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SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses a case study approach to show how a strategy of 'School Development' might be applied to New Zealand schools. It is argued that a policy of school based staff development and training will lead to greater school effectiveness. Such a policy uses a coordinated organizational approach rather than the more traditional reliance on withdrawing teachers from their classrooms for a time in order to concentrate on elements of the teaching-learning process. Support for this concept is derived from Organization Development theory and research. The term 'School Development' has been used to distinguish the particular New Zealand modifications which have been made to the more generic organization development theory. The notion of a consultant is central to the approach described and tasks and procedures which would be used by interventionists are discussed. School development assumes that schools have the capacity for self renewal. The consultant merely helps the school to realise this capacity. Components of teaching practice can be addressed within the framework of the school where they occur. Teachers can in this way increase their effectiveness with their present classes. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of school development for teacher education generally.

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'Arden' is a pseudonym for the district in which we worked. The names of schools and staff members have also been changed in order to guarantee their anonymity.

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SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

'Schools are failing' insist many commentators when attempting to explain some of the problems we are presently facing as a society. It would appear that many of the older traditional institutions are under attack. The churches have a declining membership, the courts are increasingly questioned, democratic government itself is described by some as inadequate, ineffective and obstructionist.

Young people undoubtedly behave differently, both at school and after leaving, than they did a generation ago, but does that mean that schools are unsuccessful? Some would argue that the reverse was the case. Nevertheless criticism of the functioning of schools linked with general economic decline have focused public attention on the stated role of schools in New Zealand communities. Within the profession there is general agreement that 'school effectiveness' could be improved.

The official response has been to reassure the public that the overall direction of education has been correct and that 'basic standards' compare favourably with other countries. At the same time pre-service and in-service training has been examined in order to maintain and, if possible, improve this position.

Consequently pre-service training has been increased to three years in the primary sector, a curriculum studies unit has been created at the Department level, university courses aimed at increasing specific teaching competencies have been developed, the correspondence school has offered a variety of courses through the 'Advanced Studies for Teachers' unit, and local and regional in-service courses have been widened and made available to a greater number of teachers.

Throughout the emphasis has been on improving specific skill based components of the system. It has then been left to individual schools to incorporate these improvements into their own organizations. Little assistance has been directed to this level. The introduction of 'New Maths' is a good illustration. Courses prepared by the Curriculum Development Unit were sponsored widely up and down the country. Teachers were withdrawn from their classes and instructed in this 'new' curriculum. It is now apparent that the majority returned to their schools and injected some of the jargon into their previous teaching strategies. The cupboards bursting with unused materials in many of our schools bear mute testimony to the failure of this in-service effort.

In Service Training

The assumption that withdrawal types of in-service training programmes would result in changed teaching behaviour is not supported by the literature (Courtney 1972, Perlberg 1972, Borg 1975). The usual pattern of withdrawing teachers from their classrooms for a short period, exposing them to a variety of new ideas and experiences, and then sending them back to their classes to implement these ideas simply hasn't worked. The nature of the training has been too general and those forces working against change have been too strong.

Attention has been directed to educational innovations which emphasize a particular skill, or a specific instructional process, or as with 'new' maths, a particular curriculum. Too little attention has been given to those organizational features of schools which impede or aid the adoption of such innovations. Similar assessments have been made in other school systems (Schmuck *et al* 1975).

The structure of the support services to our education system further promotes thinking about components rather than processes. For example both the visiting teacher service and the psychological service tend to focus on pupil problems rather than school or class room problems. It is unusual to view these specialists as an organizational resource although they have that capacity.

During the last two years there has been a renewed emphasis on educational administration training. From beginnings at a national seminar in 1978 the Department of Education has fostered national and regional courses through frequent use of the Hogben and Lopdell House residential venues. Districts have also co-operated and there have been numerous 'Principalship' courses. The pattern which is emerging is one where the residential courses attempt to 'train the trainers' and the district courses call upon these newly created resource people to replicate their training in the local area. This social integrative approach has not proved particularly successful in curriculum areas in the past and there is no reason to presume that educational administration training will fare any better.

Many of the people involved in planning these courses are well aware of this danger and consequently a number of innovations have been introduced. One that is significant is the practice of ensuring that at least two people from the same institution attend a withdrawal course. On returning to their school they are able to support each other. It is not that the withdrawal idea should necessarily be replaced with other forms of on-going training, although ideas exploring this notion should be encouraged, but rather that some system of support operate once the teacher, principal, head of department, or senior teacher returns to the school. Furthermore such training should be focused on specific

strategies which have the potential to change teachers' classroom behaviour (McGee 1978).

Purpose

What we were attempting to do in this study was to establish a school-based approach to management training and development. The intention was to encourage a number of schools to engage all their staff in this task. We would act as consultants and assist with data gathering, feedback and general process development. By dealing with the problems of individual schools and generating training which endeavoured to increase their effectiveness, we proposed to illustrate an alternative view of in-service teacher education and management training. Considerable time was spent both in seminars and in general discussion with principals from the 'Arden' Principals' Association. Two schools which we have named 'Belmont' and 'Dee Street' invited us to work with them as they attempted to implement school-based training.

Organization

This thesis is divided into three parts.

Part I deals with the literature related to organization development theory and details how this concept originating in commercial and industrial enterprises has been increasingly applied to schools. The notion that consultants are central to the process is elaborated. Strategies and types of interventions are discussed with reference to a variety of models. A modified approach called 'school development' is advanced as more suitable for New Zealand conditions.

Part II follows a description of the 'Arden' project which details how the participant-observer research began. It is a record of two consultancies lasting throughout 1980. Case 1, 'Belmont' School, illustrates a problem-solving approach which ran into serious difficulties and Case 2, 'Dee Street' School, illustrates a task-oriented approach which was successfully developed. 'Dee Street' School translated to a problem oriented mode later in the year.

Part III explores the implications that these case studies have for future school-based management training and staff development. Attention is directed to the results of organization development interventions in other school systems. Emphasis is given to the necessity of staff participation. It is suggested that the more generic organization development can be modified and applied in New Zealand schools as school development. Some specific guidelines are proposed.

In service training is aimed at increasing educational effectiveness. This all encompassing aim has been its downfall. What is being advocated in this thesis is that this general aim should be replaced with a specific school development programme.

At present, because there is some recognition that individual organizational features influence the adoption or rejection of innovations in schools, senior administrators are being trained to recognise these factors. Unfortunately such training is being undertaken by conventional methods. Once again courses focus on elements or components, with the participants removed from their place of work. Little effort is made to focus on organizational interpretation of the processes involved. To be successful in-service training needs to be school based, organization specific, and valued by all

the participants. Optimistically, a few schools are taking advantage of the school-based in-service days they have available to them to begin school development training similar to that described in Part II. As on going training, centred on the individual, withdrawn from his place of work, has been shown to have serious deficiencies we now turn to a discussion of how training could be centred on the organization.