Introduction

For Whom This Book Was Written

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

The Need for Systemic School Improvement

In organizations throughout the world there is a revolution underway in how these systems are organized and managed. Within the past 15 years, barriers to innovative thinking about organization and management have come down, and cutting-edge ideas are emerging quickly. "The business model hasn't changed dramatically in 70 years," says Chris Turner, the "learning person" for Xerox Business Services (CBS). She continued:

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

Our current schooling structures are also inflexible and outdated.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

Regardless of efforts to develop state and local standards, new forms of assessment, innovations in technology, or applications of new approaches to teaching and learning, these attempts at educational reform will not succeed without fundamental and heroic changes in the culture, structure, policies, and perceptions of the people we call school. (Brown & Moller, 1999, p. vii)
This book offers a cutting-edge methodology for redesigning entire school systems that has the potential to make significant and positive differences in the lives of school-age children and the adults who work with them. Our process-based methodology is designed to transform the school system into high-performing, learning communities that create students, teachers, and system learning. This new methodology has the capacity to create what Brown and Mofett have called for: "changes in the culture, structure, policies, and perceptions of the place we call school." This methodology is called Knowledge Work Supervision.

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

Systemic school improvement does not search for quick-fix solutions to complex problems. Instead, in the words of Richard Farson (1990), author of Management of the Invisible: Paradoxes in Leadership:

What we need when confronting a problem or a predicament is not a quick action based upon a glimpse of all the issues involved, nor a quick process to lead to a new perspective. "Doing" should follow thinking... Perhaps it is more true "planning" than thinking. (p. 169)

**THE NEED FOR NEW APPROACHES TO SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT**

Why is there a need for a new approach to school district improvement? In the literature on school systems, only schools need to be improved. In the same literature, there are many authors telling you that you should be. Some of these model schools are limited to improving individual school buildings, while others attempt to improve the curricula. Few of them, however, talk about how to improve high performance. Most of what is described in the literature represents incremental, piecemeal change.

Jack Dale (1997), the innovator of Federalist County Public School System, Frederick, Maryland, has talked about the problem of incremental, piecemeal change. He says that piecemeal change occurs in educators respond to demands from a school system's environment. He asks:

- How have we responded? Typically, we design a new program to meet each emerging need on an as-needed basis. The continual addition of discrete educational programs does not work. Each of the specialty programs developed to date, shifted the responsibility (burden) from the whole system to expect a specific program to solve the problem. (p. 23)

Regarding piecemeal change, Dale also observes that "a permanently changed educational system is mandated. We cannot fish around the edges. Instead, we must provide leadership and vision to change the entire system. We must create a system that permanently engages itself and continually strives for improvement." (p. 25).

- Lewis Shulman (1997), former deputy director of the American Association of School Administrators, has also addressed the issue of piecemeal change. He says that educators experience the difficulty of perceiving and understanding the role of the school districts. bud with the fundamental goal of effective educational change, it must impact all children. It was a little earlier 30 years ago when John Goodlad popularized the idea of the school building as the fundamental unit of change. But now it is wise to question that assumption—not because it is wrong, but because it is insufficient. Otherwise, how can we answer the question: If the building is the primary unit at which to focus change efforts, why after 30 years has so little really changed?" (p. 19)

**THE NEED TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINING SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT**

Knowledge Work Supervision (KWS) is built on the premise that school systems must develop the capacity for sustaining distinctive improvements. This premise is supported by the literature. For example, O'Leary-Green, and Holton (1996) said:

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

(1900), and Crosby (1979, 1996). All of these people say that shortcomings in the method rest with management and management systems. The notion that managers do not use TQM principles effectively is that they lack an understanding of how to change traditional, bureaucratic organizations (Sherwood & Hoyt, 1992). Born, Eisenhardt, and Spector (1990) also explain why many change programs like TQM do not result in anticipated changes. They say that expected changes do not become reality because the change programs are guided by a theory of change that is fundamentally flawed. The common belief is that the place to begin is with the knowledge and attitudes of individuals. Changes in attitudes ... lead to change in individual behavior ... and changes in individual behavior, repeated by many people, will result in organizational change. ... This theory gets the change process exactly backwards. In fact, individual behavior is powerfully shaped by the organizational rules that people play. The most effective way to change behavior, therefore, is to put people into a new organizational context, which imposes new rules, responsibilities, and relationships on them. (p. 159)

Fundamental and enduring improvements in quality come only with fundamental changes in the way an organization is structured, together with changes in the way people are trained and managed, and therefore with changes in the way work is thought of and performed (Sherwood & Hoyt, 1992). Yet with TQM, these fundamental changes are not happening.

The application of TQM in school systems is in its early stages (e.g., Blankenship & Savin, 1994; Bradley, 1993; Salla, 1993; Tacket & Lodge, 1993). It is meeting with resistance because of its close association with business and industry and because many school practitioners are aware that TQM is often not being implemented effectively in the business world.

Systemic Education Reform: The Future of School Improvement

Contemporary school improvement approaches assume that all students can learn. Contemporary reformers also believe that student performance standards must be raised if all students are to develop higher order thinking and problem-solving skills (Coben, 1988). Raising performance standards means that instead of reform efforts focusing on isolated programs and functions of the school system (especially on teachers and students), they focus on the entire system (Murphy, 1991). It is now believed that all parts of a school system must be coordi-