department itself.

Soshanguve School Development Planning (SSDP) in Soshanguve: backward mapping

Link Community Development, perhaps more than any other NGO working in the area of district development has meticulously grown a 'model', referred to as the Soshanguve School Development Planning model. The model was originally developed in Soshanguve, and refined and disseminated under DDSP in the Kimberley District of the Northern Cape and in districts in Ghana and Uganda.

At the heart of the SSDP district development model is an integrated planning process in which districts begin to plan around school needs. In the most recent version of the SSDP model as implemented in Kimberley, the process begins at the district level, where the district office identifies its capacities and translates them into a delivery statement. Each unit of the district office lists the types of activities that they could deliver to schools to assist them to improve. As the district officials work through the development of these delivery statements, they begin to reconceptualize their relationship to the schools.

Armed with the delivery statements and training provided by the LCD, the district officials begin to support schools in development planning. A specific framework is used to ensure that the schools do not focus on resource but genuinely engage with the real issues of the school. Once the SDP is completed, a copy is forwarded to the district office. At the district office, teams review the plans and return them with comments for further refinement. The district office then analyses what schools have identified as their service needs, and begin to plan according to the priorities. Rigorous planning tools are used to ensure that

what is required is what is delivered. The outcome of this cycle in the process is a district plan.

The district planning documents become the basis for all activities in the district office. Just as schools have identified their own priorities, so does the district office. On completion of the district plan, it is forwarded to the provincial head office to indicate the types of support the district office will be requiring.

Prew (2002b) suggests that this 'backward mapping' approach in which the entire planning process for the province is grounded in school needs has begun to shift the values and style of the provincial department. Head office officials have begun to understand that their role is to respond to districts, rather than the other way around. It has also influenced the structure of the organizations as districts increasingly found it necessary to reorganize to meet the actual needs of the school.

Learning Lessons

Coherence, both internal and external, vertical and horizontal

One of the central arguments that has been made in recent years in the literature on educational change is that systemic improvement is only possible when instruments of change, i.e. policies or programmes, cohere or align. Advocates of notions of coherence argue, for instance, that to get substantial gains in learner achievement across an entire education system, it is essential to align policy/and or programmes such as teacher development, curriculum frameworks, assessment procedures and standards, and learning support materials toward a specific target (Cohen and Spillane, 1993). While disagreement has emerged over whether alignment at a policy level will automatically be experienced at school level (Clune, 1993), the notion of coherence has gained wide currency. De Clercq (2002b) has introduced a useful distinction between vertical and horizontal coherence, with vertical coherence focusing on the issues of governance and management, and horizontal coherence on curriculum and instruction.

For our purposes it is important to recognize that for district development programmes to be successful, they must pay attention to both vertical and horizontal alignment. Questions like, 'are the programmes aligned to major provincial policy or organizational developments such as bureaucratic restructuring?' can reveal a great deal about why an initiative is successful. However, alignment in and of itself is no guarantor of success, as a recent event around whole school evaluation and school auditing in the SQIP programme has revealed. In that case, the project had to consciously distance itself from the official state policy in order to ensure 'buy-in' at school level. The QLP self-consciously designed its model around a strong vertical alignment, focusing on all levels of the change process. However, it is important to note that the activities at district level have only indirect bearing on the targets of improving maths and language results. Put another way, the district and to some extent the school management activities, are the necessary conditions for improvement in marks, but are not directly focused on them.

Fit between context and model

A standard critique of education improvement projects, whether school- or district-focused, is that the outside service providers, whether state or NGO driven, come with a single intervention strategy that is designed for all schools and all districts. While lip service is paid to adapting the project to local circumstances or needs, the reality is that most service providers simply do not have the time or the capacity to develop a thorough analysis of each site, and then develop a customized solution. What this means is that the attempt to deal with the specificity of each site tends to be superficial.

There is, however, a deeper issue around the 'one-size-fits-all' problem that relates to making judgements about the particular developmental needs of a school or district. While each institution is unique, it is clear that, given common histories and contexts, institutions cluster around key variables. As such, common types of interventions would be appropriate. For example, Slavin (1998) and Hopkins (1998) have identified three types of schools, namely 'profoundly dysfunctional', 'functioning but low performance', and 'good'. Scholars tend to agree that specific types of interventions work best for specific types of schools. Profoundly dysfunctional schools require either closure or a highly intensive and directive intervention. Schools that have the appearance of stability, but are not providing the kind of ambitious learning outcomes envisaged, may require structured curriculum and pedagogy support.

If we stretch the analogy, then we would suggest that, depending on the nature of the problems in a district, specific types of interventions are required. In the United States, for example, courts have ordered state education departments to take over school districts where the districts have failed to fulfil their constitutional mandates. While this may be appropriate action only in a small number of cases and only after remedial actions have failed, it does point to one particular type of approach. Closer to home, it has been pointed out that the district development models that are driven by an education management information system may only be effective where a basic level of capacity and functionality has been achieved. In the SQIP project, the model of training superintendents worked well in Empangeni and Eshwe, but has been less successful in Pongola. Like remote districts in the Eastern Cape, the district office struggled to recruit experienced staff and continues to run under capacity. Until underlying problems are resolved, the model of training of superintendents in school auditing is likely to fail.

Partnership: external-driven or internal-driven

Although the donor-funded, externally-managed programmes included in this chapter tend to pay a great deal of attention to participant 'buy-in', the problem of ownership remains. Experience suggests that district officials tended to distance themselves from outside interventions. What generally seems to occur is that the projects are announced by provincial governments as part of agreements between funders and provincial departments. Head office officials make decisions about which project will be assigned to a region or district. District officials are

merely informed about the assignment of a project. Although service providers encourage district officials to identify their own development needs, government officials often perceive external service providers as an extra burden on their already heavy work load, or at best, extra capacity that can relieve them of some of their responsibilities. There is little sense that the district development project is 'their' project, and that they must conceptualize it, develop plans for it, take charge of implementation and are ultimately accountable for its success or failure. In the cases of projects that have overcome this problem, they have done so by the force of their presence, i.e. by being located in the district offices on a full-time basis.

Internally-driven projects by definition do not face this specific problem. However, they face another equally vexing problem. As the Benoni/Brakpan project shows (confirmed in Spillane and Thompson, 1997), internally-driven projects require a high level of both human and social capital to start with. District officials need to be prepared to take risks and need to have social links within and outside the district in order to be effective.

Using data to drive improvement

Projects like DDSP and QLP are beginning to use data to drive improvement practices. However, overall the use of data for improvement purposes has a long way to go in district improvement projects. The underlying question is how does using data lead to improvement? We can conceive of it in at least two different ways. First, data helps service providers and helps districts and schools identify gaps, weaknesses or problems that had previously been missed in self-assessment exercises. It can help them plan more strategically and monitor change.

For example, the analysis of pass rates in one of the DIP projects (GDE, 2001), supported by other research (Simkins, 2002) showed that weak achievement in specific school subjects can explain aggregate underachievement of schools. Poor subject knowledge and inadequate pedagogic content knowledge need to be addressed in their own right. This kind of data interpretation has allowed for the development of targeted interventions with high, short-term impact, as in the case of the Maths Centre's mathematics strategy in De Aar.

Data can also be used for accountability purposes. In the literature on performance-based accountability (Fuhrman, 1999), the use of data for improvement via accountability works because results help schools and districts to focus attention, set goals to be achieved, and in some cases become part of a system of rewards and sanctions.

For data to be effective as an instrument of change, however, it must saturate schools or districts. Unfortunately, save for the matric examination results, there is little practice or achievement data available that has become part of daily practice. While information on classroom practice is useful, it lacks the gravity and immediacy of learner test scores. Initiatives to increase the range of learner achievement data from third-, sixth- and ninth-grade system assessments will begin to address this problem so long as that information provides insights into aggregate classroom level and school-level performance. Notwithstanding its

centrality in overall district and school improvement, data-driven improvement initiatives that rely on standardized systemic assessment results contain their own sets of dangers.

While effective use of data for efficient resource planning and for accountability has been recognized, the challenge is how to institutionalize the practices. As Harvey (2002) notes, future district capacity building agendas must strongly integrate training in the use of database systems. Historically, much of this capacity has been defined as a head office function, with most of the capacity having gone to EMIS units in provincial offices.

Combining pressure and support

Thinking about educational development has been moved forward substantially by the recognition that institutional change, i.e. improvement in teachers' practice and learner achievement requires more than additional resources, capacity building, empowerment or restructuring. Support or capacity building only works in conjunction with pressure or accountability. While high stakes accountability in the form of threats to close schools seems to have only limited impact (Mintrop, 2002), other accountability practices have shown themselves to be successful (Elmore and Fuhrman, 2001).

At the core of the idea of pressure and support is the theory that organizations are by nature conservative or averse to change. Merely providing additional resources or capacity does not alter the underlying culture of the organization, as it merely adjusts to or accommodates external threats. Without concerted external expectation of change, without clear targets or outcomes to be achieved, and without rewards and sanctions associated with the achievement of these targets, institutions seldom sustain change. If districts are provided with (a) adequate resources to change; and (b) clear and realistic targets to be achieved; followed by (c) sanctions if they do not achieve the targets without a reasonable explanation; or (d) meaningful rewards if they do, then change is more likely.

At the most superficial level, the idea of pressure and support can be used as a gauge to judge projects. Have they incorporated in some form or other both pressure and support, or accountability and capacity building? For understandable reasons in the recent past, the emphasis had been on capacity building and empowerment in most improvement initiatives. This seems true of the district development projects. However, some have attempted to move cautiously to build in some aspect of accountability. In particular, QLP has conceived of the assessment of performance as part of the accountability process. However, two problems remain. First the assessment is not rapid enough with feedback going to the participants who are supposed to account for change, i.e. the district offices and the schools. Second, there are only weak systems of rewards and no sanctions.

A complicating factor is that the external providers are structurally unable to hold either the district or the school to account. They are the external supplier, not the employer, and as such lack the legal authority to back hard accountability.

What kind of pressure/accountability and how does it work?

What types of accountability work? We can talk about at least two forms, performance-based accountability and the older forms of bureaucratic accountability (Darling-Hammond, 1989). During the past decade, performance-based accountability has emerged as the dominant form. In essence, systems are measured by how well learners perform on systemic assessment. This kind of accountability has a number of advantages. First and most basic, it measures the system on the basis of what is core learner achievement. It forces a focus on that which matters the most. In the South African context, with the history of the matriculation results with its high stakes consequences for learners, all stakeholders are familiar and accept the legitimacy of principle of performance-based accountability.

The problem with performance-based accountability for system-wide improvement is that it requires high quality systemic testing across all phases on an annual basis. The process of building a culture of systemic assessment is still in its infancy and if the Ontario experience is anything to go by, where no expense was spared in a high capacity assessment system, it takes five or more years for people to come to accept the results both at system level, institutional level, as well as at an individual level. The other obvious concern has to do with perverse incentives. We have seen this very clearly in the South African Education Action Zones (EAZ) study, where schools use exclusionary practices to boost results (Fleisch, 2002).

The alternative to performance accountability is bureaucratic accountability. This is associated with the traditions of inspection and bureaucratic rule compliance. This approach has come in for considerable criticism. However in recent years there is a growing reconsideration of the role of inspection. While it is very costly and requires high levels of trust, both of which are in short supply in South Africa, it has an unintended positive consequence that may be central for district improvement projects. Why do school inspections, auditing or whole-school evaluation work? The reasons are counter-intuitive. High quality inspection, with adequate follow-up is in fact a form of capacity-building. This is an important lesson learned from those projects that have worked hard at developing districts' capacities to audit, inspect or evaluate schools.

O'Day and Smith (1993) have suggested that well developed standards for inputs, practices and performance as part of a system of accountability work in three ways. The standards, once well understood and publicized with audits of organizations against those standards, would lead to (a) self-generated improvement, (b) external pressure for improvement, and (c) hard accountability in terms of rewards and sanctions. Just having clear sets of standards that organizations are measured against is perhaps the most powerful force for change. In the cases where schools or districts fail to meet the standards, pressure from parents or other stakeholders often comes into play either directly through governing bodies or through parent choice. Finally, improvement through accountability against standards can work through traditional bureaucratic sanctions such as review of employment contracts.

What kind of support? What theory of learning?

This leads into the theories of learning implicit in the district development projects. The notion of capacity building needs to be unpacked. In general we can see three conceptions of capacity building in district development projects: (a) capacity building as empowerment, (b) capacity building as transmission of knowledge and skills, and (c) capacity building as learning. The first assumes that the fundamental institutional problem is authoritarianism, and thus through processes of empowerment, capacity will be built through self-actualization. The second concept of capacity building as a process of transmission is exemplified in the approach to curriculum training. This approach assumes that a discrete body of knowledge exists that can be simply transferred from one person to another. The final notion of capacity building as learning assumes that the learning process involves a learner moving through a zone of development from novice to expert. This process requires the novice to have access to extensive scaffolding in the form of modelling of new practice, collaborative work with an expert, opportunities to practice under the supervision of an expert, gradually leading to full responsibility as the novice becomes more competent and confident.

Many of the best district development projects have begun to move toward the third model of capacity building. This particular model is particularly appropriate for the development of capacity to undertake school audits/evaluations. While the third conception of capacity building is likely to have the greatest impact, it is also the most expensive.

The dilemma of the service provider

Reflecting on the lessons of district development, it would be remiss to ignore the problems with the NGO providers sector. As the demand for improved delivery gathers momentum, so has the demand on NGOs to become service providers on a mass scale. To fit into pre-existing programmes with tight timeframes, NGOs are forced to expand without having time to do adequate training of new staff, or time to test new materials and training approaches.

In Prew's view (2002b) NGOs cannot and should not be at the core of the delivery process. He believes that as a sector it has contracted dramatically since 1994, and as such can and should primarily involve itself in innovation. Graham-Jolly and Peacock (2000) point to another more serious paradox associated with NGOs' work. In the Thousand Schools Project (TSP) that was to be the flagship of large-scale, school-by-school improvement projects in South Africa, it was found that NGOs that were contracted to provide services were reluctant to invest heavily in research and development for each and every new assignment. As a result, the NGOs' services tended to draw on the basket of activities and materials that had been previously used in other projects. This ad hoc arrangement undermined the overall coherence of the new project, particularly as it was experienced at institutional level.

Hatch (2000) has identified an additional organizational paradox associated with NGO innovations. While few stakeholders or individuals within organization are satisfied with levels of functionality, the risks associated with high-end

innovations are often too great. These innovations create unsatisfactory levels of uncertainty in environments characterized as unpredictable. He argues that the solution must be a middle ground between preserving existing practices and radical organizational change.

Strategy, structure, systems, staffing, skills, or shared values: defining the problem?

Perhaps one of the most important lessons that has been learned from various district development initiatives is each has chosen to define the problem of district development in their own way. Using McKinsey's Seven Ss as a tool we can make sense of the relationship between the definition of the problem and the set of chosen activities. For example, the SEED project defined the problem in terms of organizational values and style and in so doing focused its attention on building a learning organization and democratic management practices. SQIP focused on systems and skills. Delta Foundation has focused on structure and staffing, DDSP on systems and skills. What makes the SSDP project significant is that it focused on strategy. Integrated development planning shifted the 'strategy' of the district office from fulfilling head office instructions to responding to schools' service needs.

Conclusion

The descriptions of district development programme models in relationship to the literature on effective change suggest that there is a gap between knowledge of best practice and current project designs. While some projects are clearly showing the way forward, we cannot say much about whether programme models actually work (i.e. improve schools or increase learner achievement) or which programme models work better than their alternatives. In addition to reliable and valid findings about the effects of these programme models we also need to know more about efficacy of replication. Often models work when implemented by their designers, but fail when they go to scale. Finally, information on effects and replication is not in and of itself enough – we need to know a great deal about programme model costs and cost-effectiveness (Levin and McEwan, 2001). In many instances the actual costs of programmes are not known. We also need to understand the tradeoffs between different kinds of interventions to improve districts such as restructuring, increasing the numbers of staff, and improving training and infrastructure.

Note

- 1 The Business Trust commissioned this discussion paper for the District Development Seminar, Development Bank of Southern Africa, 25 July 2002.

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The Challenge of Systemic Change in Complex Educational Systems

A District Model to Scale Up Reform¹

Janet H. Chrispeels and Margarita González

The history and focus of policy and resources for school improvement in the United States has been and continues to be the individual school. At the federal level, the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) programme and Title I funding for disadvantaged schools are primary policy drivers for school change. CSR/D funding serves as a strong impetus ('policy inducement' in the words of McDonnell and Elmore, 1987) for school improvement, by providing financial support to schools across the country to adopt externally developed school improvement models such as Success for All, Accelerated Schools, Comer School Development model and Core Knowledge. Support for these external models represents a significant effort to 'scale up' the process of reform, and many schools have used the models to bring about increased levels of student performance and achievement (Datnow, 2004). The underlying premises of these programmes are that the school is the unit of change and teachers are the primary actors. By targeting and resourcing individual schools, however, school improvement efforts often leave policies, procedures and practices untouched at the district level, which eventually affect the depth of change and its sustainability over time. Schools can find their reform efforts undermined by loss of funds, adoption of new standards and accountability procedures that may be at odds with improvement model goals and turnover of personnel at school or district level (Bodilly, 2001).

More recently, researchers have begun to examine the district context of school improvement and the work of reforming districts (Elmore and Burney, 1997; Hightower *et al.*, 2002; Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy, 2003; Togneri and

Anderson, 2003). Districts find themselves in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, district decision-making is constrained by state and federal policy initiatives that are extending and expanding their reach well beyond three traditional areas of regulations: content standards, state-wide assessments and teacher preparation and licensure, to now include setting of achievement targets, drastically limiting textbook options and other curriculum materials and mandating specific professional development for teachers and administrators (Blank and Langesen, 1999). On the other hand, districts are for the first time being held responsible for the performance of individual schools and can be labelled as failing under a new federal law, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). NCLB is impacting on all levels of the US school system, mandating that states, districts and schools close the existing achievement gaps between Anglo and disadvantaged students (e.g. low-income, minority ethnic groups).

Studies of district reform in challenging settings suggest that a systemic approach can be highly effective in improving student learning. For example, in their study of five high poverty school districts that boosted student performance, Togneri and Anderson (2003) identified seven actions that they found accounted for the improvement. High-performing districts:

- acknowledged poor performance and demonstrated willingness to seek solutions
- put in place a system-wide approach to improving instruction – one that articulated curricular content and provided instructional supports
- instilled visions that focused on student learning and guided instructional improvements
- made decisions based on data
- adopted new approaches to professional development that involved a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction
- redefined leadership roles, and
- committed to sustaining reform over the long haul.

Although the above list is useful, in contrast to the school improvement field, there are few tested or researched models of district reform that districts might use as guides for systemic change. This chapter explores the initial efforts of one district in partnership with a local university to design and implement an explicit model of systemic change at multiple levels of the system. The chapter briefly presents the conceptual frameworks that guided the reform design, a multi-level model for system change; presents the context and methods; describes how progress was assessed; summarizes key findings in terms of how the model helped to scale up the reform districtwide; and shares lessons learned about the theory and implications of scaling up reform.

Conceptual Foundations of a District Reform Model Based on Effective Schools Processes

In developing the Effective Schools (ES) district reform model presented in this case study, three conceptual frameworks guided the design: a systemic perspective, a socio-cultural perspective of learning and professional development and concepts of social and human capital development (Chrispeels, 2002). We suggest that these frameworks collectively represent processes, procedures and ways of thinking that are needed to scale-up reform. Coburn (2003) argues that scale-up has been undertheorized and as a consequence its multidimensional facets have not been adequately addressed in conceptualizing most reforms. She identifies four interrelated dimensions for scaling improvement efforts from 'external' to 'internal' reform actors through depth, sustainability, spread and shift in reform ownership. By *depth*, Coburn implies 'deep changes' into the system to alter teachers' beliefs, norms of social interaction and pedagogical principles. *Sustainability* implies building the schools' and districts' capacity to self-generate the necessary resources that will enable them to sustain their reform efforts over time. *Spread* includes expanding beliefs, norms and principles to additional classrooms and schools. *Shift in ownership* means to transfer the authority and responsibility of the reform from external to internal actors in the district, schools and classrooms. This case study helps to illuminate these dimensions of scale in practice, highlights the importance of a systemic perspective to achieving scale, and illustrates how professional development approaches that engage participants in sustained joint work may build the social and human capital needed to take reforms to scale.

A systemic perspective

Research suggests that a systems approach to reform is key to creating lasting change since schools operate as living systems, in complex and dynamic webs where changes to one part affect another (Chrispeels and Pollack, 1989; Senge *et al.*, 2000). For this project, the ES correlates were seen as the beginning of a systemic and comprehensive frame for district development (Chrispeels, 2002). The correlates represent processes of school effectiveness (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000) that can be applied equally well at a systems level. They encompass the system's need for clear purpose with a primary goal that focuses on teaching for learning and maintaining high expectations for all students. The importance of the role of leadership for achieving effectiveness and pursuing a goal focus is identified as well as conditions essential for high levels of learning (e.g. safe and orderly learning environment and opportunity to learn/time-on-task), and practices supportive of change (e.g. frequent monitoring of student progress and home-school relations) (Chrispeels, 2002: 18).

In a systemic approach, the nature and level of change is also taken into account. If we want to scale up reform and reach many more schools that are in need of reform, change has to be enacted simultaneously at multiple levels of schooling: district, school, classroom, students and community. Systemic

reform requires the development of shared beliefs and a whole system perspective by all members of the community (Senge, 1990). Many researchers argue that such perspectives are best developed through distributing leadership and engaging multiple shareholders in decision-making (Cheng, 1997). Systemic reform thus implies a shift in the way leadership is traditionally conceptualized, from a top-down single leader model to one of distributed or collaborative leadership (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2000; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001; Camburn, Rowan and Taylor, 2003; Daly and Chrispeels, 2005).

Several studies have shown that distributing leadership throughout the system enhances potential for leaders at classroom, grade or department, school and district levels to mobilize knowledge and co-ordinate comprehensive and coherent changes that are needed to improve instruction and increase rates of student achievement (Arhar, 1997; Cotton, 2001; Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, 2001; Rottier, 2002; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2003; Chrispeels, 2004). The systemic ES reform model that engages all levels of the system (central office, schools, grade level and classroom) outlined in this case study also draws on a socio-cultural perspective of professional development as a conceptual frame and strategy to enhance capacity, distribute leadership and enhance scalability of the reform.

A socio-cultural perspective of professional development

Researchers and practitioners have made considerable advances in understanding how children learn and the pedagogical approaches that will enable high levels of learning by students (Dalton, 1998). Unfortunately, new research on learning and children's development often does not enter the classroom door. One possible explanation is that professional development in districts is menu driven and is influenced by district policies that may have little to do with pedagogy (Hillard, 1997). Districts are moving beyond one-time workshop formats, but much professional development does not allow time for site-embedded teacher collaboration, follow-up and peer observations to see new approaches and strategies tested in the classroom – all of which are key components for deepening the scale of reform (Coburn, 2003; Shiu and Chrispeels, 2004). School and district structures and allocations of time often preclude opportunities for collaborative approaches needed to affect the deep structure of teaching and build teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, although some districts and schools hire reading or maths coaches to support teacher development, much of a coach's work is conducted one-on-one with a teacher in her classroom, thus limiting the potential for rich facilitated collaborative learning that could spread reform.

The theory of action that supported the design of the ES district reform model was a socio-cultural perspective of professional development designed to mirror excellent classroom pedagogical practices (Rueda, 1998). Research on teacher learning suggests that professional development should recognize the social nature of learning and the need for participative communities of learn-

Table 10.1 Summary of professional development principles and programme design

<i>Professional development principle</i>	<i>Implementation design</i>
1. Facilitate learning and professional development through joint productive activity among leaders and participants	1a. Establish a Leadership Academy that collectively engages all administrators in learning and working together on district issues 1b. Establish grade-level teams where novice and expert teachers collaboratively produce lessons and units and solve common problems 1c. Establish leadership teams that engage in projects that unite the school around a common task or theme
2. Promote learners' expertise in professionally relevant discourse and engage participants through dialogues, especially instructional conversations	2a. Create district administrative, school leadership teams and grade-level teams as situated sites for professional learning and dialogue through collectively reading and exploring educational research 2b. Stay focused on a content area for sufficient time to ensure learning and use student data to guide discussions
3. Contextualize teaching, learning and joint productive activity in the experiences and skills of participants	3a. Create structures and opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn together across shared contexts and over a sustained period of time 3b. Encourage and facilitate the sharing of teacher and administrative knowledge in a coexpertise model during district, school leadership and grade-level team meetings
4. Challenge participants toward more complex solutions in addressing problems	4a. Create opportunities for double-loop learning by examining core values and beliefs, not just the presenting problem 4b. Revisit problems of implementation through ongoing discussions and reviews of student work

ing (Lieberman, 2000; Huang, 2002). Table 10.1 summarizes the professional development principles and illustrates how they were applied to the ES district reform.

Developing social and human capital

Sarason (1990) argues that reforms will continue to fail unless fundamental relations are altered between teachers and administrators, among teachers, and between teachers and students. Establishing structures and practices that draw teachers out of their classrooms and into collaborative networks with other teachers and with administrators can help build social and intellectual capital (Chrispeels, 2002; Shiu and Chrispeels, 2004). Teachers need opportunities within their own

school, across the district, and in professional associations and networks outside the district to broaden and deepen their content knowledge and pedagogical expertise (Guskey, 2003; Morris, Chrispeels and Burke, 2003). According to a review by Dika and Singh (2002), social capital is generally conceptualized in two ways. Coleman draws on structural-functional roots to look at relationships and norms and defines social capital by the presence of three components:

- trusting relations among members
- enhanced social networks that engender interdependent relationships, and
- shared norms and expectations with sanctions (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995).

In contrast, Bourdieu's 'conceptualization is grounded in theories of social reproduction and symbolic power' (Dika and Singh, 2002: 32–3), which highlights access to institutional resources. Both theoretical strands are relevant for the ES district reform model. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social capital in terms of access to important institutional resources that might affect social reproduction patterns is critical to the eventual outcomes of the ES district reform model. A critical question is, when

social capital among teachers and the district schools is enhanced, do students have greater access to needed institutional resources (e.g. better prepared teachers able to provide high quality lessons) so that the achievement gap diminishes significantly and low income students have opportunities to alter the existing distribution of power resources?

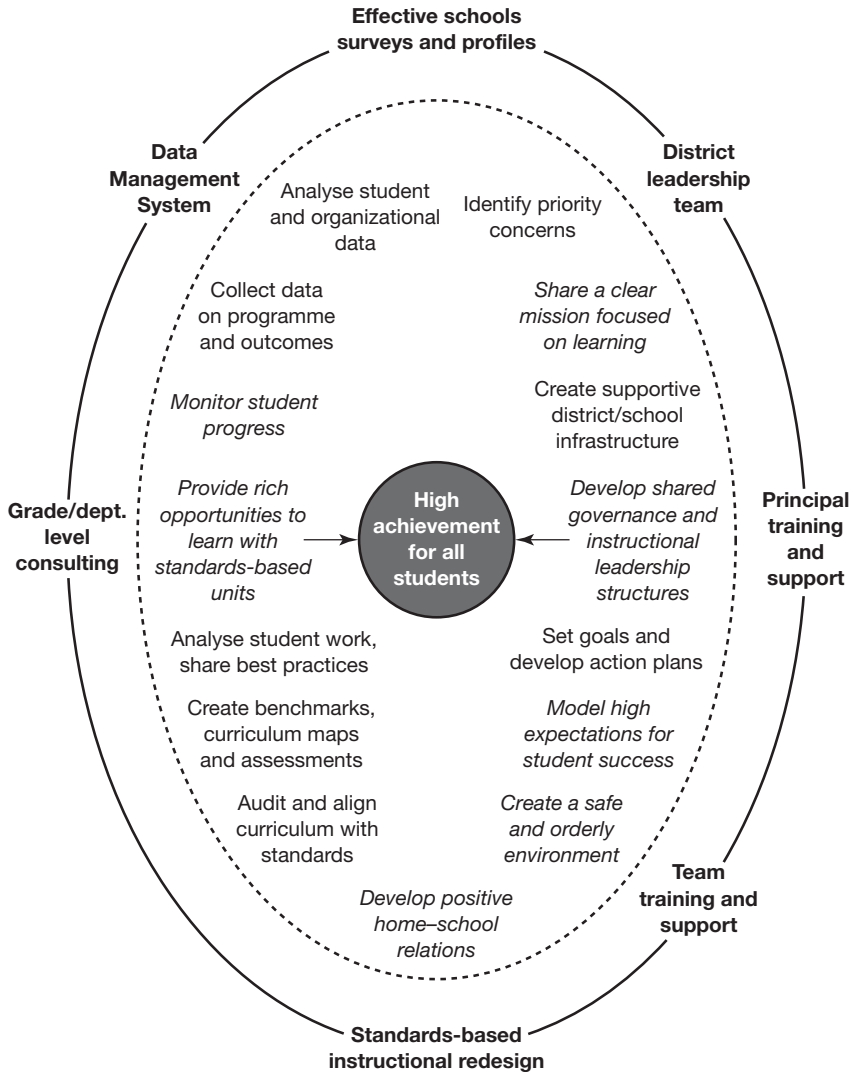
(Chrispeels, 2002: 22)

Thus, a major challenge for district level reform is to ensure that all schools have sufficient resources initially and develop the capacity to become self-generating in ways that sustain and deepen the reform and prevent the reproduction and return to past practices that led to student underperformance.

What follows is a description of the district ES reform model based on the conceptual frameworks and the initiatives that were implemented at each level of the system. After that, the case context and methods are described. We use Coburn's (2003) four dimensions of scale to present the findings from the case, and then close with some suggestions for additions and refinements of the dimensions based on their application to this case.

A Multi-level Model for District Systemic Reform

The university and district staff codeveloped a model of systemic reform shown in Figure 10.1. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks and design principles described above, the intent was to simultaneously engage all levels of the system in the reform process: district, school and grade/classroom levels. The university



Words in italics = effective schools correlates

Figure 10.1 Model of a districtwide effective schools process showing district and school tasks

guided the work reflected in the outer circle (e.g. assisting with surveys and data analysis, working with the district leadership, providing professional development for site administrators and leadership teams, guiding the curriculum alignment process and grade-level meetings). The schools and districts focused on the work in the inner ring. The dotted line indicates the fluidity of the process.

District-level work

Over the three years of the partnership, the university and district staff collaborated to bring about changes in four key system-wide areas:

- aligning the curriculum
- setting instructional foci that included improving reading comprehension and writing and meeting the needs of English learners
- developing a leadership academy for all administrators, and
- increasing the accessibility and use of data, especially district and state assessment results to determine areas for improvement.

Aligning the curriculum to state standards

The alignment of the district's language arts and mathematics curricula to the relatively new state curriculum content standard began in August 2000. Over 80 teachers from every school in the district, with guidance from two outside consultants and district staff, worked for a week to develop language arts performance indicators (benchmarks) and curriculum maps at each grade level. The process was repeated in January 2001 with another group of 80 teachers who aligned the mathematics curriculum. This process ensured that there were teachers at every school who now had knowledge about the standards. At least a cadre of teachers had moved from unknown and uncharted territory to the new world of standards with a map to follow. As will be discussed below, those schools that were also participating in the grade-level meeting component were able to take greater advantage of these 'local experts'.

Setting districtwide instructional foci

During the three years of the project, the district made a commitment to focus system-wide on three important curricular areas: reading comprehension, writing and English language development (ELD). Although the district had an extensive menu of workshops and training programmes for teachers, it also had a tradition of providing system-wide professional development as well. In 1996, it implemented a programme called Accelerated Literacy, providing training for all teachers in strategies for teaching reading with trade books, an approach in alignment with the state's curriculum frameworks at that time. This same year, the district also partnered with the local university's maths department to implement Project Prime, designed to enhance teachers' mathematics content knowledge. Teacher leaders at each site received 125 hours of professional development and were expected to then train other teachers to implement the California Math Framework. To address the foci on reading comprehension and writing, internal expertise and study group ideas (Murphy, 1991) were used with the leadership academy, during leadership team seminars and at grade-level meetings.

Administrative Leadership Academy

To enhance the capacity of administrators, in the second year of the partnerships, the university and a small committee of principals, assistant principals and

the assistant superintendent developed a leadership academy. Through a needs assessment, principals identified two foci for their professional development: implementing the new teacher evaluation system and supporting the districts' instructional foci on reading comprehension and English learners at their school sites. The planning committee took a systemic perspective, scheduling the academy sessions after school so all principals, assistant principals and district staff could attend. These sessions replaced two of the four monthly management meetings. The planning committee also utilized both internal and external experts and carefully designed learning activities that applied socio-cultural professional development concepts such as viewing videos of teachers and collaboratively analysing the video and applying the new evaluation criteria to enhance inter-rater reliability. The committee realized that if principals and assistant principals were to be effective instructional leaders, they needed opportunities to develop social and human capital through a thematic approach with built-in opportunities to revisit and practice key concepts with colleagues. Previously the primary professional development for administrators had been 'one-time presentations' offered by a county office of education. Although these presentations featured national and internationally known speakers, they were not necessarily tied to district and school needs, and no time was allowed to implement new knowledge and practice skills, or revisit ideas.

Increasing the accessibility and use of data to guide improvement

A final area of focus was to develop a data management system that would allow schools and classroom teachers better access to existing state student achievement and demographic data as well as district- and school-level student attendance and achievement data. Through ES surveys developed by the Association for Effective Schools, the district and schools would also have access to important perceptual data from all school staff as well as parents and students in regard to the ES correlates.

This system-level work provided direction, guidance and resources for all district schools. Given the limited partnership resources for the ES initiative, it was mutually agreed to use a phased-in approach in conducting the school- and grade-level work beginning with the elementary schools.

School-level work

At the school level, teacher/administrator leadership teams were formed and professional development offered. In the first year, seven of the lowest performing elementary schools (this number expanded to 10 of the 15 elementary schools in the second year of the project) participated in six day-long seminars spread throughout the school year. Although some schools had a leadership group with whom the principal met, this was not a practice in most of the schools prior to the project, and none of the leadership teams had previously received any professional development. The seminars encouraged teachers and principals to forge new relationships, collaboratively question long-standing practices, and plan how to lead their schools. The university took the lead in organizing the seminars;

however, seminars frequently involved district and teacher leaders who led key components. The design of the seminars applied the socio-cultural frame and focused on three main areas including the ES correlates (e.g. monitoring student progress, school climate and culture, high expectations, use of time and opportunity to learn, home-school relations, clear and focused goals) and team building and district instructional focus areas. Each session actively engaged participants in learning and practicing skills so that they would be able to guide colleagues on schoolwide issues as well as in grade-level meetings.

At the grade and classroom level

The purpose of the facilitated grade-level meeting component of the model was to enhance the collaborative culture of the participating schools. Collectively teachers looked at student work, read and studied research, shared their expertise and planned instructional strategies and units aligned to standards. The schools participating in leadership team seminars were provided with roving substitutes to release teachers weekly or bi-monthly to meet in grade-level teams. A guest teacher programme was designed to recruit and train the cadre of substitutes who covered the teachers' classes while they attended the meetings. Lesson plans were developed by district staff to support classroom instructional continuity. An unintended consequence was that these substitutes were frequently hired as classroom teachers, which by Year 3 of the reform work, led to a substantial decrease in the number of uncertified teachers in the district.

The Orchard Case Study

District context

Orchard School District (pseudonym) has many challenges. It is located on the central California coast with 16 K-6 elementary and three intermediate schools spanning grades 7-8 serving approximately 16,000 students. The district's student population has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, particularly its proportion of low-income and Latino students whose families work predominantly as fieldworkers, in related agricultural sectors, or in low-wage service and tourist industry jobs. The rapid growth in the district has resulted in large schools, 700-1,300 students, which operate on a multi-track year-round schedule. This means neither all staff nor students are ever at school at the same time, which make professional development and grade-level or department collaboration challenging.

Two-thirds of the schools have 80-99 per cent Latino students and approximately half of the district's students need English language instruction. A bilingual programme operates in the first three years of schooling with a transition to English-only instruction now beginning by third grade. When the ES reform was launched, the district's student achievement results were among the lowest in the region, even when compared to districts and schools serving similar student populations. Table 10.2 displays key district and schools demographic data for the 10 elementary schools that were extensively involved in the reform

Table 10.2 Demographics of participating and non-participating schools (2000–1)

School	Enrolment	Ethnicity		Language		Low SES
		Latino %	White %	EL %	EF %	
District	16,249	81	11	49	51	71
<i>Participating schools</i>						
School 1	756	91	4	67	33	78
School 2	840	97	1	72	28	91
School 3	814	84	10	50	50	63
School 4	1,044	92	3	65	35	82
School 5	616	84	7	55	45	86
School 6	781	96	2	58	42	84
School 7	559	93	3	65	35	78
School 8	813	96	2	59	41	86
School 9	681	99	1	80	20	92
School 10	1,140	84	10	55	45	77
<i>Non-participating schools</i>						
School 11	886	82	5	57	43	82
School 12	1,032	73	17	35	65	63
School 13	1,163	60	29	29	71	52
School 14	1,099	49	34	10	90	30
School 15	845	81	11	47	53	71

EL – English learners, EF – English fluent

and for five that did not participate in the leadership team seminars and facilitated grade-level meetings.

In 1998, under the leadership of a new superintendent (not new to the district, he had previously served as Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services), Orchard's board of education, teachers, central office and community engaged in a strategic planning process. In 1999, when the university approached the district about developing and testing a model of districtwide reform based on ES research, the board and superintendent agreed because they saw the close alignment between the goals in the strategic plan and the processes proposed in the ES district reform model.

Data collection

We collected a variety of data over the three years to understand how these multi-level initiatives influenced district practices and student outcomes. The phased-in nature of the project at the school and class level created a naturally occurring experiment within the district context. This 'quasi-experiment' allowed us to assess how the layers of intervention contributed to the achievement within the context of systemic reform. The design recognizes that schools are important units of change and their needs will vary over time, and that attention at the district level to certain variables such as curriculum, data management and administrative professional development may speed the process of reform at the school level.

As shown in the demographic data presented in Table 10.2, the original seven participating schools (1, 2, 5, 7–10) in Year 1 were the lowest performing in the district, had the largest percentage of English learners and the lowest socio-economic status (SES). In Year 2, three other schools voted to join the project (3, 4 and 6). Although all schools benefited from the district-level work (e.g. they had teacher *experts* who participated in the curriculum alignment work, they received the curriculum maps, their administrators participated in the leadership academy, and they participated in district organized professional development around the instructional foci), five other elementary schools (11–15 in Table 10.2), did not participate in the leadership team training and did not have facilitators for grade-level meetings. For the sake of this study, we called these school the non-participating schools.

Student achievement data

We used data from California's state testing system to track student progress. In particular, we charted the growth of the schools as measured by the Academic Performance Index (API). Each year schools were given a growth target by the California State Department of Education accountability system and expected to meet it. Although not a perfect measure, the API reflects the school's efforts to improve student achievement.

Survey instruments

We used three surveys to collect perceptual data. For the schools participating in the initiative most intensively, staff were asked to complete an ES survey developed by the Association for Effective Schools, which measured perceptions of the presence of seven ES correlates. For the original seven schools, this survey was completed in 2000 and in 2002. At the end of the first year, staff in all elementary schools completed a Professional Culture survey. This survey, developed by the university partner, examined a wide range of school cultural issues, such as teacher to teacher trust, self and collective efficacy, functioning of grade-level groups and leadership teams, and level of implementation of the curriculum alignment work. The third survey was a School Leadership Team (SLT) Implementation Continuum (see Appendix 10A for two examples of rubric scale), also developed by the university partner to assess ways the teams were leading their

school. In addition, evaluation forms of the leadership academy sessions, as well as open-ended year-end surveys of the leadership teams and grade-level meetings, were collected.

Interview data

At the end of the first year, university graduate students and the principal investigator interviewed a purposeful sample of teachers in several participating schools. The purpose of these interviews was to document the reform process, assess progress and identify adjustments needed in the project design. In the second year, principals and small groups of teachers serving on the leadership teams were interviewed to explore the challenges of sharing leadership and working collaboratively to lead school reform. Results of these interviews have been published (Yep and Chrispeels, 2004, 2005).

Observations, field notes and document data

Field notes and videos were recorded at each leadership team seminar. The facilitators maintained agenda and materials generated by the grade-level teams. In addition, leadership team and grade-level meetings were intensively followed in one school for three years, for one year in another, and for three months in a third school.

In the next section, we first present the student achievement results comparing participating and non-participating elementary schools in order to answer the question: are there differential gains between schools receiving the most intensive levels of intervention compared to schools receiving only districtwide interventions? Then we use Coburn's (2003) conceptual framework of the dimensions of scale to analyse the qualitative data and to answer the question: In what ways has this multi-level systemic approach led to scaling up the reform?

Results

Student achievement

We compared the student achievement growth gains of the 10 participating elementary schools (although only seven schools participated in the project all three years) with the five non-participating elementary schools to answer the first question, are there differential gains between schools receiving the most intensive levels of intervention compared to schools receiving only districtwide interventions? As shown in Table 10.3, all schools in the district achieved growth gains; however, those schools receiving more intensive intervention made significantly greater gains. At the beginning of the reform, three of the non-participating schools (which had the highest socio-economic status and lowest percentage of English learners in the district) were outperforming all the participating schools. After the three years of reform, the schools receiving the more intensive intervention significantly closed the achievement gap. Six of the participating schools now had API scores comparable to the non-participating schools.

Table 10.3 API scores of participating and non-participating schools (1999–2003)

Schools	School API score				
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<i>Participating schools</i>					
School 1	468	547	612	672	676
School 2	407	478	475	531	572
School 3**	538	561	587	622	640
School 4**	485	593	603	627	633
School 5	354	472	510	476	519
School 6**	544	549	579	605	607
School 7	450	499	529	574	597
School 8	543	591	605	622	615
School 9	*	505	553	571	600
School 10	633	658	676	698	699
<i>Non-participating schools</i>					
School 11	636	652	618	631	626
School 12	560	567	570	616	649
School 13	620	657	666	688	722
School 14	669	692	698	704	690
School 15	559	601	557	609	602

* New school, first API score in 2001

**Joined project in 2001

The achievement gains made by the 10 participating schools were found to be statistically significant. Due to the differences found in the schools' demographics, we used the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) to control the possible effects of English learners, socio-economic status, ethnic groups and school size on the schools' API. We compared the initial and final API scores of the participating schools with those of the non-participating schools. The MANCOVA results showed a statistically significant effect of the multi-level work on the participating schools ($F = 8.220$, $p = 0.026$). As can be seen in Table 10.3, the schools that were classified by the State as 'underperforming schools' (under 500 API) made the most significant improvement, moving from that category. For example, the school with the lowest API (354) significantly increased its score to 519.

Table 10.4 API growth of participating versus non-participating schools (2001–3)

<i>Schools</i>	<i>API growth</i>			<i>Average growth</i>	
	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>		
<i>Participating schools</i>					
School 1	64	53	53	170	57
School 2	49	−9	53	93	31
School 3**		24	44	68	34
School 4**		10	25	35	18
School 5	97	47	−34	110	37
School 6***		40	26	66	33
School 7**	29	22	46	97	32
School 8	36	28	17	81	27
School 9*		49	18	67	34
School 10	30	35	18	83	28
Average growth participating schools: 33					
<i>Non-participating schools</i>					
School 11	14	−22	14	6	2
School 12	2	−1	47	48	16
School 13	40	28	23	91	30
School 14	23	12	2	37	12
School 15	37	−28	55	64	21
Average growth non-participating schools: 16					

* New school, first API score in 2001

** Joined project in 2001

***Dropped project but continued grade-level meetings in 2002

Table 10.4 presents a comparison of the yearly API growth in the two sets of schools. Two points are worth noting. First, the participating schools' average gains across the three years were twice that of the others. Second, except for one participating school, these schools showed steady gains each year, whereas the non-participating schools experienced more fluctuation in API scores, with three of the five failing to meet their growth target in 2002. It is interesting to

note that in the 2002–3 school year, two of the non-participating schools were now led by principals who had been administrators in the participating schools in the first year and the third school had an assistant principal familiar with the ES work. These principals reported taking ideas from the ES process, especially implementing more substantial grade-level meetings, to their schools. Furthermore, *all principals* had participated in the Leadership Academy in 2001–2.

Scaling-up the Reform: The Role of Simultaneous District-, School- and Grade-level Work

Coburn's (2003) dimensions of scale provides a heuristic framework for exploring ways that various reform components at the district, school and grade level helped to scale up the reform. Coburn argues, and we agree, that the concept of scale has been too narrowly defined as increasing the number of teachers, schools or districts involved in a reform. The conceptualization of the district–university partnership reform model described in this case study, however, offers a rich site for exploring the four dimensions to scaling-up reform suggested by Coburn and enables us to answer the question: In what ways has this multi-level systemic approach led to scaling-up the reform? It is important not to overstate causal relations between outcomes and actions in a project of this complexity and with other state and federal driven reforms occurring simultaneously in the district (e.g. new textbook adoptions, underperforming school projects, Beginning Teacher Support and Assistance (BTSA) programmes, an ongoing maths reform project). Nevertheless, exploring the qualitative and survey data collected through the ES reform over the three years of the project in relationship to these four dimensions of scale help to show at least a partial link between project activities and their probable relationship to student achievement gains.

Spread

According to Coburn (2003), spread is generally defined as an increase in the number of teachers, schools or districts involved in a reform but needs to be conceptualized in a much deeper way to reflect the paths by which reform is spread through new norms and principles and becomes embedded in district policy and procedures. Data are presented to document how the ES initiative, through its systemic design, spread in traditional ways, as well as through changes in norms and practices. The traditional perspective on spread seems to have occurred in four ways. First, in the second year of the project, staff in three additional schools voted to join the original seven by forming leadership teams and selecting one of the project facilitators to guide their grade-level meetings. Second, the project spread to non-participating schools in Years 2 and 3 when three principals and one assistant moved from the original group to non-participating schools. One of the principals who had moved to the junior high invited the university partner to provide two days of professional development for her new leadership team, which then led the school in moving toward interdisciplinary teaming. The

others began to implement more structured grade-level meetings and to work more actively with a teacher leadership group. Third, as principals in the non-participating schools saw their colleagues' schools make improvements, they pushed their school staff to work harder. Fourth, the leadership academy, which met regularly in the second and third years, provided a districtwide forum for school administrators to share across sites and learn from each other (Chrispeels and Yep, 2002).

The ES initiative also began to spread in the district in non-traditional ways. Toward the end of Year 3 of the project, the Orchard Board of Education voted to require all schools to hold grade-level meetings, to have the meetings focus on instruction, and to allocate \$10,000 to each site to support the grade-level or departmental work. This decision reflected an institutionalization of the reform process that began with seven schools and within three years was now operative in all 16. A second shift in district norms was the attention to standards-based instruction districtwide through the development of the curriculum maps, performance indicators and efforts to establish a districtwide database to assess progress. At the end of Year 1 (Spring 2001), a districtwide survey of professional culture indicated there was a significant difference between intensively participating schools and non-participating schools in regard to understanding of the curriculum standards and teacher perceptions of their ability to help students meet standards, suggesting that the grade-level work which, in the first year focused extensively on understanding standards, designing units to address standards and using the curriculum maps, was deepening teacher knowledge of standards. However, by Years 2 and 3, through the leadership academy, principals in the other schools were beginning to help their staff pay more attention to standards.

The spread of the work was also illustrated in an in-depth analysis of the work of two grade-level teams over a period of three years. The video data showed that, over time, each team developed routines that guided their work such as setting an agenda for each meeting, reviewing standards and developing unit plans to address the standards (Shiu and Chrispeels, 2004). Data collected from teams a year and a half after the end of the partnership (Winter 2004–5) also indicated that teachers across the participating schools reported that they were able to have an impact on their classroom practice and on student learning when their grade-level meetings followed their meeting norms, encouraged open communication and sharing of ideas, set goals and had an agenda. The data also indicate that not all grade-level teams in the schools had institutionalized these practices and, as a result, on both surveys and interviews the teachers acknowledged that their grade-level meetings were not effective.

These follow-up interviews also revealed that the school grade-level work was being expanded districtwide, and a new form of collaboration was being initiated by teacher leaders – 'district grade-level meetings'. For example, second-grade and fifth/sixth-grade teachers started meeting once a month, with different schools hosting their colleagues. These teachers also created an online forum on the district website for every grade level to share discussions and practices and distribute agenda and minutes to an expanded community. The germ of these

ideas was planted when grade-level 'share fairs' were implemented across schools during the leadership team seminars.

Depth

Coburn (2003) argues that in the definition of scale little attention has been given to the concept of depth, that is, what it really means for an external change to be successfully implemented. Obviously, fidelity to a model is one concept of depth. The design of the ES reform model, however, was to go deep, not with a prescribed programme, but by increasing vertical alignment in the system. Work that was engaged at the district or central office level, such as curriculum alignment, also was replicated at the school level through leadership team training, and then at the grade level with bi-monthly facilitated grade-level meetings. The process is more accurately captured in the language of fractals than in terms such as replication or duplication.

Basically, a fractal is any pattern that reveals greater complexity as it is enlarged. Thus, fractals graphically portray the notion of 'worlds within worlds' . . . Whether generated by computers or natural process, all fractals are spun from what scientists call a 'positive feedback loop'. Something – data or matter – goes in one 'end', undergoes a given, often very slight, modification, and comes out the other. Fractals are produced when the output is fed back into the system as input again and again.

(A. Beck, as cited in Alejandre, 2005)

Data from interviews and observations of the districtwide leadership academy, school-level leadership and grade-level teams illustrate the depth of the work being undertaken at all levels of the system. For example, after the leadership academy, administrators reported having deeper knowledge about standards, differentiated instruction, reading comprehension and writing. One of the principals commented: 'I will show the video to staff, and use the grids to help teachers explore standards and get a deeper understanding'. Reviewing, understanding, integrating and implementing state content standards was the focal point of school leadership team seminars and grade-level meetings, especially in the first year. Responses to survey questions from all seven schools in Year 1, and nine schools in Year 3, indicated that work with the teacher-designed curriculum maps had been instrumental in maintaining a focus on standards and used to guide lesson planning and pace the teaching of the standards.

Results of the districtwide survey regarding standards were corroborated by interview and observation data. As one fifth-grade teacher reported: 'These meetings have given me the chance to better understand the curriculum map and the assessments. It has helped me to better plan my lessons to make sure standards are being addressed and that the students are prepared for the assessments.' A third-grade teacher, reflecting the comments of many of the teachers, said she had learned how 'to focus more productively on standards-based instruction'.

The leadership team seminars served as entrance points for new ideas into the

system. These teacher leaders were taught protocols and processes for reading research, examining student work, making sense of student achievement data, setting improvement goals and building a team. They were introduced to content and pedagogical knowledge, such as reading comprehension, writing processes, mathematics instruction, classroom instructional strategies and information on how to develop strong home-school relations.² In addition to their schoolwide leadership team role, according to the grade-level facilitators, these teachers with their advanced knowledge also became either official or unofficial leaders at the grade-level meetings.

In the facilitated grade-level meetings, teachers explored in depth many of the topics first introduced to the leadership teams. They also collaborated to develop unit plans or lessons and rubrics to assess them. They engaged in extensive sharing of ideas, materials and lessons, and occasionally modelled teaching strategies or observed one of the team member's teaching a particular lesson or strategy. Sustained observation of grade-level meetings yielded insight into the effect of helping teachers link research and standards in ways that raised expectations. The following are responses from two kindergarten teachers, from two different schools:

This team has made significant progress in believing kids can learn more than they thought in both literacy and math.

Wow! We have really worked on math this year. Specifically #1–30. Our students can now count, write, recognize, represent and order 1–30 or 1–100 (some have really excelled).

Another way in which many grade-level teams pushed deeper into the core technology of schooling was through reading sections of a book and discussing how the ideas could be used in their classrooms. Teachers then implemented the strategy. In subsequent meetings, teachers would share with colleagues student work generated from the strategy for review; further discussion about the strategy usually ensued:

I have tried many of the strategies for reading comprehension very effectively. The particular strategies were making connections, mental images, inferring, and summarizing. I have also tried new ELD strategies focusing more on the printed word.

(first-grade teacher)

One definite change has been using 'Strategies that Work' as a tool.

(third-grade teacher)

One teacher commented that she had implemented the 'text to self, text to world and text to text' strategies effectively with her second-graders. Another second-grade teacher noted how helpful it was to have her students practise visualizing the story as she read aloud to them, and then to make connections from the story

to their lives. In Years 2 and 3, leadership team seminars and grade-level meetings focused on writing and English language development, providing teachers with time to develop content knowledge and discuss and solve implementation problems. Comments typical of many teachers include:

Doing student centered rubrics connected to writing. This writing practice had a huge impact on my students. They bought into their writing by creating their own rubrics.

(third-grade teacher)

I learned so much this year about teaching writing and evaluating student work.

(third-grade teacher)

Reports from the facilitators indicate that initial apprehensiveness gave way to appreciation as teachers engaged in dialogue around a piece of student work, asking questions such as: How do you see it? Why do you see it that way? What does it mean? What are the next steps in instruction? In the year-end survey responses, teachers each year shared the value of the time to work with colleagues:

I learned a lot from my colleagues. I really value the sharing of student work and sharing of strategies they used with their students.

(first-grade teacher)

We share the same concerns . . . [how to help] students that are not on grade level and learn methods other teachers use for assisting students so they may become better writers.

(second-grade teacher)

Everyone has valuable ideas to share. We work well together as a team; I respect all of the 3rd grade members. We will be doing more teaming of classes next year.

(third-grade teacher)

One sixth-grade teacher's comment summed up many of the views expressed by teachers across all the participating schools when she highlighted the value of the Grade-level meetings (GLMs) in helping her to think and learn beyond her classroom:

This gave me a focus that is needed to plan beyond the daily and weekly class goals. The meetings help clarify goals and strategies, encourage collaborative effort, and decrease the stress of increased district requirements, by providing a forum for teachers to exercise greater decision-making in their teaching practice. I learned from colleagues and felt energized by their creative ideas and professionalism. I think that this motivates me to

do my best as a 'team member'. Our roles as teacher do not exist in isolation but are so much enhanced by colleagues' support. I felt this all year long.

(sixth-grade teacher)

The findings from interviews, surveys, facilitator agendas and reports, as well as observations of grade-level and leadership team meetings, suggest that the multi-layered process of introducing ideas to all administrators through the leadership academy, going deeper with participating school leadership teams, and then exploring the ideas in even greater detail at grade-level meetings, facilitated the ability of teachers to alter classroom practice and improve student learning. This was especially true in those classrooms where teachers were open to learning. Our data also indicate cases of teachers who were resistant to the process of grade-level meetings and were frustrated at being asked to work with colleagues. Teachers who were most engaged in the leadership team work and the grade-level meetings reported that one of the greatest barriers was 'their colleagues'.

Sustainability

A third dimension of scale that Coburn introduces is that of sustainability, which she states has largely been treated as separate from scale:

Most discussions address issues of sustainability and scale separately, obscuring the way that scale, in fact, depends upon sustainability. And, perhaps most seriously, only a minority of studies of scale have employed designs that have allowed these studies to investigate sustainability

(Coburn, 2003: 4)

By engaging with and building the capacity of multiple actors at multiple levels of the system for a period of three years the ES district reform model was designed to enhance the potential of sustainability. Data collected from the leadership teams at the end of Year 3 suggested that they were extensively engaged in guiding their school in a number of important areas. Table 10.5 summarizes team responses to an open-ended question about their primary accomplishments in 2002–3. As can be seen in the table, learning to use data to guide their work had become a practice of all the teams. One team reported, 'we learned about data analysis and aided the rest of the faculty in that area'. Most teams also indicated they were fully engaged with the district foci on writing and had helped their colleagues to become engaged. As one team reported, 'we selected "writing" as a focus and built community among the grade levels in the instruction of writing'. Another team indicated, 'we promoted the South Coast Writing Project Young Writers' Camp and worked to promote a common language among teachers relating to ELD, standards, writing, and other curriculum areas'.

Data collected from ES surveys completed by the teams in 2000 and 2002, also indicated that strengthening home–school relations was one of the areas of greatest

Table 10.5 Summary of major actions taken by school leadership teams in 2002–3 to support school improvement

<i>Schoolwide leadership team actions</i>	<i>School 1</i>	<i>School 2</i>	<i>School 3</i>	<i>School 4</i>	<i>School 5</i>	<i>School 6</i>	<i>School 8</i>	<i>School 9</i>	<i>School 10</i>
Used data to guide improvements	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Implemented rubrics to reinforce standards	√		√	√		√		√	
Strengthened home–school relations	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Used schoolwide focus on writing		√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Focused on ELD ¹		√	√					√	√
Implemented Results ² training		√							√
Became a stronger team to address school issues	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√

¹ ELD = English Language Development

² Training programme offered through the school district, which helped teachers assess reading progress of students

need. As can be seen from Table 10.5, most teams worked to strengthen this component. One team reported they had ‘held two Open Houses during the school day to increase parent contact and established a Parent Action Team and [conducted] visitations’. Another team indicated it had ‘made a follow-up presentation to staff on the work of Ruby Payne’s *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and hosted a Parent Night, where input for collaboration with teachers was shared’.

Becoming a strong team able to address school issues was also a reoccurring theme in the responses. One team commented, ‘we became a resource to the rest of the faculty regarding school issues and by sharing information learned at Leadership Trainings’. Another team indicated, ‘members of the group became a “leadership team” with their new principal’.

Data presented in Table 10.5 suggest the leadership team seminars supported teams in addressing schoolwide issues and increasing system coherence by aligning school and district work. They also provided advanced introduction to ideas and materials that were to be introduced at the grade-level meetings, thus SLT members were able to play more active leadership roles during the grade-level meetings, spreading, deepening and sustaining the reform.

In spite of these encouraging findings about the benefits of serving on a leader-

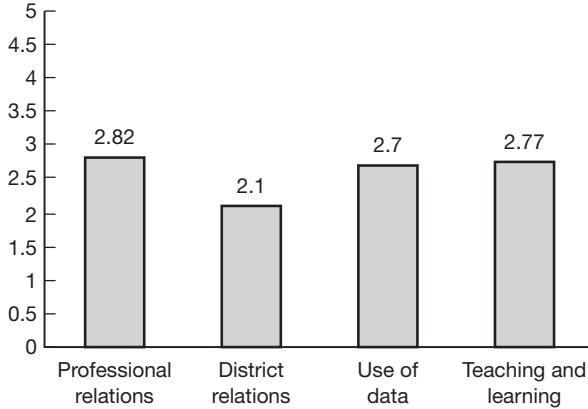


Figure 10.2 Leadership team survey: district mean scores by category

ship team and reports of their work, the challenges the teachers face in leading their schools cannot be minimized and relate directly to the issue of sustainability. The data from a leadership team implementation survey in Spring 2003, which asked members to rank the team along a 5-point continuum indicating beginning stages to full implementation, indicate that in many respects the leadership teams are still at modest levels of implementation in four areas of team development: professional relations among the team and with staff, district relations, use of data and research and focus on teaching and learning (see Appendix 10A for a sample rubric items).

Figure 10.2 presents the averages across the teams based on members' perceptions in each of the four major categories assessed by the continuum. As can be seen in Figure 10.2, none of the teams indicates that they perceive themselves as fully implementing their work schoolwide, which a mean score of 3.5 and higher would suggest. The area 'district relations' was rated the lowest by all the teams. In the first year and a half of the project, the superintendent, assistant superintendent and central office staff were regular participants at the leadership team seminars, but their participation began to wane substantially as these administrators came under increasing criticism from the teacher union (Doerr and Chrispeels, 2005). A considerable lack of trust in the district was repeatedly confirmed during group interviews of leadership team members (Yep and Chrispeels, 2005). The underdeveloped and to some extent mistrustful relationships between the leadership teams and the central office are troubling indicators that suggest the sustainability of the leadership teamwork may be in jeopardy.

Another category of team functioning that is relevant to sustainability is professional relations within the team and to other staff and committees. Although relations between the principal and team are strong across almost all schools, survey and interview data suggest that the teams' relations with the staff as a whole and with other school groups is underdeveloped. Both groups' interview

data and end-of-year surveys indicated that an 'us-them' perspective prevailed in some schools between the leadership team and other staff members (Doerr and Chrispeels, 2005; Yep and Chrispeels, 2005). Previous studies suggest the greater the collaboration among all staff and co-ordination among different school committees, the greater the potential for the school to improve learning outcomes for students (Chrispeels, Brown and Castillo, 2001). On the one hand, these findings about the team to staff relationships raise questions about sustainability; on the other hand, they also reflect the ongoing and typical challenges of teamwork within the framework of a larger organizational whole. The continued existence of the leadership teams a year and a half after the end of the partnership suggests this component of the reform continues in spite of a great deal of turmoil at the top (Doerr and Chrispeels, 2005).

Follow-up interviews in 2005 with teachers in six of the district's elementary schools indicate that grade-level meetings have become institutionalized, in most cases now after school, either once or twice a month. Survey data from 102 teachers and focus group interviews in these six schools indicate that there was within-school variability in the level of engagement and perceived benefit from the grade-level meetings. Teachers reported that when the grade levels are focused, have set goals, follow norms of open communication, their meetings are impacting their teaching and their students' learning. These meeting-effectiveness factors explained 43 per cent of the variance among grade-level teams' reported impact on student learning. Lack of goals and open communication was also significantly and negatively correlated with perceptions of impact on student learning and teacher practices. In other words, some grade levels were meeting in name only. Although the quality of grade-level work varied within and across schools, data collected during and after the partnership suggest that a multi-layered and multi-level model of reform can enhance sustainability by instilling depth through capacity building and altering standard operating procedures. The data also indicate that norms must continue to be enacted if there is to be an impact on teaching and learning.

Shift in reform ownership

One of the challenges of the ways in which school reform work has been enacted in the US is through external designers and actors who bring the reform to the school. Coburn argues that spread, depth and sustainability are all to some degree dependent on the transfer of ownership.

Finally, to be considered 'at scale', ownership over the reform must shift so that it is no longer an 'external' reform, controlled by a reformer, but rather becomes an 'internal' reform with authority for the reform held by districts, schools, and teachers who have the capacity to sustain, spread, and deepen reform principles themselves.

(Coburn, 2003: 6)

The data from this case study raise for us some issues around this concept. Some of the evidence presented above about grade-level and leadership teams suggests that teachers and administrators to varying degrees now own these processes and are using them to sustain the reform work. In the follow-up interviews during Winter 2005, many of the interviewees indicated they would not give up the grade-level meetings. One commented, 'we've really been working hard at improving our teaching practice . . .' Another commented, 'I just appreciate the meetings . . . we're very productive and I enjoy that'. For some of the other grade-level teams, they were still struggling to make the meetings work: 'I'd like to keep the constant evolution of it, I'd like to keep trying. I'd like to maybe get that trust'.

Central office administrators very early in the process academically owned the curriculum work and every year prepared Stairway to Academic Achievement, which provided a revised curriculum map, classroom assessments and other tools to assist teachers at every grade level to be able to pace their instruction to standards. In the third year, the central office sought state funding, taking fiscal ownership, to be able to continue the leadership academy work and requested a waiver so that the state programme could be offered to all district site administrators simultaneously. After administrators received training in a walk-through process for school site supervision, the Superintendent required all site administrators to make walk-throughs a part of their administrative duties, suggesting a shift in values and beliefs about instructional leadership. The central office and board of education took steps to own and institutionalize the grade-level meetings, requiring them at every school and providing resources to support them, but leaving teachers to construct and own their content. Even as this process of shift in ownership was unfolding, however, other forces were at work to disrupt it. The micropolitical aspects of school reform (Chrispeels and Martin, 2002) often result in lessons learned in hindsight and potential new insights about scale.

Lessons Learned

One of the persistent issues in school reform has been how to transfer and scale-up reforms from one school to many. This study suggests that taking a system perspective can help to address this challenge by simultaneously engaging in co-ordinated work at multiple levels of the system. This co-ordinated approach is essential to deepening, spreading and sustaining improved performance. Through the school-level work of leadership team development and facilitated grade-level meetings, the data from this case suggest that new practices entered the classroom door as teachers met, shared student work, planned lessons and read research. The findings also hint that higher performing schools, which usually already have greater social and human capital, will closely watch the work of other schools if they perceive they might lose their 'higher performing status'. This suggests that spread of a reform can be enhanced by district-created collaborative structures that share ideas and practices across schools (such as the leadership academy did in this model) and involve teacher leaders from every school in key professional

learning opportunities (such as was done in the curriculum alignment work), without necessarily working directly with every school. The district may be well justified in concentrating resources in the schools in greatest need. In fact to achieve depth and sustainability, differential treatment such as additional staffing to facilitate grade-level work, one-on-one coaching to assist a principal in need, a district liaison to work with the leadership team, and intensive professional development to meet an identified need may be essential.

As Lorna Earl and her colleagues assert in the title of their chapter in this book, changing schools is hard. At the end of Year 3, there was jubilation at the increasing test scores as well as fatigue. The fatigue was especially acute because by Year 3 new mandates from state and federal government were being layered on top of the district's reform efforts. New language arts and maths textbooks were adopted, which required extensive mandated professional development. Teachers who had invested in creating integrated language arts units felt their work was useless since they now had to follow the prescribed text. In addition, much of the grade-level meeting time during the last year was devoted to organizing how to implement mandated leveling for a 30-minute block of English instruction for English learners. Knowing how to navigate competing reforms and increasing mandates is not easy and requires district administrators who are able to bridge the two worlds and create coherence for teachers and community. The dimensions of scale need to be explored more extensively through case examples to understand how systems cope with competing demands as they work to sustain change efforts.

In this case, emotional fatigue was also readily apparent. The long history of tensions between the union and central office reached a critical point. In November 2002, the teacher union was successful in electing its two new candidates to the board of education. With incessant pressure from the union, the assistant superintendent for educational services was forced to resign and the superintendent announced his retirement.

Refining the ES Reform Model and the Dimensions of Scale

This three-year experiment points to some lessons learned about implementing systemic reform and suggests some new insights about scale. Six areas seem to stand out as in need of refining and fine-tuning. Three are directly related to the district-level work and three to the site level.

Transfer of ownership

In Coburn's discussion of the dimensions of scale, transfer of ownership is mentioned last, which is typically how external reform models have been conceived, if transfer is even considered. The findings from this study suggest that a new conceptualization is needed: reform needs to be co-created and co-owned from

the beginning. The teacher and classified union leadership especially need to be part of the design team. Although presentations about the project were made in the beginning to the teacher union board of directors and a union advisory committee, with a representative from each participating school, was established to guide the project, their ideas for how best to design the project were not initially solicited. In this case study the lack of co-ownership proved to be a flaw that undermined the social and intellectual capacity that was developing through the leadership teams and grade-level meetings. The more efforts the central office administrators made to involve teachers in the curriculum alignment, in grade-level meetings, on leadership teams and districtwide reform committees, the more resistant the union became. Given the long history of district and union mistrust that was subsequently uncovered, this outcome is not surprising (Doerr and Chrispeels, 2005). Our observations and findings also suggest the need not only to include the unions, but also to establish a multi-shareholder team that guides the change process. By involving all shareholders initially in co-creating, ownership can occur, the concept of transfer is less relevant, and 'the predictable failure of school reform' (Sarason, 1990) is much less likely to be fulfilled.

Strengths-based assessments and processes

Although depth and spread of reform are important, sustainability may be more dependent on whether the reform is designed to build on system strengths than fix problems. The needs in this district were obvious. The systems were highly stressed from rapid growth and inadequate facilities, high percentages of very needy students and families, significant numbers of children who spoke Spanish but not fluently and who also needed English instruction, and a bi-modal distribution of the teaching force divided between 20- to 30-year veterans and teachers in their beginning years in the profession dominated discussions. Missing from the equation was a rigorous assessment of the district's strengths, which would have acknowledged more adequately the knowledge and skills of the veteran teachers and provided a sense of connection between past and future (Daly and Chrispeels, 2005). Our data and observations suggest that a strengths-based assessment of the district should be the starting point for reform. Such an approach would have provided the intellectual, conceptual and structural hooks on which to hang new knowledge and understanding, and we believe would have deepened, spread and sustained the reform.

Identifying and strengthening the organizational core

To enhance the depth and spread of reform, this case study suggests the need to give more attention to identifying the district's core values and enduring purpose and working with all shareholders to co-construct and co-own the vision, not just share it (Collins and Porras, 1997). A strengths-based assessment will help to lay the foundation for identifying core values and purpose and enable a shared vision to be established. The multiple levels of the Effective Schools district reform model offered a unique structure for embedding the vision throughout

the system but were not effectively used because of the failure to identify core values and purpose that could serve as the cornerstone for the district's vision. This study reminds us of the critical need to work at the level of individuals' beliefs, ways of seeing the world, skills and capabilities to create an environment conducive to change, which we believe will be greatly facilitated by a strengths-based reflexive inquiry process (Daly and Chrispeels, 2005).

Professional development and systemic structures to support scale

Depth, spread, sustainability and ownership may require more attention to be given to professional development processes that deeply engage participants, and system structures that develop social and human capital. This district did not have a strong tradition of teacher leadership teams, requiring a steep learning curve. Members often felt frustrated at the lack of response from colleagues once they returned from a leadership team seminar. In some cases the team shared their work at grade-level meetings, but often in the early stages, the team's learning remained with the team. A team that represents the 'starters' (Senge *et al.*, 2000) is critical, but everyone has to own the improvement process for the reform to go deep and be sustained. The teams should have been guided more quickly to organize in ways that engaged everyone in the improvement process.

Time for school and district development

Time may be a missing dimension in the concept of scale – time during the school day and year for teacher collaboration and joint work, and time in years for the reform to accomplish intended effects. Teachers and administrators both recognized that time for leadership team seminars and meetings was critical and necessary to any efforts at school improvement. Collaboration time for grade levels to meet was also seen as crucial to long-term improvement but questions arose about how schools could derive the 'biggest impact for the buck' regarding immediate and pressing needs of schools. Surveys indicated that teachers and administrators alike viewed 'time out of class' as a dilemma. The cost and quality of substitutes and the diminished classroom continuity, particularly in the lower grades, were seen as problematic; however, in a year-round district without summer time for whole district professional development, it seems important to provide some release time for leadership teams to meet.

Follow-up interviews with teachers in 2004–5 also indicate that grade-level meetings held after school have diminished grade-level productivity and focus. Much more attention needs to be given to how the school day can best be structured to facilitate the collaborative work of teacher teams.

Leadership as a dimension of scale

To maximize leadership as a dimension of scale, we must consider the need for both external and internal leadership. While the knowledge of external and internal leaders may differ, they must be congruent and explicit around the issues of spread, depth, sustainability, ownership and time. For example, the potential of grade-level meetings to be a force for school improvement needs both exter-

nal and internal leaders. Our findings suggest that this is an ongoing iterative and dialogic process, with external-lead facilitators helping to bring new information and ideas to grade-level teams, and internal-lead facilitators moving theory to practice. We suggest the importance of attending to and researching both external and internal leadership as it relates to achieving scale and not viewing it as an either/or proposition.

The design of the effective school reform model based on the conceptual frameworks of systemic thinking, social-cultural model of professional development and social and human capital development represent a potentially productive approach to school reform that can address the issue of scale as defined by Coburn. When Coburn's framework of scale is applied to this case, new dimensions of scale emerge which help to inform our understanding of scale and the challenges of systemic reform and point to rich areas for further research.

Notes

- 1 Support for this study was generously provided by the Heller Foundation, Washington Mutual and a University of California, Santa Barbara Outreach grant. The authors, however, accept full responsibility for the contents of this chapter. The authors wish to thank our incredible partners – the administrators and teachers in the case study district who worked tirelessly to improve their schools and who engaged actively in this experimental endeavour to scale-up reform.
- 2 Leadership teams were provided with and given guidance in using books such as *Reading with Meaning* by Debbie Miller (2002), *Strategies that Work* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000), *Reading Counts* by Raffaella Borasi and Marjorie Siegel (2000), *Knowing and Teaching Elementary Mathematics* by Liping Ma (1999), and *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Study Achievement* by Robert J. Marzano, D. J. Pickering and J. E. Pollack (2001). Copies of *Reading with Meaning*, *Strategies that Work* and *Classroom Instruction that Works* were provided to all teachers in the project schools and others were purchased for teachers as requested for use by teachers at the grade-level meetings.

Appendix 10A

Table 10A below gives two examples of SLT Implementation Continuum rubric used to assess team development in the following areas: professional relations, use of data and research, district relations and teaching and learning. As can be seen, the rubric represents a five-point scale, but with these descriptors, participants can indicate more precisely where they fall on the continuum. The use of such descriptors has resulted in fewer responses tending toward the mean, which a typical Likert Scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' often yields.

Table 10A Two examples of SLT Implementation Continuum rubric

Item 2 <i>SLT team to staff relationships</i>	Item 12 <i>Using data to inform action (e.g. inquiry cycle, continuous improvement cycle, action research)</i>
1. Most staff members are unaware of who is serving on the SLT, and the team's work is not shared with the staff.	1. SLT members have not been introduced to the concepts of using data to inform action as an integral part of a cycle of continuous improvement.
2. The school staff knows who serves on the SLT team; but not everyone supports or understands the purpose of SLT.	2. The SLT is discussing the concepts of using data as an integral part of a cycle of continuous improvement and understanding how data can inform action.
3. The SLT team actively shares its work with the staff and is generally supported by the staff.	3. The SLT is developing specific plans for the collection and analysis of data to monitor implementation of selected strategies and their impact on student achievement.
4. The SLT engages with most of the staff between SLT seminars, shares what it is learning and involves the staff.	4. The SLT occasionally involves the staff in collecting and analysing student achievement data in order for the staff to take informed actions for school improvement.
5. The entire staff values the SLT work and relies on the team's leadership to guide school improvement work.	5. The SLT frequently and regularly involves the staff in collecting and analysing student achievement data in order for the staff to take informed actions for continuous improvement.

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The Creation of Knowledge Networks

Collaborative Enquiry for School and System Improvement¹

David Jackson

Introduction

This ‘think-piece’ is built around an initiative emanating from England’s National College for School Leadership – Networked Learning Communities. The chapter opens with an exploration of the importance of networks as an organizational form that can stimulate innovation and facilitate knowledge transfer, leading on to a brief explanation of networked learning communities.

Following that, two interconnected themes are explored:

- The first relates to the centrality of collaborative enquiry, not only as a vehicle for the improvement of teaching and learning, but also as a means of fostering professional development, leadership learning, organizational learning and school-to-school learning.
- The second presents the case for enquiry and knowledge-creation as essential elements in the leadership of change and in capacity building at the school, network and system level.

In particular, the chapter will explore some of the key issues surrounding the use of knowledge-creation through enquiry as an energy source for school improvement and as a means of generating professional knowledge networks.

The Role of Networks in Supporting Innovation²

The argument is built upon the premise that, in education as in other fields, networks have a key role to play in supporting innovation and development. Accordingly, networks need to be regarded as support structures for innovative schools – facilitative, too, of the dissemination of both ‘good process’ and ‘good practice’, overcoming the traditional isolation of schools, and challenging traditional hierarchical system structures through lateral leadership and learning norms.

In the past, most school systems have operated almost exclusively through individual units set within hierarchically designed structural forms – typically local authorities or school districts. Such isolation may have been appropriate during times of stability, but during times of rapid and multiple change there is a need to ‘tighten the loose coupling’, to increase collaboration and to establish more fluid knowledge flow in order to foster responsive structures. Networks are a means of doing this – and one for which there is an ample evidence base from other public and private sector organizations seeking to respond to the twin challenges of the knowledge economy and the associated ubiquitousness of change (OECD, 2000).

Networks are locations in which specialized knowledge can be created and transferred within collaborative team contexts. Senge (1990) emphasizes team learning and team skills rather than individual skills and individual learning as being the key to competitiveness. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) research cited above suggests that the move toward learning organizations is reflected in changes both in firms’ internal organization (internal networking) and in inter-firm relationships (external networking). Within firms, the accelerating rate of change makes multi-level hierarchies and strict borders between functions inefficient. The report goes on to suggest that to build schools as learning organizations may be one of the major challenges for the future. A hypothesis that we bring to the Networked Learning Communities initiative is that school-to-school networks may, in fact, be both the catalyst and context for the internal redesign required to generate learning networks within schools.

Networks do not just facilitate innovation. By offering the possibility of new ways of working, they can also be viewed as being an innovation in themselves. This is particularly important in contemporary educational systems, as there is currently a tendency to reduce district-level intervention and support for schools. It could well be argued that these support structures – the role that local authorities or school districts, local universities and other agencies have traditionally played – have been more effective at buttressing the status quo than initiating/supporting change or transferring knowledge across the system.

We know that school development benefits from external facilitation (Fullan and Miles, 1992), but it is also evident that what is needed is not outmoded institutions not geared up to the task, but more creative and responsive patterns of working within and between schools. Networks are, then, increasingly being seen as a means of facilitating innovation and change, as well as contributing to

large-scale reform (OECD, 2000; Hopkins, 2001; Demos, 2001). They offer the potential for redesigning local system structures by promoting different forms of collaboration, links and multi-functional partnerships. Networks offer the potential for flexible and adaptive patterns that enable stakeholders to make focused and purposeful connections and to build synergies around shared priorities and common knowledge-creating activities. The system emphasis becomes less about exercising control (which is both impossible in an increasingly autonomous context and antithetical to creativity and innovation), and more about harnessing the interactive and creative capability of system-wide forces.³

In September 2000, the OECD/CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) seminar held in Lisbon brought together five of the world's most advanced educational networks, with a view to drawing theory from their collective practice. The arguments so far outlined in this chapter and the discussions during the seminar concur in the belief that networks have the potential to support educational innovation and change by:

- providing a focal point for the dissemination of good practice, the generalizability of innovation and the creation of 'action oriented' knowledge about effective educational practices
- keeping the focus on the core purposes of schooling, in particular in creating and sustaining a discourse on teaching and learning – and the organizational redesign factors that will support more powerful learning
- enhancing the skill of teachers, leaders and other educators in knowledge-creation, change agent skills and managing the change process
- building capacity for continuous improvement at the local level, and in particular fostering leadership and creating professional learning communities, within and between schools
- ensuring that systems of pressure and support are integrated, not segmented. For example, professional learning communities incorporate pressure and support in a seamless way, and
- acting as a link between the centralized and decentralized schism resulting from many contemporary policy initiatives, in particular in contributing to policy coherence horizontally and vertically

It is these points, and the additional aspiration of generating morally purposeful partnerships between teachers and schools creating knowledge with and on behalf of one another, that led us to establish the Networked Learning Communities initiative.

Networked Learning Communities: a Framework for Knowledge Networks

A networked learning community (NLC) is a cluster of schools working in partnership with others to enhance the quality of pupil learning, professional

development and school-to-school learning. We have drawn from the OECD Lisbon seminar in defining NLCs as follows:

Networked Learning Communities are purposefully led social entities that are characterized by a commitment to quality, rigour and a focus on outcomes. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, Networked Learning Communities promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralized and decentralized structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organizational systems.

The NLC programme is designed to improve learning opportunities for pupils and to support the development of schools as professional learning communities. It places teachers, leaders and schools at the heart of innovation and knowledge creation within the profession and enables the development of local, context-specific practices and solutions that can be explained and interpreted by schools in other contexts – at the heart of knowledge networks. NLCs act as critical friends to one another and each additionally elects to have an external partner, which may include higher education institutions (HEIs), local authorities (LAs) or community groups.

The programme itself was designed as a partnership initiative, the early planning involving the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the General Teaching Council (GTC) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). In this way the system was seeking to mirror networking, collaborative and knowledge-sharing values. It is a joined up initiative. NCSL acts as the facilitator of learning and knowledge transfer between networks and takes responsibility also for spreading good practice from the programme to a wider audience.

More specifically, each NLC comprises a group or cluster of schools working in partnership to:

- raise standards by improving the learning of pupils and staff, and by supporting school-to-school learning
- develop leadership for learning by developing and harnessing the leadership potential of a wide range of people, and
- build capacity for growth and continuous improvement by schools enquiring into their practice and by sharing both process and product outcomes.

They use collaborative processes such as:

- developing and incorporating a wide variety of approaches to professional development including coaching, mentoring and enquiry into teaching and learning
- supporting and recognizing practitioner enquiry and enquiry-based leadership as a means of creating knowledge and generating theory about learning

- and school improvement, grounded in the analysis of professional practice and informed by the application of professional judgement
- engaging teachers with the theoretical perspectives and research findings of others, in both academic and practitioner communities
 - seeking accreditation for both internal and external processes
 - providing a range of leadership opportunities through the ownership of knowledge-creating processes and the leadership of enquiry partnerships
 - modelling collaborative leadership learning through explicit headteacher learning
 - challenging thinking, benchmarking practice and incorporating external expertise
 - utilizing diversity and uniqueness of context for and on behalf of all schools
 - making sense of local, regional and national initiatives through collaboration
 - establishing networking systems, processes and relationships geared toward knowledge-sharing and sustainability, and
 - targeting concrete outcomes that will attract widespread interest and take-up.

By ‘working smarter together, rather than harder alone’ (a key mantra for the initiative), learning from each other, with each other and on behalf of each other, an NLC will: improve the learning of pupils and staff and school-to-school learning; develop enquiry-based leadership opportunities and leadership for learning; build capacity for growth and continuous improvement – and knowledge about the process; provide a supportive context for risk-taking and creativity, and the confidence to ‘turn and face the danger’ – to take charge of change and thrive.

Each network identified a pedagogically grounded *learning focus*. This is a unifying theme, which underpins the early activity undertaken by the network. It was the initial vehicle through which NLCs built knowledge through enquiry into, and study of, practice and began to change organizational processes in support of new ways of working. This learning focus should respond innovatively to local, regional and/or national initiatives and be relevant to other schools and other networks, in order to facilitate school-to-school transfer of knowledge – both about the area of focus and the change issues involved in the improvement of practice.

This is a design-based innovation. Learning networks are being promoted to enrich professional practice as they create and transfer knowledge to support improvements in teaching and learning and organizational restructuring. In achieving this goal, schools within NLCs:

- collaborate around the study of teaching and learning – within and between schools
- promote and recognize practitioner enquiry – creating knowledge together
- engage with and learn from theory and research generated by involvement in the enquiry process to build the knowledge base about what works
- develop and utilize a wide variety of approaches to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) including: coaching, mentoring, induction programmes,

- shadowing, intervisitations and internal and external programmes of learning that qualify for accreditation, and
- draw theory from enquiry into practice with a view both to implementing the learning from this process, and to generating artefacts such that they can be shared with other schools and networks.

The initiative is of its time. If it is successful in its aim of advancing professional knowledge creation and knowledge networks, it will be because it is able to capitalize upon a theoretical, practical and policy context that provides fertile ground for transformation.

The Contextual Background

There is a long educational history behind action research and school-based enquiry, dating back to the work of Kurt Lewin (1947, 1948) and his followers (e.g. Chein, Cook and Harding, 1948; Rowan, 1974; Lippett, Langseth and Mossop, 1985)⁴. More recently, there is a growing international evidence base of its centrality to school renewal and restructuring efforts (Glickman, 1993; Seashore-Louis, 1994; Garmston and Wellman, 1997; Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 1999) as well as to classroom improvement. And there is an increasingly varied range of voices calling for a reappraisal of the role of research in school development. Some have centred upon the significance of teacher involvement because of their 'user community' role (Hargreaves, 1994) or because 'only teachers are in a position to create good teaching' (Stenhouse, 1975, 1980); other perspectives have criticized the unacceptable divide between the communities of research and those of practice (Kennedy, 1997; Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Hargreaves, 1999); many recognize the nature of teachers as professionals and their necessarily central role in the development of schools (Halsall *et al.*, 1998; Stoll, 1999; Wheatley, 1999). These imperatives are also supported by a more grounded perspective – which is that we cannot improve our schools until we know our schools; that the route to knowing is collaborative enquiry; and that the regenerative processes of knowledge-creation, knowledge-conceptualization, knowledge-transfer and knowledge-utilization are at the heart of organizational and professional learning.

A significant factor in reversing the trend for educational knowledge creation to be housed with university researchers, and in bringing the weight of theory and research about enquiry-driven school improvement back into the consciousness of school leaders, has been the massive growth since the late 1980s of educational Masters degrees, most containing significant applied research components. A major Australian survey, a study by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, 1998), concluded that the 'largest single group' involved in educational research was school leaders and teachers involved in Masters programmes. Further, the report found that 'in terms of direct impact, the most frequently quoted example (by school principals) of systematic

educational enquiry affecting the school context was action research, because it brought immediate benefit'.

In parallel, there is also evidence of increased teacher involvement in action enquiry conducted on the *outside* of the HE accreditation framework and within new communities of practice (e.g. involving LA or school district partners alongside HE colleagues) in the UK (e.g. Myers, 1996; Halsall *et al.*, 1998; in Australia (e.g. Harradine, 1996; Retallick and Groundwater-Smith, 1996); and Canada (e.g. Stoll and Fink, 1996; Delong and Wideman, 1998); and an increasing recognition of the action enquiry process as fundamental to school improvement and enhanced capacity to lead and manage change effectively (e.g. IQEA, Hopkins *et al.*, 1994; Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 1999).

In connecting those in leadership roles with the theories and research findings of others, by introducing them to the potential of enquiry as a means of generating new knowledge and theory rooted in the analysis of practice and also, in many cases, by forging ongoing links between higher education personnel and schools, a climate and an evidence-base for enquiry-informed professional practice and organizational development has been created. That having been said, it is worth adding also that education has a huge journey still to travel in the knowledge management field if it is to be able to withstand comparisons with other sectors. Table 11.1 (OECD, 2000) starkly demonstrates the current debilitating context for education.

There is another interesting contextual dimension in England. The relative failure of educational reform endeavours between the 1970s and 1990s to transform either the system or student achievement, together with the increasing weight of evidence cited above, has led in the last few years to a reappraisal of the role of school-based approaches and their relationship to reform strategies (Fullan and Miles, 1992). The climate has changed. The drift of national legislation in England is further supporting this. Increased centralization has been accompanied by school-level autonomies – in budgets, governance, internal policies and professional development practices. While for some schools the additional burdens of accountability have been viewed as deterrents to innovation, to others they are interpreted as imperatives – and enquiry is the vehicle used not only to propel improvement, but also to unearth the evidence of success in order to meet accountability expectations. In these circumstances, teachers are noted to 'immerse themselves in real situations of reform and begin to craft their own theories of change, constantly testing them against new situations and the experiences of others' (Fullan, 1995). Specific elements of legislation have supported such knowledge-creating processes as (Beacon Schools, Specialist Schools, Training Schools, Advanced Skills Teachers); practitioner enquiry (Best Practice Research Scholarships, International Study Visits); and the study of innovation (Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities).

The 2002 White Paper in the UK called for – as well as a continuing emphasis upon standards and accountability – transformation. In Michael Barber's terms (2000) the process of modernizing the education system demands a transition from the 'improvement wave' of educational reform (largely dominated by the

Table 11.1 Knowledge management – comparison between sectors

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>High Tech</i>	<i>Medicine</i>	<i>Education</i>
<i>1 Pressures on knowledge creation, mediation and use</i>			
Main source of pressure for knowledge creation	market R & D	clients' R & D	politicians
Pressure to seek innovation from own professional culture	very high	medium	low
Priority given to knowledge creation and mediation	very high	medium	low
<i>2 Structures and resources for knowledge creation, mediation and use</i>			
R & D expenditure	very high	high	low
Awareness of knowledge management ideas	high	low	very low
Application of knowledge management ideas	high	low	low
Actor networks	high	medium	low
Cross-specialism collaboration	high	variable	low
Expert–novice interactions	very high	mainly high	mainly low
Overall internal networking	high	low	very low
Overall external networking	high	medium	low
Public–private collaborations	strong	weak	very weak
Links with universities	strong	medium	weak
Use of ICT in mediation	high	medium	weak
Mediation of new knowledge	very fast	fast	slow
Implementation of new knowledge	rapid	variable	slow
<i>3 Outcomes of knowledge creation, mediation and use</i>			
Level of success in knowledge-creation	very high	high	low
Quality of R & D	high	variable	low
Rate of innovation	high	variable	low

standards agenda) to the ‘transformational wave’, where innovation, inclusion, diversity, evidence-informed practice, knowledge-creation and transfer, professional learning communities, informed professional judgement and practice informed policy, are presented as key features of a new landscape of educational reform. Networked Learning Communities have their genesis within this contextual environment and, it might be argued, have an important role to play in supporting school leaders as they make the transition to a vision of school leadership underpinned by such transformational imperatives (NCSL, 2001c).

Educational transformation is now a national imperative. Knowledge is the new economy in educational development, both within schools and between schools. The management of change is unavoidable. Simplistic notions of organizational restructuring are no longer sufficient – the new discourse emphasizes ‘transformational’ objectives, which require a radical approach to both school- and system-level redesign and to the leadership of the change management process itself. Meeting young people’s needs for the future world is not simply a matter of doing better or more of what we have done in the past. We need to do different things or, at worst, do some of the same things differently. A move away from traditional hierarchical, constraining and debilitating structures and toward the building of leadership density and models of lateral learning (within schools and between schools) together with an emphasis upon new forms of situated learning and the conditions required to support this (Hargreaves, 2001) are increasingly being seen as key ways to unleash creativity and build capacity.

Enquiry, knowledge creation and knowledge networks provide a vehicle. The remainder of this chapter will explore the nature, role and logistics of enquiry-informed school improvement processes for school, school-to-school and network-to-network learning.

The Nature of Enquiry

The word ‘research’ tends to bring with it associations related to rigour, reliability, validity, generalizability, ethical procedures, objectivity, scale – and so on. In reality, though, what we are talking about when engaging with school-based and school-to-school enquiry activities does not always need to conform to the same exacting standards. The concept of fitness for purpose, or ‘good enough research’ – the generation of enquiry designs that are valid and reliable in relation to their function and their context, rather than in relation to the purity of the knowledge or its generalizability – has much to offer schools. Increasingly, networking arrangements between organizations, and the sharing of semi-formalized knowledge and understanding, are becoming important in changing education, and are probably more so than external research findings (OECD, 2000). School-based enquiry is often ‘good enough’ research, or, as Charles Lindblom (1990) describes it:

The required inquiry process is a broad, diffuse, open-ended, mistake-making social or interactive process, both cognitive and political. 'Inquiry' is not quite the right label, suggesting as it does the rigours of scientific inquiry. 'Probing' captures much of the flavour of the process, since it emphasizes persistence and depth of investigation, uncertainty of result, and possible surprise . . . The study of social knowledge in social change calls for a study of amorphous inquiry, probing, investigation, or search as practiced by many kinds of people in various roles. The specialist contributions of those who engage in professional scientific discovery and testing have a place in such processes, but only a limited one.

Schools are, of course, awash with routine data-processing activity. When talking about 'enquiry for school improvement' we are implying a process that transcends this routine level – which is more focused, more improvement orientated, more consciously collaborative and more professionally pervasive. A basic taxonomy is offered by the following sequence:

Data – the term we use for the mass of routine or purposefully acquired material that we have available to us within a school.

Information – the meaningful material that we extract from available data because of its potential to inform our future actions and decision-making.

Knowledge – the transformation of data and information into shared, collectively owned and institutionally relevant knowledge as a result of collaborative social processing.

Collaboration in itself is not necessarily a virtuous pursuit – other than for its value in creating social cohesion. Collaboration that involves reflection, dialogue and discourse built around information, which leads to the creation of institutionally relevant knowledge, and which subsequently leads to improvement and planned intervention designs, is a potent school development and professional learning activity. Where this process leads also to the 'reification' (Wenger, 1998) or 'valorization' of that knowledge in commonly understood artefacts, it also provides a route for transfer, adaptation and adoption within learning networks.

Enquiry for school improvement purposes, then, involves purposeful, focused and informed engagement with both pedagogical practice and with the context of the school. It is a means of studying and learning collaboratively about the school's work – and with a view to designing informed improvement interventions, both within classrooms and within the wider operations of the school, arising from the knowledge generated and the contextual meanings made.

Transfer of knowledge between schools involves validation in the host school ('this worked for us'), the creation of process knowledge ('this is how we did it'), and making explicit the theory underpinning practice ('these are the principles underpinning why we did it and what we did'). The generation of transferable

artefacts and the subsequent social processing with teachers from other schools leads to further refinement, strengthening of the theoretical base and mutual adaptation.

Moving beyond merely analysing and interpreting readily available data requires purposeful enquiry. An interesting starting point can be to create knowledge about existing good practice (and the processes that created it) and to use this 'affirmative enquiry' as a model for transfer and wider learning. Internal benchmarking – bringing all internal practice up to the level of the best – is a powerful way of shifting an individual school's culture toward knowledge transfer and lateral learning approaches. External benchmarking is a useful tool for school-to-school collaboration. Alternatively, a school might use enquiry (within and between schools) to identify gaps between existing practice and aspirations – 'gap analysis enquiry'. Another strategy is to build transferable models of practice – shared knowledge and language between schools – about aspects of teaching: how do we differentiate for learning styles? What are the characteristics of effective didactic teaching? How do we best get students to learn from one another? What do we know about effective co-operative groupwork? Where is the best classroom use of ICT to support learning and how is it designed? What is rapport, and how is it best achieved? What are the characteristics of effective coaching to improve classroom performance?

Whatever the approach, knowledge is the medium of educational exchange, and enquiry is the central vehicle for knowledge-creation – at all levels.

Learning Networks and the Role of Enquiry

Within the NLC programme we have defined three levels of learning networks: within-school networks, school-to-school networks, and networks of networks.

One firm hypothesis underpinning the NLC work is that the school and system transformation being sought is dependent upon achieving active synergy between all three levels. We feel that the establishment of school-to-school networks is the key component. We are confident of the project's capacity to facilitate network-to-network learning. We are equally certain, though, that the greatest challenge is the school-level redesign required for active and widespread within-school networks. This echoes the recent Demos (2001) finding: 'Networks should be developed to share good practices. Networks are particularly important, as policy channels have changed. At a more sophisticated level, networks should be developed within institutions.'

1 Within-school networks

A strange characteristic is that, in secondary (and some large primary) schools, teachers are often more disposed to engage in knowledge-creation and sharing activities with colleagues from other schools than with the colleague in the next classroom or the department on the next floor. Partly, it is that we lose sight of our common professional knowledge-base – pedagogy – and have substituted

instead subject or phase-specific knowledge. Partly, though, it also relates to poor learning histories and organizational pathologies within our schools.

Enquiry has increasingly been found to be a liberating force for changing this situation in school improvement projects and network programmes around the world. Some of these reasons can be simply stated:

- We cannot improve our schools if we do not know our schools. Collaborative study is a vehicle for knowing.
- The data from enquiry engages people in shared meaning-making and creates an evidence base that energizes action.
- Survey-feedback has long been a blame-free strategy in organizational development theory, designed to unlock stasis. ('This is what we have found. What do you think it suggests we should do?')
- Collaborative enquiry is a socially cohesive activity. Teachers working together on enquiry activities create a learning context for each other.
- Enquiry is of itself professionally developmental. It creates a context, too, that causes teachers to want to visit the theory and knowledge after external research in order further to inform practice.
- As a vehicle for generating knowledge, enquiry becomes the means by which practice can be transferred and transformed.
- There is an equality of voice in enquiry, a parity – enquiry is emancipatory for members of the school community.
- This active engagement of community members within enquiry activity – both as data source and active participant – has the effect both of liberating voice (the lived experience of schools) and of creating actively democratic contexts.

There is also, of course, no end point to enquiry; it is a journey, a way of working, a metabolism, a mode of being, a process of continuous learning. As such, it both requires and creates new structural environments within which to operate. Schools that have been involved with enquiry driven improvement work over a period of time, gradually and progressively redesign themselves around collaborative study of practice.

This works at two levels. Teachers engage in enquiry based around classroom practice, progressively seeking to study and improve what they do, to coach one another in the new practices that evolve. At the same time, enquiry takes place at the school level, ensuring that the school adapts itself so as to be increasingly supportive of new modes of working. Enquiry into changes at the level of school structures and processes become synergistic with enquiry into changes about teaching and learning (the structures and processes of the classroom). One without the other does not work. Classroom enquiry *on its own* will create isolated pockets of effective classroom practice, but not whole-school change. School-level enquiry *on its own* fails to permeate the insularity of classrooms.

Through schoolwide action enquiry, a school staff can develop the school as a centre of enquiry and knowledge creation so that it is perpetually self-renewing.

Formal collection of data, followed by group analysis and interpretation, can move the school community forward on the path it has elected to follow. In America, Glickman (1990, 1993) and Joyce *et al.* (1993, 1999) are two of the major scholars who have long supported the use of schoolwide action research for school renewal – involving democratic governance, commonly agreed values, a simultaneous focus on organization and teaching, and learning issues and staff commitment to the ‘critical study process’ of enquiry. In the UK, the work of Hopkins, Ainscow and West within the IQEA project (Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994; Hopkins and Harris, 1997; Hopkins 2001) has trod a similar path.

Involving groups of staff in collaborative enquiry is, of course, professionally developmental for those who engage in it. However, this is insufficient for whole-school improvement and renewal purposes. Two other factors are required. One relates to whole-school learning. An enquiry activity designed for school improvement purposes may only involve a small group of staff, but it has to be collectively owned. It is being undertaken *by* an enquiry group, but *on behalf* of the whole staff. A second relates to permeability to external learning.

2 School-to-school networks

One of the beliefs underpinning the NLC work is that schools seeking to redesign themselves as enquiry-based professional learning communities will be able to do so more potently by working and learning together. In fact, we see it as almost axiomatic that schools committed to learning and to collaboration will know that they *need* to do so. Recycling the existing knowledge-base is an insufficient foundation for learning. Research has also revealed that innovation is a complex rather than a linear process, with interactions among many actors creating *innovation systems*. Developing companies seldom innovate alone (OECD, 2000). Innovation systems are constituted by actors involved in innovation and their interrelationships.

The challenge, of course, is that school-to-school collaboration goes against the pattern of recent times – against the grain, so to speak. There are a number of contributory factors, some contextually specific to education, some generic to organizational learning challenges. They include:

- poor collaborative histories
- communication barriers
- divisions within the system
- conservative forces and resisters
- dependency cultures
- isolationism
- work overload, and
- a policy environment that has encouraged competition.

There is also, though, a growing desire for collaboration, an increasingly supportive policy context and an evolving knowledge-base about the infrastructural conditions needed for effective learning networks. These conditions include:

- informed external facilitation and problem-solving
- consultancy support and critical friendship
- connections with the knowledge-base
- both internal and external trainers
- research expertise, or support for enquiry
- high levels of communication
- adequate resources
- networking capacity – support for school-to-school learning, and
- committed leadership.

Contained within the last item, leadership, are some key characteristics that may be of even greater significance – the intellectual, emotional and aspirational dimensions of effective knowledge networks. They include shared values, a willingness to distribute leadership, openness, a capacity for trust, the will to make it happen and the moral purpose to want to work together on behalf of all children and the system. Clearly, leadership is critical.

There are some specific elements of this leadership dimension that are worth making explicit. The first relates to the ‘meta-leadership’ role of the headteacher in acting as advocate and gatekeeper for the progressive cultural and structural changes required in the way things are done within the school. Within-school and between-school learning cannot happen without headteacher leadership of a high order – which is why leadership development processes are a key component of NLCs. The second concerns the early facilitation and transition management role for leadership teams in getting things started, ensuring that they become embedded, identifying key personnel, creating time and shelter conditions and connecting enquiry groups with the wider community within and beyond the school. A third relates to the particular skills required of those who lead enquiry groups – the creativity, technical abilities, learning hunger, problem-framing and problem-solving capacities, humility, humour, empathy and change agency orientation.

Beyond these obvious ‘levels’ of leadership, though, lies also the more potent potential of schoolwide collaborative enquiry – which is to empower all staff, at all levels, to become interchangeably leaders and followers, partners and participants in the use of enquiry and the creation of knowledge for school and system renewal. It is an activity that grows leaders.

3 Networks of networks

NCSL has promoted network-to-network learning within the NLC initiative. This is new terrain – and we have been enquiring into process and practice, learning as the initiative evolves. The challenge was to generate system-wide maps of innovatory practice, and to encourage transfer of learning through grouping NLCs into ‘networks of 10 networks’. Each grouping had consultancy support, a researcher, facilitated online communities and access to web site dissemination, in addition to face-to-face groupings of network leaders, critical friendship partnerships, seminars, celebration and sharing conferences and

newsletters. There was a substantial quasi-independent 'real-time research' component, designed to transfer learning and to stimulate innovation.

These same 'structures' facilitated infusion of knowledge into the network groupings from NCSL's research programmes and knowledge-creating activities as well as from the wider landscape of educational knowledge. Connection with and involvement of international partners and non-educational organizations generated the challenge from which network theory tells us that networks thrive:

Network theory tells us that homogeneous networks, characterised by close proximity (e.g. the same district) and common affiliation (e.g. the same educational discipline) limit the extent of different ideas to which the members are exposed and consequently restrict their thoughts and actions to a small repertoire of options. In contrast, networks developed among educators from diverse educational backgrounds, of diverse professional belief systems, and with diverse professional practices or teaching assignments provide a rich source of new ideas and new possibilities and a foundation for experiments in practice. This sort of experimentation holds the potential for profound improvement.

(adapted from Smylie and Hart, 1999)

Knowledge transfer within and between networks was a crucial determinant of success. However, aspirations around the theme of transformation were equally dependent upon the paradigm shift potential of challenge by knowledge from beyond this country and, we believe, from beyond the exclusive field of education, too.

Conclusion – Levels of Learning

This chapter makes the case that knowledge networks require a reorientation, first, around enquiry and associated knowledge management processes. Hopefully this dimension has been fully covered. Less fully, but nonetheless overtly, the case has also been made for a focus upon different patterns of leadership within knowledge networks – distributed leadership models, lateral leadership and new styles of coaching and facilitative leadership for headteachers and others in formal leadership positions. It is also axiomatic that leadership and enquiry are processes deeply integrated with learning.

Learning makes professional and organizational meaning from knowledge, and receptiveness to learning – professional, organizational and systemic – is a critical precondition for effective knowledge networks. Within the NLC initiative, we therefore defined five levels of learning around which proposals were formulated. They were:

- pupil learning (a pedagogical focus)
- teacher learning (with professional learning communities as the goal)
- leadership learning (at all levels, within and between schools)
- organizational, or 'within-school' learning, and
- school-to-school learning.

Knowledge networks require 'nested' learning arrangements, both laterally and vertically. In that way connected components of the system can learn together in order to be able to function facilitatively for one another. The five levels of learning above lie within the control and determinism of those who work in schools. For the system to support knowledge networks it requires also LAs, universities and policy-makers at local levels to create hospitable contexts. Just as important is the national policy context – and the capacity of government departments and agencies such as NCSL, the GTC, OFSTED, etc. to work in tandem also – to live out a commitment to knowledge networks at the macro-level.

Notes

- 1 Paper presented to the CERI/OECD/DfES/QCA/ESRC Forum 'Knowledge Management in Education and Learning' 18–19 March 2002, Oxford.
- 2 This section of the chapter is adapted, with permission, from *Schooling for Tomorrow: Innovation and Networks*, D. Hopkins (2001), OECD/CERI.
- 3 For a further discussion of these points see Fullan, M. (2000) The return of large scale reform, *Journal of Educational Change*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–23.
- 4 *Understanding the Role of Enquiry*, Jackson, D. (2001), which contains an account of the history of action research and school-based enquiry, is available on the NCSL website, www.ncsl.org.uk.

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Part 4

Toward Phase 5 School Improvement

Conclusion

Future Directions for the Field

Janet H. Chrispeels and Alma Harris

The accounts of the various programmes and projects contained in this book collectively enhance our knowledge and understanding of the processes and impact of school improvement. As discussed in the opening chapter, school improvement as a field has evolved through several distinct phases. These phases are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and flow into one another. Phase 1 with its focus on teacher action research, school self-review and concern for meeting the needs of disadvantaged students laid an important foundation. Phase 2 brought to the surface the idea of the school as the unit of change, which was reinforced in Phase 3 with greater attention to replicable Comprehensive School Reform approaches that addressed both organizational and classroom improvement. The dominant themes of Phase 4 are the concern for being able to scale up reforms and the recognition that districts and local education authorities have a vital role to play in school improvement. As work in Phase 4 continues to mature, we suggest that the knowledge and insights gained are contributing to a potential new phase of development within the school improvement field. This 'fifth phase' of networked learning communities and their relationship to district reform initiatives will be explored later in this chapter. It is also clear there are a number of challenges currently facing the school improvement field as it has grown and diversified. Paradoxically, the school improvement field has consistently converged around 'what works', being much more certain of this empirical territory than ever before, while simultaneously, splintering and diverging into

new research activity. A number of the themes identified in this book – context related improvement, networking, district led reform, professional learning communities – represent independent and growing research areas in their own right. A challenge for the school improvement field therefore is one of concurrently exploring new areas without forfeiting the coherence and the core purpose of the field as a whole.

School improvement research has shown that many schools are capable of improving themselves if the conditions are right and relationships within the external environment are optimum. But as Fullan (2005: 4) argues, schools are inevitably pulled in two directions, by stable and less stable forces, and the dynamics of the successful organization are of ‘irregular cycles and discontinuous trends’. It will inevitably be more difficult to create the optimum internal conditions in the face of relentless, external change. Much will depend on the educational priorities of the future and the weight placed upon ‘school improvement’ as a means of meeting these priorities. Past experience would suggest that even the most influential research fields can become marginalized in the pursuit of quicker, more expedient and politically popular solutions to raising attainment and achievement.

The evidence presented in the chapters in this book represents a 30-year historical record of the process of school improvement and highlights important gains that have been made in the field. Some of the individual and system-wide initiatives have resulted in effective school- and system-level change, others have been less successful. The themes and points of tension that emerge from these chapters and their accounts of different interventions and initiatives offer ‘rich points’ (Agar, 1994) for critical dialogue and contrastive analysis, which help to make visible the similarities and differences of school improvement across different countries and contexts.

Using Inherent Tensions and Dilemmas to Foster School Improvement Possibilities

In concluding this book, we discuss some of the challenges and concerns identified by various chapters, which we believe present the opportunity to deepen our understanding of school improvement and creatively address what appear at the moment to be some intractable problems and dilemmas. The conflicts and tensions inherent in the process of school improvement create the potential for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to examine these dilemmas not as either/or situations but to see them as interrelated and offering new possibilities and solutions. Three broad themes about school improvement emerge from the data and accounts in the chapters and will be presented as a series of key questions for the field. These three themes are: goals and outcomes, capacity building and structures for school improvement.

Goals and outcome tensions and dilemmas

How can systems maintain the press to close the achievement gap and set reasonable targets and timeframes for achievement gains that motivate and inspire teachers and students? When researchers examine achievement data over time, it is unusual to find sustained gains for more than two to three years in a row. These findings suggest that it may be unrealistic for policy-makers to expect continuous gains, in all schools, at all levels and for all subgroups every year. Plateaus in student achievement may be necessary and inevitable to give school staff time to reflect, regroup and re-energize after three or four years of intense improvement work. Such plateaus are currently not factored into public policy achievement expectations (Lee, 2004; Lee and Wong, 2004). Although cycles of continuous improvement may be desirable and essential to close the achievement gap, the current press for reform and the accompanying high stakes accountability measures in United States, Canada and England are creating *improvement fatigue* that is not sufficiently taken into account by district and state educational leaders. More work is needed to understand the kinds of conditions and supports needed both within the school and within the broader community to sustain school improvement and close the achievement gap.

What are measures of school improvement outcomes that reflect standardized, comparative student achievement as well as more locally significant outcomes that capture school improvement goals and rich student performance? As discussed in the opening chapter, a major shift in school improvement emerged between Phase 1 and Phase 2, in which those involved in school improvement turned more attention to classroom instruction and outcomes for students. Programmes such as Success for All and the High Reliability Project set fairly specific student outcome measures that included achievement as well as factors such as student attendance or graduation rates. Other programmes described in this book such as Improving the Quality of Education for All tended to focus less on specific measures of improvement and more on creating the conditions within the school to foster improved teaching and learning. It is clear from the account of the Effective School Improvement across several European countries that different contextual factors lead to different interpretations of 'improvement outcomes' for students and for schools. As Tillman asserts,

Multiple forms of cultural knowledge are central to good pedagogy. Student knowledge and teacher knowledge of students are relevant to decisions about educational practice [and outcomes] . . . This cultural knowledge includes that of particular communities that ought to be understood by researchers.

(Tillman, 2002: 32)

Consequently, knowing how to measure school improvement outcomes needs critical discourse among policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, community and students that takes account of outcomes for students as well as organizational and practice outcomes.

What is the appropriate balance between standardized practices and local diversity? The chapters in this book illustrate that context matters and that context is of paramount importance in designing and implementing successful school improvement programmes. One reform programme or model will not fit the needs of all schools in a district or all districts. Schools may need a range of improvement models from which they can determine which combination of programmes or individual programme is most appropriate for their context. Because of the idiosyncratic nature and local development of many school improvement models in Phase I through III, it could be argued that research efforts have been disparate, and in some cases non-systematic, tending toward the descriptive rather than analytical or critical. Possibly this helps to explain the under-theorized nature of school improvement (Chatterji, 2002). There is a considerable empirical base; however, it is diverse and has tended to be reactive rather than proactive and theory-building.

The last few years have witnessed a sense of urgency in many countries to improve student outcomes and address equity issues. As a result of these policy demands, there has been a greater press for standardized reforms at national, state and district levels, as shown in several of the chapters. The press for more standardized practices, however, runs the risk of limiting a schools' options to meet the diverse needs of its learners and to fully address contextual factors. Three of the chapters on district reform suggest that districts can scale-up reform and at the same time give differential treatment to schools within their systems. The appropriate balance between uniformity and variation and differential resourcing within one district or region is an area ripe for further research. The chapter on Networked Learning Communities provides an alternate example of how the scale-up of good practices might be achieved without necessarily requiring standardized practices across schools. More evidence, however, is needed to determine the effectiveness of this form of 'scaling up' if schools are able to produce the outcomes being demanded by policy-makers.

Building capacity tensions and dilemmas

In what ways can teacher autonomy and creativity be balanced with the development of strong professional communities? School improvement practices over the last two decades have challenged traditional visions of schooling, particularly the idea that teachers are in private practice working in isolation from other teachers and primarily joined by a common corridor or parking lot. Many teachers have seen the opening of the classroom door through coaching or mentoring programmes as a threat to their beliefs about teacher autonomy, and the pressure to use more prescriptive curricula as diminishing creativity. When opportunities for teachers to collaborate are implemented, as were illustrated in many of the chapters in this book, some teachers expressed appreciation, saw the benefits, and were able to alter classroom practices as a result. Studies of new teachers who stay or leave the profession indicate that a primary reason teachers give for leaving is the lack of a collaborative culture (Moore-Johnson *et al.*, 2004). Given the current classroom and school structures in most educational systems, the difficulty for

policy-makers and practitioners is creating time, resources and structures that facilitate meaningful collaboration and engage teachers in professional community building. Research is needed that explores how systems use resources to promote collaboration and the cost/benefit ratios from such endeavours.

In what ways do external and internal leadership practices best support the school improvement process? The chapters in this book confirm many other studies of the importance of leadership to the improvement process. A new insight is how vital external leadership is in assisting schools and districts in the improvement process. The critical dilemma is how best to redefine roles and relationships between external and internal leaders when both are involved. Will a language of co-expertise and co-construction define the relationship? Two decades of school improvement research indicates that the more carefully reform models are developed, tested and co-constructed by school staff, the more likely they will be successfully implemented. The chapters in this book also illustrate that schools and school systems need capable, effective and sustaining internal leaders who work with external change facilitators in a co-expertise approach. The more defined the school improvement model, however, the more difficult this approach may be, especially if there are tensions among any of the key players – teachers, administrators, central office and external consultants – who are central to the reform's success.

In models that are more process oriented, such as the IQEA project or the High Reliability Schools Project, the facilitation skills of the external leader are central to successful implementation. Several challenges, however, face external change facilitators such as how to assess readiness, how to engage with the school or district, how to develop the internal capacity of the system, and how to exit. The timeframes of many externally supported initiatives are often too short to sufficiently co-construct broad-based internal leadership capacity. As the South African chapter illustrated, another dilemma is the scale of the task and the danger of spreading external support too thinly. Without strong external-internal partnerships school change efforts may be short-lived because the internal capacity will not be sufficient to sustain the improvement initiative when the external support subsides. Sustainability is also threatened if the reform requires practices that differ significantly from previously held core values, beliefs and practices or if the reform is challenged substantially by a subgroup such as the teacher union leadership, board of education or a new superintendent.

In what ways should reforms be scaled up through systemic directives in contrast to a more locally focused capacity building approach? A major practice and research 'blank spot' in the school improvement field has been the challenge of transferability and scalability of reform. The school improvement field is full of programmes and projects that are locally or nationally ring-fenced because of the type of design or the issues being addressed. The lack of easy transferability suggests two conclusions that warrant further research. First, the school improvement field may not have sufficiently concentrated on the mechanisms and possibility of transferability across local, national and international boundaries with the net result that the degree of replication and repetition in the field is

high. On the one hand, this replication can be seen as a waste of time and energy when needs are great and resources scarce; on the other hand, replication and repetition can enhance ownership and local sustainability. Vitale and Romance (2005) argue that frameworks for scale-up are needed to guide the transfer of successful research-validated approaches.

Second, consecutive studies of implementation of change suggest that context is important and effective programmes must adapt and be adapted to the context to remain effective. Yet context remains a relatively under-explored dimension within the field, although it is clear it can be a barrier to growth and expansion of certain programmes. Interestingly, three improvement programmes highlighted in this book – Success for All, IQEA and High Reliability Schools Project – began in one locality to meet the needs of a certain group of schools in a particular context and have shown that the models can span national boundaries. Those programmes have been transferred to new sites to embrace and work within other contexts. Studies of these models suggest that both fidelity and mutual adaptation may be key to transferability and scalability. A better understanding of the incremental and iterative processes of moving from the few to the many could advance our knowledge of how to scale up reforms more effectively.

The chapters in this book on districtwide reform suggest a different path for school improvement – that of systemic reform as a method of scaling up. However, we are just beginning to understand how to expand and sustain reform through engaging in system-wide improvement initiatives such as implementing curriculum standards, aligning those standards to instruction and assessment, mandating certain textbooks, and providing common, professional development. However, little is known about how a system or district copes with and supports the varied readiness of schools within the system to take up the reforms. The chapters in this book begin to provide insights but, as illustrated in the chapter on South African district reform, may lack the structures to implement the directives. Without district or school-level capacity, effective and appropriate system changes may not enter the classroom door or influence student learning (Cuban and Usdan, 2003).

In addition to the lack of local capacity, systemic changes designed to scale-up reform can also be undermined if there are high rates of administrative and teacher turnover, which is often typical in many inner city areas under high stress and in isolated rural communities. Furthermore, many of the current system changes seem to focus on increased accountability as the core driver for change. As Lee (2004: 820) and Lee and Wong (2004) indicate, most accountability legislation is 'regulatory and not supportive, relying more on mandates and sanctions than on capacity building and reward'. National and state governments are frequently pressing for districts and school co-operation with new mandates and simultaneously applying threats for noncompliance or underperformance. This is certainly perceived to be the case in the US under the 2002 No Child Left Behind mandate for reform. Recent research in economics suggests that requests for co-operation that are coupled with threats for compliance reduce voluntary co-operation and build resistance (Fehr and Schmidt, 1999). Furthermore, Fullan (2005) argues that sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the

whole system is moving forward. His argument is that new vertical and lateral leadership connections are needed within the system (from policy-maker to classroom teacher) to ensure that it is constantly adapting, improving and problem solving. More research is needed to fully understand the interplay of legislative mandates and how they support or constrain the development of (a) local capacity and effective structures needed to respond to and sustain school improvement, (b) safe collaborative learning environments for children and adults, and (c) the retention of competent teachers and administrators. To move beyond the standards plateau will require systems thinking that encompasses the whole – policy system, school systems and community – to identify how improvement efforts can become large-scale forces of change and transformation.

Structural dilemmas and tensions

How can top-down and bottom-up reform be productively linked to empower schools, teachers and students? Although Fullan (1999) and others have argued that top-down and bottom-up reforms are needed for sustained school improvement, this dualism, nevertheless, leads to inevitable and often ongoing tensions. These tensions between school autonomy and choice and top-down directives from district, state or national levels can be healthy and even complementary as seen in the New York case study. The San Diego case study suggests, however, that policy-makers and district leaders may need to be aware that top-down mandates, which require uniformity, may actually disrupt excellent local reform efforts in some schools. As the California Central Coast district case study also showed, when state mandates are imposed on top of local district reform initiatives, overload and confusion can result, which undermine teacher/student-centered initiatives. More attention therefore needs to be given to understanding the differences between the outcomes of teacher-led school improvement and system-initiated school improvement. The NLC concept also raises interesting possibilities to understanding how teacher-led reform may be best supported by centralized structures.

What is the relationship and balance of a school's responsibility for student learning and obligations of the larger community to help close the achievement gap? The achievement gap between children of poverty, especially poverty compounded by second language needs, persists and prevails. The chapters in this book highlight processes and models that have narrowed the achievement gap without addressing the wider conditions of poverty and disadvantage in the surrounding community. The continuation of the gap in many high poverty urban communities throughout the world is evidence that school improvement alone is not the answer and that it is naïve to expect that school improvement can address such deep rooted social inequities. There is a need to move beyond blaming the school (teachers) or the community (parents and students) toward more multi-agency forms of intervention that tackle the social inequalities that negatively affect schools in certain communities. Research is needed to understand the level of resources from private and government sectors that are required to attend to the economic and social health of communities and to assist schools in the poorest

communities to attract and retain the best teachers. Too little work has been done on community investment modelling that could have the highest payoff for school improvement.

In what ways can teacher unions be more fully engaged in school improvement? Several of the chapters, particularly the two chapters describing district reform initiatives in California, USA, illustrated the important role of the teacher unions in the reform process. In some of the cases outlined, the lack of teacher union support eventually undermined the reform process. Protecting working conditions and securing salary and benefits are important functions that have improved the work environment for teachers; and at the same time, unions have frequently prevented teachers from securing the professional status enjoyed by other knowledge workers. Particularly challenging for those involved in school improvement has been securing changes in the school calendar and timetable to increase time for teacher collaboration and professional development, yet as most of the chapters in this book illustrate, time for professional collaboration is critical for school improvement. The role of unions in the process of school improvement is an understudied phenomenon.

The identification and discussion of the major themes above are a way of exploring the tensions and challenges inherent in the school improvement field. They raise questions, present challenges and point to new directions for future research. They represent rich points of insight and understanding as well as highlighting some of the *blank spots* in the school improvement field.

Toward a Fifth Phase: the Possibilities and Challenges of Networked Learning Communities

In the opening chapter we described the evolution of the school improvement field through four phases: Phase 1 – focus on small-scale teacher development projects often targeted to special groups of students, Phase 2 – school improvement focused at the classroom as well as school level, Phase 3 – programme refinement and issues of scalability and transferability of comprehensive reform models, and Phase 4: improving schools through system-wide or system changes. We would argue that a fifth phase of school improvement is emerging that is largely concerned with system-level changes through collaboration and networking across schools and systems. To conclude, we examine some of the conditions that will be necessary to maximize the benefits of networking and suggest that networking may have its strongest impact if there is a close interface between networked learning communities and Phase 4 systemic change efforts, especially at the local authority or school district level.

The concept of networking schools has spread most rapidly in England with strong financial support of the government and organizational and leadership support of the National College of School Leadership (see David Jackson's chapter in this book). The chapter on Manitoba secondary school reform by Lorna Earl, Nancy Torrance and Stephanie Sutherland also illustrated the development of a

networked learning community in Canada that brought together a private foundation, provincial government and schools. Many of the Comprehensive School Reform models in the US also link schools across districts and states that are engaged in the same reform model in summer institutes. However, these networks do not stimulate the same level of interaction as the clusters of networked schools in England. Although networking is regarded as a potentially powerful transformative approach to school improvement (Hargreaves, 2004b; Fullan, 2005), there are a number of conditions that may need to be in place for networking to reach its full potential. We suggest that one condition that may be essential is to decrease the ranking and comparison of schools currently found in many accountability systems. We would argue that such ranking creates inherent tension and contradictions between the continued press for standardization and individual school accountability alongside the aspiration that schools should collaboratively transfer knowledge, innovate collectively and jointly plan to improve teaching and learning. While emphasis upon partnership, collaboration and networking is to be welcomed, the mechanisms of accountability need to be adjusted in ways that can support their potential outcomes and benefits.

A second condition essential for achieving the benefits of a networked learning community is ensuring that all schools have the same possibility and opportunity to be part of a network, federation or partnership. For schools considered to be in challenging circumstances or in high poverty areas, the potential for collaboration with other schools may be more limited. Hargreaves (2004a) suggests there is apartheid of school improvement created by the fact that schools that are performing well are given the latitude and resource to collaborate and innovate. Conversely, those schools that are considered to be underperforming are in receipt of even tighter prescription and scrutiny. The resulting effect is a sharp divide between those schools able to participate in the new collaborative or networking efforts and those schools excluded by virtue of their under-performance. Put bluntly, those schools best placed to improve are rewarded by being given even greater opportunities to develop, change and grow. In contrast, those schools in less favourable circumstances with poorer results are penalized by the imposition of even tighter review, control and prescription.

A third important condition that could help realize the benefits of alternative models of partnership, networking and collaboration for school improvement is to develop ways of discerning the different sets of needs of schools and identifying the various combinations of networks, partnerships or federations that would best meet those needs. We need to give proper attention to differentiation and to gauging the impact of collaborative forms of school improvement in relation to pupil learning outcomes:

We are also waking to the understanding that to move beyond mere rhetoric about supporting every child to be successful will require collaboration – within school networks and between schools and a range of other public service, voluntary and community providers.

(Jackson and Hannon, n.d., p. 2)

Related to this third condition is a fourth – the need to focus on outcomes expected from the various types of networks. There is a danger that the rhetoric of networking will overshadow the need to look critically at what networks do, what they produce and whether teaching and learning improves as a result. The very rapid spread of networks in England suggests that given the opportunity to link with colleagues, the appeal of collaboration is particularly strong in educational systems premised upon competition and control. Nevertheless, there needs to be careful consideration and some systematic evaluation of whether and how far these new collaborative arrangements contribute to improved learning outcomes, for both teachers and pupils.

Finally, a condition that could be vital to sustaining and strengthening networked learning communities is to fully develop a role for local educational authorities. As illustrated in several chapters in this book, district-led reform is one way to scale-up school improvement. We would suggest that if districts also worked to network schools within the system and with schools in other districts, the schools would have the benefits of both internal and external knowledge and resources. Other studies have shown that when teachers have both internal and external professional development networks to draw on, there is an exponential effect on their learning as well as the schools (Morris, Chrispeels and Burke, 2003). We believe that schools could also benefit from internal and external networks, and that school districts and local education authorities need to play significant roles in building these networks. This logic suggests that we need to think of the phases of school improvement not as either/or propositions but as conjoined and evolving. The findings and informed practices of systemic reform being identified in Phase IV research need to be linked and brought forward into Phase 5. District reform and network building need to occur side by side, and they need to be linked. Networks of schools can thrive in the short run on enthusiasm, the hard work of a few, and the national policy and resource stimulus of an organization such as the National College of School Leadership in England. To substantially affect teacher and student learning in the long run, however, networks need ongoing facilitative structures, which local districts may be best positioned to provide. This new ‘brokerage role’ (Jackson and Hannon, n.d., pp. 5–6) for school districts and local authorities will require new levels and types of conversations with schools and across boundaries, including conversations and partnerships with social service, employment and health service agencies to meet the needs of students and families who are currently left behind.

In summary, the 30-year history of school improvement has unearthed critical dimensions in the process of school change and development. The early years illustrated the importance of engaging individual teachers in the process of improvement through action research and curriculum development. Networked learning communities are once again showing us the power of personal and collaborative engagement of teachers. We have also learned that teachers cannot do it alone and that school organizational variables count and must be addressed. Whole-school reform is needed in the improvement process. The positive results from many Phase 3 Comprehensive School Reform models also illustrate that

schools benefit from external programme development and outside expert knowledge. Schools do not have the resources and capacity to single-handedly improve themselves, especially if they serve the most disadvantaged pupils. The challenge of Phase 3 has been how to take good models to scale and transfer knowledge across contexts. Whole system change emerged as a potential answer. National, state and provincial governments entered the school improvement process with top-down policy mandates. These centralized initiatives have helped to speed improvement in many schools, but have still not closed the achievement gap or addressed many inequities in local systems. More local systemic initiatives have recently shown that school districts and local authorities can be positive forces for more system change by mediating national policies, building capacity and creating shared vision for excellence and equity (Rorrer, Skrla and Scheurich, 2004; Jackson and Hannon, n.d.). The challenge posed by these systemic efforts, however, is that individual schools and educators often feel hamstrung and unable to exercise their best judgements in improving student learning. Evidence from networked learning communities suggest one way to reinvigorate and recommit individual schools and educators to the process of improvement. To sustain these networks and their potential to contribute to school improvement, however, requires system support from both national and local educational authorities. The phases of school improvement indicate a constant striving to achieve the delicate balance between individual initiative and system change, between internal and external resources and ideas, between pressure for accountability and support for change, and between independence and collaboration.

Despite the challenges to be addressed and the research and practice work that remains to be done, school improvement practitioners and researchers have provided a rich and diverse account of the processes and practices of school improvement. Both have worked tirelessly in the best interests of schools, teachers and students to implement changes and to understand the processes and consequences of the changes. School improvement researchers, in particular, have demonstrated a consistent commitment to working with schools and teachers that other fields have simply not achieved or sustained. The school improvement field continues to show the possibility and potential of schools to make a difference to the life chances of young people in many countries. Its research base has reinforced a firm belief in the potential of schools to change educational outcomes for the better, in spite of other external and powerful factors. The school improvement field has sometimes been pressurized to offer naïve panaceas or promises but has resisted the opportunity to do so. As the chapters in this book dynamically illustrate, there is much to be recognized, acknowledged and celebrated.

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