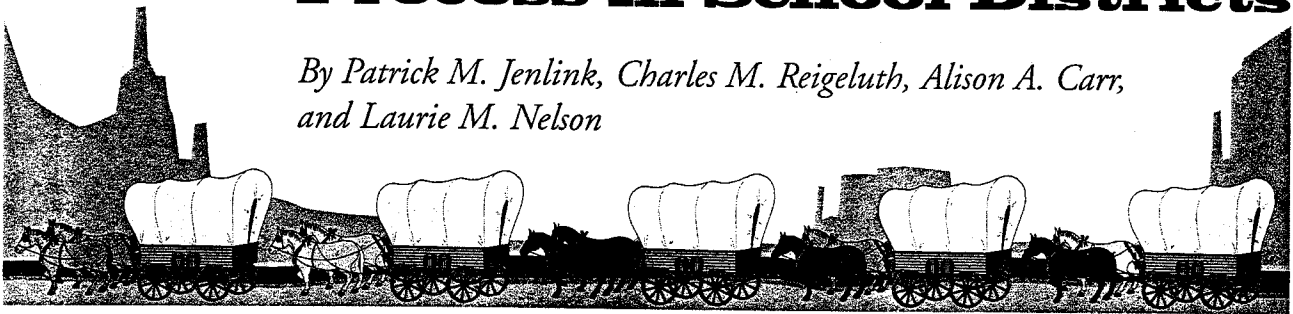


An Expedition for Change

Facilitating the Systemic Change Process in School Districts

By Patrick M. Jenlink, Charles M. Reigeluth, Alison A. Carr,
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Conditions and educational needs of communities have changed dramatically from what they were in the 1950s and 1960s, and educators recognize that fact. Those changing conditions and educational needs include:

- a society in which there is greater need for citizens who can understand and utilize the advancements of new technologies, sustain and advance a democratic way of life, accept the responsibility of protecting the environment, and ensure a bright future for our children,
- a workplace in which there is greater need for employees with initiative, cooperative skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, life-long learning skills, and diverse perspectives,
- a family in which there is less discipline, less communication, less caring, and more emotional, physical, and sexual abuse,
- a community in which there is more violence, more drug use, less of a sense of community and caring, and more need for civic awareness and action, and
- individuals who face more obstacles and challenges in attaining self-actualization and self-fulfillment.

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Educators are also recognizing that these changes in their communities require systemic change in their educational systems, to significantly enhance their ability to meet all students' needs for coping with such a different world. However, those educators seldom have any experience in undertaking systemic change, and they are finding that it is far more difficult than the piecemeal reforms that have prevailed over the past several decades. They are finding that efforts to bring about such change in their school systems are much like a journey to a new land—a journey that is fraught with obstacles and danger.

Fortunately, enough educators have recently undertaken this type of journey to provide us with some information about the terrain, and some in-

dication of what places to avoid and what directions to pursue. Having been on some of those journeys and studied others, the four of us are currently developing some maps of the terrain, and descriptions of some pitfalls, mountain passes, and bridges that can help an expedition to get closer to whatever destination its members may set for themselves. Those descriptions are in the form of "guidance for a guide"—a facilitator of the change process—who helps the members of the expedition to figure out where they want to go and how to get there.

In this article, we summarize the maps and descriptions we are developing for a guidebook of the same title as this article (Jenlink, Reigeluth, Carr, & Nelson, 1995). We begin by offering our view of the definition and purpose of systemic change, and for whom our guidebook is designed. Then we describe the logic of the journey (change process), followed by a description of some tools (beliefs) that a facilitator is likely to find helpful for avoiding and overcoming the numerous obstacles. Then we briefly describe some specific actions for a guide (process facilitator) to take and specific activities for the explorers and settlers (change team members and stakeholders) to engage in to decide upon their destination, plan their route, and undertake the journey. These actions and activities (which we refer to as "events") are of two kinds: discrete and continuous. Discrete events are those which are done just once, and tend to have input-output relationships with each other. That is, the result of one event is needed as input for another event to be most useful. For example, an expedition may need to cross a bridge before it can cross the mountains on the other side of it. On the other hand, continuous events are those for which they need to constantly monitor the needs and conditions for the expedition and periodically take actions to address them, such as replenishing their fuel and food supplies.

Systemic Change

The purpose of systemic change is to create a better educational system than what currently exists. We define systemic change as an approach to change that:

- recognizes the interrelationships and interde-

pendencies among the parts of the educational system, with the consequence that desired changes in one part of the system are accompanied by changes in other parts that are necessary to support those desired changes, and

- recognizes the interrelationships and interdependencies between the educational system and its community, including parents, employers, social service agencies, religious organizations, and much more, with the consequence that all those stakeholders are given active ownership over the change effort.

The purpose of the guidebook is to help those facilitating a change effort to create and sustain systemic change in their educational system. It helps them to learn from the failures and successes of others, so that they may avoid mistakes that have the potential to divide their community and destroy careers. It focuses on the process for change, rather than on what specific changes should be made. We believe that a community should decide what changes it needs, and that our role should be to share what we have learned about the change process—the critically important understandings, beliefs, skills, knowledge, and events for effecting a district-wide, community-based change effort.

The guidebook is intended primarily for people who want to facilitate systemic change in education. More specifically, it is for:

- People who recognize that systemic changes require changes beyond the scope of a classroom or a school building; that they require district-level changes as well.
- People who recognize that systemic changes require the participation of all groups in the community that have a stake in their educational system.
- People who realize that systemic change is difficult and who want some guidance as to how to go about it.

The Logic of the Journey

As a facilitator your purpose is to help a community, and its school system, to better meet all students' needs. To do this, it is important for you to

help the community to develop a vision of their ideal educational system. Creating an ideal vision frees the stakeholders from the premise that the current system is a given and must be the foundation for whatever they develop. This ideal vision process enables participants to transcend existing mindsets and assumptions about schools and educational change, which enables the stakeholders to design a new system in a safe or neutral space.

How can you foster the development of an ideal vision of education? One challenge is to help the stakeholders to break out of their current mindsets about education. Without this, they will never seriously consider a new vision. A second challenge is to help stakeholders create and take ownership in a shared vision of the new educational system. A third challenge is to help them develop a passion for their new vision. As Peter Senge (1990) has noted, without true commitment by the stakeholders, a vision cannot sustain long-term viability and success. Each of these three challenges raises an additional question (Figure 1).

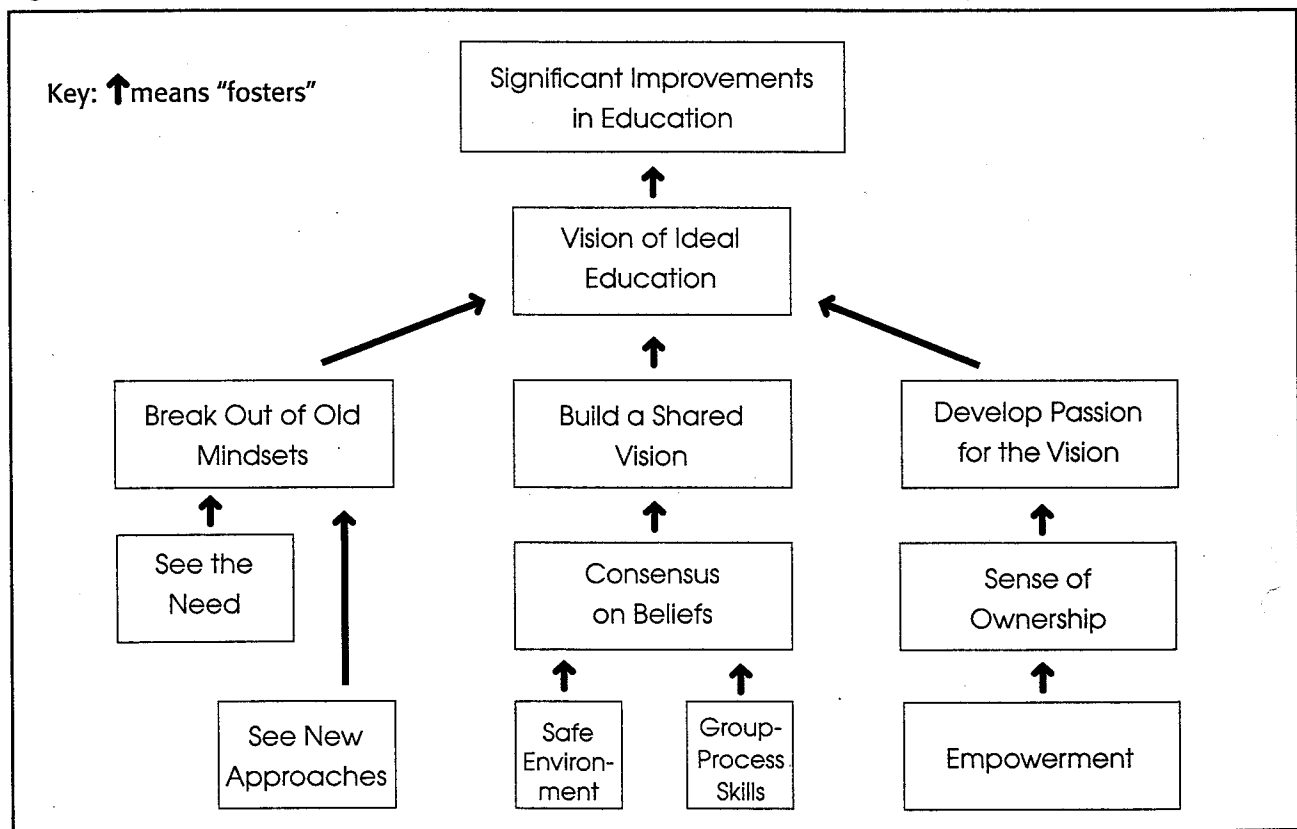
First, how can you help stakeholders to break out of their old mindsets about education and change? One essential means is to help them see

the need for a systemically different approach to education. Another is to foster exposure to new approaches to education, which can be done through readings, videos, lectures, site visits, and dialogues with all stakeholders.

Second, how can you help stakeholders to build a shared vision of education? To do this, you need to help them to reach consensus on beliefs about education, for they are the foundation of any vision. Since beliefs (or values) about education are likely to differ among your stakeholders, you must bring different kinds of stakeholders together to try to understand why the others believe what they do. This requires a psychological environment in which stakeholders feel safe in sharing their beliefs about education—an environment where everyone suspends their judgments of others while sharing. It also requires the development of group-process skills for dialogue, self-disclosure, listening, and conflict resolution, which takes guidance, time, and patience.

Third, how can you help stakeholders to develop a passion for the new vision of education? The most important consideration is to foster a sense of ownership of the vision, which requires

Figure 1. The Logic of the Systemic Change Process.



their authentic participation in, responsibility for, and control over, the process by which they develop the vision. This requires that the leadership of the district be willing to step out of their old mindsets about administration, and embrace a new mindset that entails empowering rather than controlling.

And if all this isn't difficult enough, you also need to continuously:

- foster the stakeholders' motivation for the change effort,
- foster their reflection on, and redesign of, the change process they are using, and
- foster two-way communication among all stakeholders, especially with those who choose not to participate in the change process.

Discrete Events in the Journey

Discrete events are those which occur at distinct points during the change effort. They may be understood as important transition points in the process. It may be necessary to revisit a discrete event during the change effort. Given the logic and beliefs of a systemic change process, here is an overview of discrete events.

Process facilitation begins with you, the facilitator, assessing your own readiness to serve as a process guide, and then conducting an assessment of the district's readiness for systemic change. From there, you assist stakeholders in understanding and changing their existing beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets—changing individually, in groups, and as a district (school system and community). And along the way, you find yourself continuously growing and changing—co-evolving—in concert with the stakeholders as they design a new educational system for their children.

Assess Readiness and Capacity

1. Assess and enhance your readiness to be a facilitator.

Before you take on the responsibility of facilitating systemic change, it is important for you to conduct a self-assessment of your readiness and to de-

sign a professional development program based on the needs you identify in that self-assessment. The self-assessment is based on competencies in three broad areas: skills and knowledge, personal growth and change, and group process. For each competency, we provide a set of questions to help you assign a rating to a scale, and all the scales comprise a profile of your readiness. To design a professional development program, you determine which areas require additional professional development as a prerequisite to facilitating systemic change, and which areas require ongoing development throughout the change effort. You also figure out how to enhance your development within each area that needs it, both before and throughout the change effort. Finally, you initiate this program before entering into a formal relationship with a school district, and continue the program, periodically reassessing your development and redesigning the development program as required to successfully facilitate the district's change effort. You should help every person involved in process facilitation to similarly assess and enhance his or her capabilities as a process facilitator.

2. Establish or redefine your relationship with a school district.

If you have no relationship with a district, then it is your responsibility to identify a school district that you might want to work with, talking with the contact person by phone, making a site visit, and deciding whether or not to proceed to a more time-consuming assessment of the district's readiness for systemic change. If your decision is "yes," then you enter into a preliminary agreement for conducting a district readiness assessment. If you already have a relationship with a district, in this event you attempt to analyze your relationship with key leaders, deciding whether or not to proceed to the next event, and if so, you develop a plan for redefining your relationships, and enter into an agreement for assessing the district's readiness for change.

3. Assess the district's readiness for change and negotiate a formal agreement.

To accomplish this, establish a set of criteria by looking at documents and interviewing key people. You also help those people to acquire a better understanding of the need for, and nature of, a sys-

temic change effort. Finally, you make the decision to enter into a formal relationship with the key leaders of the school district for facilitating their systemic change effort.

4. Assess the district's capacity for change.

In this event you meet with various stakeholder groups within the district and community to identify the baseline of existing and lacking capacities for systemic change. You also gather personality profiles and skill inventories, and you communicate understandings about the change process.

Prepare the Initial Core Team

5. Select the participants for the Core Team.

As facilitator, you should adapt the criteria and selection process for the Core Team to your situation with the help of key district leaders: identify types of people for the Core Team; select the initial slate and alternates with the help of key leaders; meet with individuals to make sure they will all be appropriate; recruit the members; and announce the team membership to the public, all while creating a good public awareness and image of what is going on. If you are an internal facilitator with political "baggage," some special precautions should be heeded.

6. Create the Core Team dynamic.

Accomplish this by designing and facilitating a team development process to build the team at a two-day retreat in which all Core Team members work together to develop a team culture and essential teaming skills and knowledge. This is a time for bonding and building relationships, a time for creating a sensitivity to personal beliefs, and a time for beginning to create a core of shared beliefs. This team development process will become an experience base for the Core Team to later design additional team-building experiences for new teams.

7. Train the initial Core Team in systems design.

The key responsibility at this point lies in your assisting the Core Team to develop a skill and knowledge base for educational systems design. Included are attention to systems theory, practice, and various models of systems design. Core Team members learn the importance of stakeholder involvement in change and develop a deep understanding and appreciation for the user-designer approach to

systems design. Also, you help the Core Team to begin communicating broadly among all stakeholders the meaning of systems design and the importance of systems design to systemic change.

8. Design Events 9 through 11.

As facilitator you guide the Core Team through an important transition in their role by assisting their selection and redesign of Events 9-11. Here you begin to foster an understanding of the just-in-time approach, as well as the importance of developing the appropriate skills and knowledge for each event that they design.

9. Identify competing change efforts.

You can accomplish this by helping the Core Team to identify existing and potentially competing change efforts in the district. You foster an understanding among Core Team members of the importance of identifying competing change efforts. You also help them identify where district resources are currently being directed with respect to change. You approach those stakeholders who have the most investment in the competing change efforts, and you foster an understanding of the importance of suspending those change efforts until the need for them emerges out of the systemic change process. The Core Team also starts to establish a relationship with each building in the school system and to build a positive image of the Core Team.

10. Evaluate openness to change.

As facilitator, your responsibility is to assist the Core Team in evaluating the level of openness to change that exists in the district (school system and community). They also identify why the district is open or closed to change, including an understanding of the past history of successful and unsuccessful change efforts.

11. Evaluate the existing culture for change.

This event entails you facilitating the Core Team in evaluating the existing beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets about educational change. You foster an understanding of what a culture of change is, and the importance of the language of change used by stakeholders in the district.

12. Design the process for expanding the Core Team.

At this decision point, the Core Team determines whether to expand itself into the Decisioning Team

