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AUTHOR Bettinghaus, Erwin P.; Miller, Gerald R.
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ABSTRACT

Some systematic procedures are suggested that can be utilized by states as they move toward the development of educational accountability programs. Each of the steps outlined: (1) identification of the appropriate message sources, (2) specification of communication objectives, (3) analysis of relevant publics, (4) determination of particular dissemination techniques, and (5) evaluation of communication outcomes is an essential ingredient of a recipe calculated to produce maximum communication effectiveness. While each procedure is discussed serially and in detail, it must be remembered that communication within large, complex organizations is not a linear process; it is an interactive process. Careful analysis and reseach may help insure the eventual success of an information dissemination program about state accountability models. Some of the major questions that must be asked if a successful dissemination model is to be developed are specified. For a state department of education to be able to answer some of these questions, however, will demand the systematic collection of data that does not seem to be currently available. (RC)

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COOPERATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

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Part III

Developing Dissemination Procedures for State Educational Accountability Programs

a dissemination system
for state accountability programs

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A DISSEMINATION SYSTEM FOR STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

PART III

DEVELOPING DISSEMINATION PROCEDURES FOR STATE EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

By

Erwin P. Bettinghaus
Professor of Communication
Michigan State University

Gerald R. Miller
Professor of Communication
Michigan State University

Cooperative Accountability Project
Denver, Colorado
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Cooperative Accountability Project
Colorado Department of Education
1362 Lincoln St., Denver, Colo. 80203

Program Administrators
Harry Phillips
Dexter Magers
U.S. Office of Education

Project Staff
Arthur R. Olson, Director
Arthur P. Ludka, Assistant Director

Michigan Coordinator
Thomas H. Fisher

Copies May be Obtained From:

COOPERATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT
Colorado Department of Education
1362 Lincoln Street
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PREFACE

There can be no doubt that today's educators are "accountability conscious." Numerous articles and tests have appeared in recent years discussing the topic, and the agenda of most regional and national education conferences are likely to include presentations devoted to accountability. Several state legislatures have passed laws requiring accountability programs, and many states have laws requiring "assessment" programs.

These accountability and assessment programs offer a unique approach to educational planning based in part on statements of educational goals and objectives with proper attention directed toward cost benefit analyses. However, accountability programs will make positive contributions to education only if the information generated from them is understood and utilized by citizens, educators, legislators, and other audiences. Unfortunately, the practical and theoretical guidelines necessary for accountability dissemination do not seem to be available at this time.

The Michigan Department of Education, working with the Cooperative Accountability Project (an ESEA, Title V project of the Colorado Department of Education), has attempted to fill this informational void in the production of this three-part document, A Dissemination System for State Accountability Programs. This dissemination system will not present designs for report forms or informational booklets to be used by state accountability or assessment programs. It will, instead, present interpretations of the overall communication task presented by the initiation of accountability programs and the typical communication pit-falls created by the programs. An understanding of these areas will hopefully permit the reader to achieve a better appreciation of the importance of quality dissemination activities and the general manner in which such activities should be designed. This paper, Part III of the series, utilizes the framework of both Parts I and II to develop a systematic approach to dissemination procedures in state educational accountability programs. While the paper is directed primarily to state education agencies, the principles outlined herein would certainly seem applicable to local agencies also.

Thomas H. Fisher, Coordinator
Accountability Dissemination Project
Michigan Department of Education

PART III

DEVELOPING DISSEMINATION PROCEDURES FOR STATE EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

In Part I of this report, the authors described certain problems which might arise when educational accountability programs are introduced to a state. Part II utilized current communication theory and communication research findings to develop the assumptive, theoretical, and empirical foundations that underly the development of formal dissemination models. Part III utilizes the framework and findings of both Part I and Part II to begin the development of systematic dissemination procedures that can be utilized by state and local education agencies as they move toward the development of educational accountability programs.

Five major areas must be considered if successful dissemination is to occur. These areas include: (a) the role played by state departments of education; (b) an analysis of communication objectives; (c) an analysis of relevant publics; (d) the development of dissemination techniques; and (e) evaluation of the dissemination process.

Each of these five areas is crucial to the development of successful dissemination procedures in the area of educational accountability. However, while each topic is discussed serially and in detail, it may be easy to forget that communication within large, complex organizations is not a linear process. Communication is an interactive process. Any message, no matter how carefully worked out, no matter which communication technique is utilized, no matter which source is selected to deliver the message, will elicit differential responses from the members of an audience. Those responses may, in turn, be in the form of other messages which will have an effect on other receivers. As was suggested

in Part II of this report, the process can, and sometimes does result in undesirable consequences from which the originator of the message will find it difficult to extract himself.

The authors know of no way in which to insure "perfect" dissemination of any message or series of messages so that the intent of the source will be realized with every receiver. However, careful analysis and research may help insure the eventual success of a program to disseminate information about state accountability models. In several sections within this article, further research is suggested. Such research has not, so far as the authors have been able to determine, been conducted with educational accountability programs in mind.

Part III attempts to specify some of the major questions that must be asked if a successful dissemination model is to be developed. For a state department of education to be able to answer some of these questions, however, will demand the systematic collection of data that does not seem to be currently available.

CHAPTER I

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Part I of this report reviewed current legislation regarding educational accountability and assessment in some detail.[1] Perhaps the single most uniform characteristic of such legislation is the responsibility placed by state legislatures on state departments of education. While individual states vary in the specific details of accountability legislation, the overall picture is clear. The primary responsibility for developing the details of accountability programs, coordinating such programs, collecting the data required under the legislation, and reporting the results of accountability programs is almost always given to state departments of education. It is true that different terms are used in different states. References are made to "State Department of Education," "State Board of Education," "State Superintendent of Public Instruction," or to "The Commissioner of Education."[2] Regardless of what exact title is used, the pattern has been to place ultimate responsibility on the state level educational agency.

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[1] Erwin P. Bettinghaus and Gerald R. Miller, A Dissemination System for State Accountability Programs--Part I: Reactions to State Accountability Programs (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, 1973), pp. 15-22.

[2] Ibid.

Sources communicate in order to control the behavior of receivers. This long recognized communication principle suggests a corollary that the responsiblity for successful communication, that is, successful control, rests ultimately with the source.

The first principle in developing a successful dissemination model is that the responsibility for successful communication lies with the state department of education. This responsibility cannot be delegated to the news media. Local school districts may be asked to help in the dissemination process, but the responsibility and the control over the process must remain with the state level agency.

The principle of state agency control is important, but the evidence from current attempts at dissemination would suggest that the principle has not been adhered to in many states. Few states have appointed an individual charged with the responsibility and the power to coordinate and direct the communication activities necessary to disseminate information about accountability efforts. Few states have offered help to local districts in disseminating and explaining the results of assessment activities which affect the local district. Few states have engaged in training activities with the members of the state agency itself so that every staff member is acquainted with the intricacies of the accountability effort. Few states have offered specific training to elected board of education members designed to give them adequate information about the accountability program.

The picture is not quite as bleak as it might be. Florida, for example, has appointed an "accountability coordinator" in each local

district, responsible to an individual at the state level for their activities.[3] Michigan has provided the services of State Department members to any local district needing information about the accountability model being developed. In general, however, the picture throughout the United States shows that dissemination activities have been an afterthought, and central coordination has not occurred.

Obviously, the organization and requirements of each state level agency within the United States will be different. Therefore, it is impossible to suggest the ideal arrangement for coordinating dissemination activities that will work perfectly in each state. However, it is possible to make some general recommendations--recommendations based on the communication principles discussed in Part II of this report:

1. A coordinator for dissemination activities should be appointed within the state department of education.
2. The coordinator should report directly to the Chief State School Officer or Superintendent of Instruction.
3. The coordinator should have the responsibility for developing the dissemination program which will accompany the adoption of a state accountability model.
4. The coordinator, or his staff, should be responsible for the collection and analysis of the basic data needed to successfully implement an accountability dissemination program.
5. The coordinator should be given the responsibility for clearing the communication activities of all members of the state agency concerned with the state accountability program.

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[3]Dr. James Impara, Director of Assessment, Florida State Department of Education, Tallahassee, Florida, Private communication, March 27, 1973.

6. In so far as is possible, the coordinator should be involved in the planning of the accountability model itself, so that dissemination activities do not become merely an "overlaid" function.

It is obvious that these recommendations cannot be followed in all states at this time. In some, the process of developing accountability models is too far advanced. In others, legislatures have strictly limited the scope of whatever measures are to be utilized. In the best of all possible worlds, however, these recommendations should produce more effective dissemination programs than the authors have found through some examination of current programs.

The recommendations outlined above need one word of caution. Developing an effective dissemination program is not accomplished simply by appointing a "public relations" expert. Dissemination does involve the production of messages. It does involve working with the news media. It does involve being a "spokesman" for the state department of education with respect to accountability. It will be argued, however, that effective dissemination involves far more than simply producing and transmitting messages. More important is the ability to determine the objectives to be accomplished, to be able to make effective audience analyses, to select appropriate techniques for a given audience, and to be able to evaluate the impact of messages on specific audiences. These topics form the bulk of the remainder of this report..

CHAPTER II

DETERMINING COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

In Part II, it was suggested that the goal of communication was not "to produce messages" but to control the behaviors of receivers. Similarly, the goal of any dissemination program developed in conjunction with a state accountability model is not simply to produce messages to be transmitted to groups of receivers but to produce messages which will fulfill specific communication objectives. While there can be an almost infinite range of specific behaviors which could be elicited by a given message, it is argued here that there are four general categories of communication objectives which can be suggested. These include: (a) increasing awareness of the program, (b) changing attitudes toward the program, (c) achieving compliance with required tasks, and (d) obtaining supportive behaviors for the program.

These categories are not viewed as mutually exclusive, nor as exhaustive of all possible communication effects which can be desired. However, they do cover a wide range of possible outcomes for any message and seem to apply to many of the goals for dissemination programs. For some audiences, more than one objective will need to be defined. For example, in working with a group of principals within the state, appropriate objectives might be to have them comply with the tasks required under the program and have them be willing to verbally support the program in working with their own staff members. If the target audience is a group of taxpayers, it may be appropriate simply to set a goal of increasing awareness

about the program. Each of these four objectives deserves further elaboration.

Increasing Awareness of the Program

It can be argued that regardless of the particular target audience for any message, or series of messages, it is necessary to make any receiver aware of the topic area before other effects can be expected.[4] In similar fashion, it can be argued that one primary goal of a dissemination program related to educational accountability is to make most citizens of the state aware that his state has a program in accountability. Even if the communication objective for an accountability program is more limited, e.g., to make parents of school age children aware of an assessment program, or to make every public school teacher aware of a program, increasing awareness can be a difficult and expensive task.

Because resources are limited in most states, the State Board of Education must depend on utilization of the mass media to reach mass audiences. In examining current accountability programs, the authors have concluded that current efforts to utilize the mass media for the purpose of attempting to increase awareness has fallen significantly short of what is possible in several ways.

1. Most state departments have provided "news releases" when programs have been adopted by a legislature, but those releases are directed more toward the simple announcement of a program than

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[4] Everett M. Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations, 2nd. edition (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 100-104.

toward providing information about a program. Few instances have been noted of additional releases to the news media which might be in the form of a "feature" story explaining a program in some depth. In discussing the "news media" as a relevant public in the next section of this report, further attention will be given to the mechanics of obtaining better coverage for accountability programs. It is sufficient to note here that, in the author's opinion, most programs have not done an adequate job.

2. While attention has been paid to "state level" news media, through releases to the capital correspondents, relatively little attention has been paid to local print media and even less to local radio and television stations. What news has reached such local news sources has been through local district representatives--individuals not generally supervised by or responsible to state level personnel.

3. In many states there has been a neglect of ancillary news media. While state departments do routinely provide releases and briefings to state level correspondents, there are, in every state, media which will appeal to particular groups of receivers. Such sources include union papers, chamber of commerce bulletins, house organs issued by large manufacturing plants, church publications, League of Women Voter's bulletins, and many other publications appealing to large, specialized groups of receivers.

4. A sorely neglected area is the transmission of data and information about accountability programs through the public schools themselves. Most parents are used to digging grubby notes from the.

pockets of their elementary school children, notes which provide one of the major sources of information about schools and school children. This form of communication is a type of mass communication and perhaps deserves to be utilized more fully.

The authors are well aware that dealing with the formal mass media of our society is not easy. It is also expensive. But, if one of the communication objectives of a state accountability program is increasing awareness amongst the general citizenry of a state, there are, in today's world, few alternatives to the mass media for transmitting information to large groups of people.

The mass media are not, in themselves, sufficient to adequately perform the task of increasing awareness about accountability programs. Many potential receivers are not exposed to the mass media. Other receivers need more information than the mass media can supply. In such situations, face-to-face contact is essential.

In Florida, there is a partially state supported coordinator for educational accountability in each district. In addition to helping each district to formulate its own goals, the coordinator has also had the effect of "spreading the word" to many parents, school staff members, and taxpayers within the district. To the authors, this activity, or a similar arrangement, seems crucial. In line with the suggestion that a coordinator should be appointed at the state level, it is argued that the state level coordinator be responsible for working out arrangments for public meetings in local districts, but there seems no question that if the objective of increasing awareness is to be met, such face-to-face contact is essential.

Most of the written materials examined for this study which have been designed for mass distribution are in the form of pamphlets available to local districts for distribution at P.T.A. meetings, etc. There may be more effective methods of disseminating information and thus increasing awareness about educational accountability, but surely there are few less effective methods. Such documents are seldom read and seldom do they give enough information to let the potential reader become more than momentarily aware of the details of a given program. The authors argue for the "packaging" of a short, multi-media presentation which can be adapted for various groups within the state. Such a package ought to be presented by trained personnel (presumably trained by state level employees) at the local level.

Increasing awareness about an educational accountability program demands prior planning and the utilization of many channels of communication. Prior planning demands that the current level of knowledge of the various target audiences be measured. The authors have been unable to locate any studies which attempt to measure the information level of a population with respect to educational accountability. It can be argued that one of the first steps a state might take as it moves into the development of an educational accountability program is to commission a survey designed to ascertain what level of information exists for various audiences. Such a measure is particularly important in order to detect "misinformation" that people might have. For example, in Part I we suggested that there seems to be evidence that many people have equated "assessment" with "educational accountability." If research should

indicate that this equation is generally true, communication efforts will have to be initiated to change the information base for these audiences.

Regardless of how broadly, or how narrowly, a State Board defines its dissemination task, increasing awareness would seem to be one of the most important communication objectives.

Changing Attitudes toward an Accountability Program

One of the misconceptions about dissemination activities is the notion that every possible receiver should be "favorable" toward the program that is in effect. The authors would argue that, while this might be a desirable state of affairs, it is an unlikely one. Furthermore, the presence of many citizens or parents who are either attitudinally neutral, or even attitudinally negative toward a program, may, pragmatically, be unimportant to the success of a program. If the proportion of such individuals becomes a majority, a program may be in trouble politically, but short of such overwhelming negative attitudes, it may make little difference to a program.

The authors do not argue that changing attitudes is not important. The question that must be asked is "Which receivers must be attitudinally favorable toward the program?" Some groups come immediately to mind. School superintendents, principals of local schools, members of local school districts, advisory committees, the state education associations, staff members within the state department of instruction, representatives of institutions of higher education and community representatives are all receivers who could jeopardize a program if they view the program in an unfavorable light.

Assume for the moment that we have identified those publics who must be attitudinally favorable toward an educational accountability program. Creating such a favorable attitudinal climate then becomes a major communication objective for the dissemination program. What are the conditions under which people can be expected to change their attitudes toward a program? Several conditions are related to achieving this communication objective.

1. Does the receiver possess sufficient information about the program? An individual who is being asked to change his attitude, or to formulate a specific attitude needs more information than does the individual who is merely being asked to become aware of the program. In the case of educational accountability, we would argue that such specific information will need to be presented in face-to-face situations, in operational terms, and in terms which are relevant to the particular receiver.

2. Does the receiver see the need for the program? There is considerable evidence to suggest that individuals who recognize the need for a program are more inclined to be attitudinally favorable toward the program than receivers who do not recognize the necessity for a program.[5] Specific techniques for demonstrating need in communication situations are discussed in the fourth section of this report, but there is little question that the demonstration of need is crucial to attitude change.

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[5] Ibid., pp. 237-238.

3. Does the receiver recognize the importance of the program to his own work? It is difficult to imagine an indiyidual becoming favorable toward a program which would increase his own work load with no benefits to be seen. Messages ought to stress the benefits of an educational accountability program to the superintendent or the local school board member. In Michigan, the state assessment program was eventually tied to a funding measure.[6] However, there was little indication that this potentially important benefit to some 10% of local school disttricts was stressed in the messages which were disseminated to target audiences.

4. Has the receiver received information about the reactions of other groups? A frequently heard complaint about the news media is that negative information about a program makes "news" while positive information does not reach the pages of the newspaper. To the extent that this complaint is true, the process of persuasion can be dramatically affected. Any receiver is confronted with many conflicting messages from many different sources. If he has received one set of messages designed to affect a shift in attitude toward educational accountability programs, but far more messages which are critical of the programs, it is far more likely that the receiver will arrive at an attitudinally negative position. If, however, the receiver can be exposed to a continuing series of positive messages, each one stressing the positive reactions of various groups toward the programs, it is more likely that negative messages can be "overcome."

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[6]State of Michigan, Public Act 100, Section 3, 1970.

5. Can the program be made "meaningful" to the receiver? One of the letters examined from a Michigan public school teacher was a complaint about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. Paraphrased, her complaint might be stated, "Why collect all of this useless information. If you would just give us the money, we can do an adequate job of teaching children." Obviously, the program was not meaningful to this teacher. Changing attitudes toward a program depends, at least in part, on whether the objectives and operations of a program can be made meaningful to a set of receivers.

Each of these conditions is important to various types of receivers. Creating the messages which lead to positive attitude change demands a thorough knowledge of the attitudinal characteristics of various receivers, as well as an appropriate use of communication techniques.

Achieving Compliance with Program Tasks

In many situations, people take actions in which they may well not be in agreement. Americans pay their taxes on time, they allow themselves to be drafted into the Army, they take final examinations in college, and they refuse to cross against red lights. They comply, but they may well not agree with the tax laws or the prospect of being drafted. They comply, but they may not like to take final examinations. They stand patiently on the curb even though no cars are in sight. Compliance behavior governs many of our daily activities.

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7 Erwin P. Bettinghaus and Gerald R. Miller, A Dissemination System--Part I, p. 35.

The implication of compliance behaviors for accountability programs is clear. It is possible to achieve compliance with the provisions of an accountability program even if individuals responsible for collecting and using data do not necessarily agree with the program. Teachers will administer assessment tests, will give required information, and will change their behaviors accordingly. There are at least three conditions which seem relevant to achieving compliance with accountability models.

First, the knowledge that a law or policy has been placed into operation. If the state legislature has passed an accountability measure, but that measure has received relatively little publicity, compliance with a program can be expected to be less than if the program has received wide publicity. This condition suggests that one of the main efforts of a state coordinator for accountability programs should be to design messages which are intended to inform relevant individuals about the law, and the provisions of the law, and specifically, what is actually required under the law.

Second, the knowledge that superiors support the accountability program. There is evidence to suggest that even though an individual teacher may not agree with the provisions of a particular measure, if the teacher believes that the superintendent and principal do agree with the law, compliance is more likely to occur. Thus, it is important in designing a dissemination system to make sure that messages contain the information that credible sources (e.g., immediate superiors) support the establishment of the program.

Third, the knowledge that almost everyone is on the "bandwagon." The bandwagon technique was described a number of years ago.[8] Essentially, it consists of exposing an individual to messages containing the information that many individuals with whom the individual can identify are in support of the program. Even if the individual does not change his attitudinal position, compliance is more probable than if the individual finds out that a number of other individuals also oppose the program. For example, if the state education association can be induced to support the program, it is more likely that the individual teacher in the classroom will be willing to comply with the provisions of the program.

Setting the conditions under which compliance behavior can be expected to occur is a matter of communication. If individuals do not know what the provisions of a law are, they can hardly be expected to comply. If individuals never hear from their superiors and colleagues, they can hardly be blamed for following an independent course.

The authors do not argue that simple compliance is the best of all possible outcomes from a communication situation. Obviously, it is a more desirable state of affairs to have individuals performing tasks in which they believe and toward which they are attitudinally positive. But for certain groups of receivers, compliance with the task may be the only state of affairs that can be attained. One important set of communication activities in any dissemination model ought to be directed at achieving compliance with the tasks required of individuals who are going

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[8] Carl I. Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 298ff.

to be actively involved in the situation.

Obtaining Supportive Behaviors for the Program

The reactions and behaviors of certain groups of individuals are crucial to the success of any educational accountability program. These are individuals whom we expect not only to be favorable toward the program, not only to comply with the tasks required by the program, but to verbally support the program in communication with others. Such individuals might include superintendents, who have to make public statements regarding the program, or local school board members, who have to answer periodic inquiries about assessment programs, or state board members who are expected to implement legislative acts. There may well be other groups who must serve as opinion leaders; that is, they are expected to verbally support the program in their interaction with other groups of people.

The opinion leader has several characteristics, but for purposes of the model being developed in this report, several characteristics seem most important:

1. Opinion leaders will hold attitudinally favorable positions toward an accountability model.

2. Opinion leaders will voluntarily offer verbal support to the aims of the accountability program.

3. Opinion leaders will have wide contacts with other individuals relevant to the successful operation of an accountability program.

These characteristics can be described operationally in terms of the manner in which such individuals can be located within the population of a given state.

1. Opinion leaders are likely to be opinion leaders on more than one topic. That is, an individual who is "talkative" to friends about one topic is likely to be "talkative" about others. An analysis of other educational topics and the individuals within a state who have spoken out on them may help identify potential opinion leaders for educational accountability programs.

2. Opinion leaders are likely to be associated rather directly with a specific group of related associates. Thus, the individual elected as the teacher's association representative within a school may be a candidate to become an opinion leader for a group of other teachers. Similarly, amongst all the superintendents in a state, there may be eight or ten who enjoy wide reputation and stature. They may be candidates to become leaders for accountability programs.

3. Evidence suggests that opinion leaders receive information ahead of the group they lead and that they possess more information about the topic. This suggests that if a group of potential opinion leaders can be identified, it ought to be possible to provide training programs, special briefings, etc., so that we can increase the probability that they will be seen and utilized as opinion leaders.

4. Opinion leaders cannot be seen as "tools" of the state department of education. Evidence would suggest that when this happens, the individual is no longer viewed as an opinion leader and loses his credibility. What this suggests is that some care must be taken in any training program, or any communication attempts with potential opinion leaders that they not be visibly tied to the imagined aims of the state

level personnel. If this should happen, there is a strong possibility that such indiyiduals would be rejected as opinion leaders by their respective groups.

5. Opinion leaders tend to form on both sides of any question. In Michigan, for example, there was a group of influential professors of educational administration who became "negative opinion leaders." That is, they tended to oppose the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and talked and wrote in opposition to the program. By bringing such individuals into a program very early, giving them information and attempting to change their attitudes, it sometimes may be possible to have them become opinion leaders for the other side of the topic. When possible, such potential "negative opinion leaders" should be identified early, and attempts made to neutralize the effects they may have.

While it is certainly true that an educational accountability program can be implemented without having all relevant individuals verbally or attitudinally support the program, it is also true that any program must have a fairly large number of people, in positions of responsibility, who do support the program and support it verbally with the groups to which they talk. Creating opinion leaders, or identifying potential opinion leaders, is an important communication objective.

Summary

In this section, an attempt has been made to suggest that every dissemination program must focus on the accomplishment of certain communication objectives. Those objectives ought to be planned ahead of time.

The four major objectives suggested are: (a) increasing awareness of the problem; (b) changing attitudes toward the program; (c) achieving compliance with required tasks, and (d) obtaining supportive behaviors for the program. In each case, an audience analysis needs to be performed before appropriate messages are designed and transmitted to particular audiences. The objectives suggested are not mutually exclusive. It may well be the case that a single message can be designed to accomplish all four tasks with some potential receivers. In other cases, more than one message, over a period of time, will be necessary to accomplish the particular communication objective. Setting the objectives, however, is a vital part of any dissemination model.

CHAPTER III

THE ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT PUBLICS

It can be argued that when a state passes educational accountability legislation, information about that legislation and the subsequent program designed to implement the legislation ought to be available to every citizen of the state. In a very real sense, every citizen is going to be made responsible for paying for the program and every citizen may benefit from the program. However, the authors argue for an alternative position which says that "some people are more equal than other people." Some individuals are more relevant to the success of the program than other individuals. The relevance of a school superintendent to the success of a program over the relevance of simply an individual who happens to have a child in a public school seems undisputable. Both need to be informed about an accountability program. But the school superintendent needs different kinds of information than does the parent, and he needs more information than does the parent. Thus this report argues that more of the "communication dollar" ought to go toward dissemination activities with "relevant" publics than to groups that bear only minor relationship to the program.

The "general public" does need information about any state level accountability program. In all probability, the general public can be reached primarily through the news media. The authors argue that the development of appropriate relationships with the news media is the best route toward obtaining an informed state of awareness with the general public within a state. The "news media" can be treated as a relevant

public for developing a dissemination model and success with this group ought to lead to successful dissemination of information to the general public within a given state.

In addition to the news media, there are three other types of groups that seem particularly relevant to the development of a successful dissemination program. These include: (1) state level groups, (2) local district groups, and (3) higher education groups. Obviously, within each of these broad categories, there are a number of subgroups that need to be distinguished. In this section, these major categories of relevant individuals are examined in detail.

State Level Groups

In every state, there are organizations whose base of operations is state-wide, whose spokesmen are located within the state capital, or who publish materials which reach a statewide membership. Such groups may include The Chamber of Commerce, The Junior Chamber of Commerce, The PTA, Urban League, various labor unions, The League of Women Voters, the state educational associations, and various trade organizations. In Michigan, for example, The State Chamber of Commerce became quite interested in accountability programs. Their staff members researched the problem with the cooperation of State Department of Education personnel, and the Chamber published several articles dealing with the needs of school systems in Michigan.[9]

[9] Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, Education/Taxes Special Report (a series of three circulars issued by the State Chamber of Commerce, Lansing, Michigan, April, May, and June, 1972).

The list of organizations included above is not meant to be exhaustive. In each state, an analysis must be made of the special organizations in that state that do have credibility with large groups of individuals and whose mission includes some educational issues. Once those organizations have been identified, an analysis must be made of the organization and communication structures employed by the group. Two typical patterns can be identified, although there are obvious variations.

1. One pattern is for the group to employ a full-time, paid "executive director." Such an individual is the real controlling power behind the organization and is the individual who really determines the direction the organization will move. He hires the permanent staff, directs the publication efforts of the organization through a board of elected or appointed members, and is responsible for determining what positions the organization will take. In some cases, the executive director may make policy himself. In others, he coordinates policy but must take policy matters to a board of trustees of some sort. In either case, that individual plays an obvious and important part in determining the direction the organization will go and is the individual with whom one must work.

2. The second pattern is for the group to have an elected representative of the group serve as the president for a year or two-year term. He may enjoy high status during that period of time, but seldom is completely responsible for determining policy in that group. That responsibility is usually shared with a board of trustees who meet periodically and determine the overall policy the organization will have. Typically such a

board will have one or two individuals who become opinion leaders for the rest of the group. Such individuals may or may not be formal leaders in the group, but they carry a major burden in determining policy for the organization.

After making an analysis of the organization and the communication structure that exists within the group, some attempt must be made to determine whether there already exists some policy with respect to educational accountability or even policy relating to education in general. The importance of such an analysis is obvious. If the organization has already taken a stance on an issue, overcoming that stance is more difficult than if the organization can be approached with no background to overcome. In addition to prior policies which might exist in an organization, such an analysis can help to determine the information level possessed by opinion makers within the organization. Such an analysis will help to determine what kind of communication techniques will be most appropriate for the organization, as well as what kind of communication objectives must be set for the organization.

This analysis of audiences calls for considerable attention to state level groups on the part of state departments of education. In looking at past efforts in several states, the authors have been unable to find any information which would suggest that special efforts had been given to any of the possible groups that could be considered important to the success of an educational accountability campaign. The sole exception to this statement might come with the state level educational organizations such as the state level PTA group or the state educational association. Even in this situation, however, there seems to be no systematic

attempt to analyze the efforts and communication needs of such groups in attempting to achieve the communication objectives of a dissemination campaign.

It could be argued that these state level organizations are not important--that the real success of any dissemination campaign will be achieved within the local districts. As the next section indicates, the local level is important, but state level organizations may carry influence far beyond the immediate small group who typically dominate such state level organizations. Such organizations usually publish some type of house organ, magazine, or other periodic report to their membership. Such specialized media frequently are more accepted by their readers than are the general news media that reach far larger groups of citizens. Furthermore, such groups frequently maintain lobbying groups with the state capitol and can be highly influential in determining the course of legislation. The authors do not suggest that state departments attempt to use the lobbying abilities of such organizations. It is, however, obviously better to have such organizations supporting one's efforts than opposing them.

This discussion of state level organizations has necessarily been brief. The effort involved in analyzing such organizations, working with the organizations and their staff members, and preparing the messages that might help in disseminating information to them is time-consuming, and difficult. It is also important.

Local District Groups

In analyzing past efforts at disseminating information about state accountability programs, the conclusion seems inescapable that success or failure of such campaigns and programs depends to a large extent on the success that is had at the local level. If school board members oppose such measures, it may be difficult to enforce the legislation. If local school teachers oppose the collection of assessment data, they can bring real pressures to bear on parents and on students to either refuse to take tests or to refuse to have their child submit to testing. If the program is not used by local districts, it will eventually fade away. Thus, an analysis of such relevant local groups is important, and dissemination campaigns must expend much effort at the local level.

At the local level, two major groups of potential receivers can be distinguished. The first group includes those individuals who have formal connections with the school system itself. These individuals are represented by groups such as the local school board, the school superintendents, school principals, school teachers, ancillary school personnel such as custodians and health personnel, athletic booster groups, organized parent-teacher groups, etc. The second group of individuals are represented in local organizations which are influential but not directly associated with the schools. Such groups might include the Kiwanis, Lions, local chamber of commerce, local union organizations, League of Women Voters, city councils, etc.

Both types of groups are important to the success of a dissemination effort, but the communication objectives selected for each group and the communication techniques utilized may well be different.

The entire range of communication objectiyes should be applied to those groups of indiyiduals who are directly connected with the school system. They do need to be made aware of the accountability model. It is most desirable that these groups be in favor of the program. Many of the indiyiduals in the groups will haye to comply with particular tasks demanded in the program. And it is important that many of the leaders of these local groups may be opinion leaders for the program.

Clearly, the state level coordinator and his staff cannot deliver all required messages to each local group. This limitation means that local level personnel must be identified and trained in dissemination techniques. The Florida example has already been mentioned, where an individual within each local district has been identified to coordinate the efforts of state level personnel in developing the details of the accountability model itself. The authors of this report would suggest that such an individual, if trained, could also be the one to handle local dissemination activities. Failing that solution, it is suggested that meetings be held in each local district with relevant personnel who can be given information about the program and who might be expected to be a local spokesman for the program. Possible candidates might include the local district superintendent, an assistant principal, the Chairman of the School Board, or other individuals who can be expected to be able to reach large groups of people within the district.

The emphasis must be on training at the local level. Successful dissemination can never be accomplished simply by providing a superintendent with a batch of pamphlets and then telling him to pass them

out to lots of people. Training sessions ought to be given in communicating the objectives of the accountability program, in identifying opinion leaders, in working with local groups, etc. Such training ought to be provided at the state level, and provided on a periodic basis, with additional sessions scheduled to enable further information to be passed to the individuals who will serve as transmitters of the information.

Those groups of individuals who are not directly connected with the public school system, but who are influential at the local level, demand somewhat different consideration. With members of the local civic organizations, or the local union groups, the communication must first be to increase their awareness of the accountability program. Second, an attempt should be made to change their attitudes to reflect a positive consideration of the program. Both of these objectives can be accomplished through a two-part campaign.

The first part of the campaign should be directed toward mass media coverage of the program in the local news media. In addition to the local media, specialized media like union newspapers should not be overlooked. The most important portion of such a campaign, however, will not be the materials and information gained through a media campaign, but interpersonal contact. Almost all such local groups hold regular meetings, meetings at which speakers are frequently invited. Most groups will have a program coordinator whose job is to find speakers. Most such program coordinators are actively in search of speakers who can present interesting, timely programs.

A dissemination campaign for such groups can be conducted by the

local coordinator, who may be asked to speak himself, or who may attempt to get state level personnel to visit and make presentations. Again, the emphasis ought to be on the training and materials provided by the state level coordinator to prospective speakers. The authors do not advocate the creation of a number of "canned" speeches to be given all over the state. But it is surely the task of the state level coordinator to be able to provide visual materials, handouts, and training to individuals who may be called upon to speak. The goal of all such presentations ought to be to arouse interest and awareness in the audiences and to achieve support for the accountability program.

The success of any educational accountability program will be determined by the success it has at the local level. If local officials oppose the program, and oppose it strongly, the probability is that it will not meet with success over the long run. The authors hold the position that local success is as much a part of preparation and planning at the state level as is the technical planning that goes into the actual accountability program.

The Higher Education Public

This specialized group of individuals could be considered to be a state level group. However, experiences in Michigan would suggest that separate treatment and discussion would be helpful to the development of a successful dissemination program.

By "the higher education public," reference is made to professors of higher education within a state, deans, testing specialists, etc. These

individuals bring several characteristics to the accountability situation. They are more knowledgeable about accountability and assessment program than other publics. They are usually more interested initially than other individuals. They meet and have contact with large number of relevant groups and individuals. They may well consider that the future of a state's programs lies at least partially in their hands. Additionally, such individuals may well help determine the course of legislation because of their service on committees within the profession.

In Michigan, members of the higher education group were consulted about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program in its early stages. But the legislation was passed so quickly that it was simply not possible to involve all relevant members of this group. The results of this lack of consultation are detailed in Part I of this report.[10] The authors would argue that the problems in Michigan did not come as the result of a lack of consultation with college and university personnel but with a failure to reveal that consultation to other college and university personnel. The failure was in dissemination.

A series of specific recommendations regarding the appropriate use of this group of specialists seems indicated.

1. When the accountability program is first planned by the state department of education, appropriate consultation should be made with individuals from the higher education sector. They might be helpful in

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[10] Erwin P. Bettinghaus and Gerald R. Miller, A Dissemination System--Part I, pp. 40-45.

determining what kinds of measures are to be used, what kinds of testing is to be done, and how the results will be used to implement the accountability model.

2. The fact that such consultants have been used should be the subject of messages directed at the rest of the higher education community. This can be done through journal articles, through reports at professional meetings, and through verbal reports to education faculties within the schools themselves.

3. Once this initial consultation phase is completed, at least some of the consultants should be retained to serve as members of the dissemination team. They have generally high credibility and clearly have an extremely high information level about the program. Many of them will feel committed to the program they helped develop. They might be of particular use in working with local teacher groups or local principal groups where their credibility can be placed to excellent use.

The authors do not argue that the higher education group is essential to the success of any accountability program. They do argue that such individuals bear a special competency in the area, and their talents ought to be used.

The News Media

The news media include all formal press and electronic media outlets within the state, weekly as well as daily papers, and radio and television stations. The news media also includes a number of specialized media, such as church papers, union papers, trade magazines, alumni bulletins, student newspapers, etc. In analyzing the use of news media in Michigan, one is immediately struck with several observations:

1. While routine reports were fed to state level media, no attempt was made to provide special releases to any specialized media.

2. Assessment results were released in "raw" form, and little or no attempt was made to interpret the results for local newspapers, i.e., tell what was meant in terms of the quality of education.

3. While the state department of education did cooperate with the media who wanted to do feature stories on the assessment program, no attempt was made to "feed" such feature stories to the media.

4. No single contact individual was designated by the department to coordinate media activities for the assessment program. (There is, of course, a department information officer.)

5. No individual was designated to coordinate local media stories for local level media. This resulted in misinformation appearing in the local press.

6. Major media efforts of the state department of education were directed toward the print media, while little attention was given to the electronic media. Video or audio tapes which might be used on local news shows were not available.

The foregoing observations may well sound relatively harsh. The point is that a well-developed dissemination program will have an equally well-developed set of procedures for operating with the news media. Those procedures depend on an understanding of the role of the media in our society. Several brief observations are pertinent to the development of an adequate dissemination model.

1. Less than twenty percent of the available space in any daily or weekly newspaper is devoted to "news." The rest goes to advertising.

2. The typical newspaper staff is not adequate to "cover" even a brief portion of the news events that occur daily. With the exception of the largest dailies, the greatest bulk of the news being printed is from material obtained from the wire services or from releases sent directly to the newspaper itself.

3. Selling newspapers, or television time, depends at least in part on the "local handle" that might be placed on a news story. Or to put it in another way, what happens in a school in Denver is seldom of news value to a newspaper in Wray, Colorado.

4. While the "capital staff" of large newspapers or television stations may appear to be extremely important, the chances are that their efforts will not appear in media that reach the largest bulk of the population.

5. News reporters are typically not trained scientists. With a very few exceptions, they cannot interpret statistics, nor draw appropriate conclusions from those statistics. If interpretations are not provided for them, they may well either ignore the story or report inaccurately.

6. The press and electronic media in most of the country are hungry for material which will have a "local" angle. They will ignore more important stories to be able to provide stories that have such a local angle, provided such stories do not cost them much in terms of time, energy, or money.

7. Editors attempt to maintain their objectivity. They object to being told that they "must" print a particular story. At the same time,

they appreciate receiving a well written news release which is designed solely for their particular paper or station.

8. In the long run, the news media must be treated equally. Strong resentment results when one paper is given an "exclusive," even though that paper may well print the story and add greatly to the news "log." Other media may ignore subsequent stories and even the favored paper may well lose respect for the source.

These observations, and the prior ones regarding the Michigan situation, can be the basis for developing a media program for adequate dissemination of information about educational accountability models. The following suggestions will be helpful to any state coordinator.

1. News releases should be provided for all news media within the state. When possible, news releases should be designed specifically for a particular newspaper or television and radio station. This demands being able to provide a "local" perspective for papers located outside of the metropolitan areas of the state.

2. News releases should be fairly frequent and must contain some updating of information about the progress of the accountability program. Not every story will be printed, but if even a ten percent ratio can be established, the coordinator is more than doing his job.

3. The electronic media must be treated differently than the print media. Typically, releases are designed solely for the print media. Being able to provide tapes of news conferences to local stations will greatly enhance their use.

4. At least one individual should be selected at the local level

who can be indicated as knowledgeable about the situation. The local media will, in all probability, attempt to get further information from that individual.

5. Whenever possible, an individual at the local level ought to be designated to release local stories. The success ratio in such a situation will dramatically increase.

6. A careful analysis of each pertinent medium needs to be made. For example, the large metropolitan daily that maintains a "capital staff" will probably expect to obtain stories directly from their own personnel and will ignore written releases. Cooperation with such staff members will be essential. Smaller outlets, however, expect to get their materials from local sources, from the wire services, or from releases sent directly to the paper or station.

7. The reporter who asks for an "exclusive" feature story on a topic which he has researched is entitled to it, and his exclusive should be respected. On the other hand, when materials can be provided that would have a specific local angle, it is extremely helpful to be able to supply a news medium with the story.

8. The "editorial" policy of a paper or a station can seldom be changed. In most cases, the attempt will result in more damage to a dissemination policy than simply not reacting to an unpleasant editorial. The exception to this general policy comes only in the situation where there has been use of misinformation which can be at least corrected. Attempts to "direct" editorial policy are doomed to failure.

9. Any agency should have an individual who is empowered to deal

directly and authoritatively with the press and electronic media. This power should not be dissipated among a number of spokesmen but should be concentrated, as a matter of policy, in one individual who can comment appropriately on the facts of any situation.

The authors have attempted to develop a dissemination policy regarding the news media. It can be argued that an appropriate news policy will go a long way toward providing a successful dissemination program in any state accountability program. And, in contrast, ignoring the press or attempting to use it inappropriately can well result in the rapid demise of an otherwise excellent dissemination program.

Summary

In this section, an attempt has been made to provide at least a brief review of the types of publics that must be considered in developing any dissemination model, as well as to suggest some of the criteria that must enter into attempts to deal with those audiences. The authors realize that the attempt has not been exhaustive and that conditions will exist in every state that may dictate somewhat different conclusions than have been suggested here. However, the process of identifying relevant publics might well follow the method indicated in this section, and some of the publics we have discussed in detail will have the same characteristics regardless of the state in which they are found.

CHAPTER IV

DISSEMINATION TECHNIQUES

Once communication objectives have been identified and the various relevant publics have been analyzed, specific techniques for disseminating information about accountability models must be brought into play. This section of the report examines ways of applying some of these techniques. In our analysis the authors will, of necessity, harken back to some of the material discussed in Part II of this report.

Definition: An Attempt to Specify Meaning

Starting with the assumption that meanings are in people, it is possible to point out two problems that may be faced by a communication source: (1) intended receivers may not have any meanings for the symbols, or words, that the source selects, or (2) the meanings that receivers have for the symbols, or words, selected may differ from the meanings intended by the source. Let us consider each of these problems in turn.

For some messages that are transmitted, certain receivers may simply lack meanings for the words chosen by the source--in the popular idiom, the message is "all Greek" to them. Whether this deficiency in meaning is important depends upon whether or not the message is intended for these particular receivers. The authors realize that some messages intended primarily for specialized publics--e.g., messages dealing with the reliability and validity of a battery of achievement tests and directed primarily at an audience of educational testing specialists--

may have little meaning for the average parent, nor is this important as long as the message is shared primarily by testing specialists. Trouble occurs when a message intended for a particular public falls on uncomprehending ears.

Stated differently, the communicative objective of developing awareness of educational accountability programs consists largely of an exercise in developing shared meanings for various aspects of the program. As was previously emphasized, awareness is a necessary condition for establishing favorable attitudes, increased cooperation, and performance of desired behaviors. Without such a community of shared receiver meanings, consistent with the meanings intended by the source, attempts to gain acceptance of programs are almost certainly doomed to failure.

An excellent example of a successful effort to specify meanings and to engender a sense of program awareness can be found in the recent work of several East Lansing, Michigan, schools in the area of cognitive mapping of students. This innovative approach to instruction--which by the way, strikes the authors as an admirable effort to move toward greater educational accountability in the classroom--certainly contains the potential for considerable suspicion and resentment on the part of parents conditioned to talk in terms of letter grades, IQ scores, and percentile rankings. For the uninitiated, the term "cognitive mapping" may itself conjure up images of some insidious plot to brainwash or to control behavior. In addition, the esoteric vocabulary--the "T(VL)'s," "T(AL)'s," "Q(O)'s," "Q(CEM)'s." "Q(CKH)'s," "M's," "R's," etc.--has an alien ring and an air of mystery calculated to alarm and to place parents on guard.

During the past year, the involved staff of the East Lansing schools, in conjunction with a cadre of experts from Oakland Community College, has held a series of thirteen meetings for parents dealing with the cognitive mapping program. Both the mapping and the prescription phases of the program have been thoroughly explained by expert staff personnel in face-to-face settings providing an opportunity for maximum interaction. Parents have had the opportunity to see the maps of their own children, and these maps have been interpreted for them. In addition, parents have been introduced to the classroom learning centers—both through direct observation and via slide presentations--used to actualize the prescription phase of the program. Finally, the parents themselves have been mapped, and their maps have been explained to them and compared and contrasted with the maps of their children.

The results of this concentrated effort have been readily apparent. Awareness and understanding of the program have resulted in a high level of program acceptance. Parents have readily volunteered to participate as aides in the tutoring program--e.g., the wife of one of the authors has worked enthusiastically in the language laboratory one morning a week for the past twenty-seven weeks. Many parents have mastered the vocabulary of cognitive mapping and are now seriously interested in expanding their knowledge of the relationship between mapping and subsequent prescription writing. As a speaker from Oakland Community College observed at the most recent parents' meeting, "Understanding of, and support for the program on the part of parents is truly remarkable."

Nor has this educative attempt been limited to parents. Principals

and other administrative staff of the participating schools have also been consulted and involved in the program from the outset. As the authors have previously stressed, support on the part of this key public is vital to a dynamic, healthy program.

No doubt the cognitive mapping program could have been instituted with considerably less effort. A cursory note or two or a release to several of the local news media could have served to inform parents of the existence of the new program. Had such an approach been used, however, different outcomes would almost surely have accrued. The community of shared meanings that presently exists would have been supplanted by uncertainty, rumor, and the development of meanings totally at odds with the program's aims. Instead of an atmosphere of support, the program might well have become a focal point for community controversy.

For those interested in disseminating information about educational accountability programs, the preceding example underscores several prescriptive caveats that should be followed when attempting to develop a set of shared meanings among a body of relevant receivers:

1. Allow ample time for preliminary, awareness-building communication. Do not rely upon a few scattered attempts to develop shared meanings; rather, carefully plan an extended campaign to heighten awareness and engender common meanings about a program. Moreover, do not conceive of a linear sequence of events where preparatory awareness-building precedes actual program implementation. While some pre-implementation communication should certainly occur, it should continue well into the initial phases of the actual program. In fact, meanings can

always be sharpened and refined; hence, a good rule of thumb to follow is that awareness-building communication should be a continuous aspect of the program itself.

2. Solicit and arrange for maximum involvement on the part of relevant publics. Since meanings are derived from experience, a rich pattern of experiences ensures more rapid acquisition of shared meanings. Participation in an actual mapping session builds meanings for the concept, cognitive mapping, more vividly and efficiently than does an abstract lecture on the underlying psychological and sociological theory. Moreover, people vary in their ability to acquire meaning through various sense modalities. By varying the experiential bases for meaning acquisition, these individual differences can be accommodated and the community of shared meanings can be expanded. More will be said about involvement in the next section.

3. Provide trained, sympathetic personnel to assist relevant publics in developing meanings. Few professional educators would question the importance of such concepts as reinforcement and feedback for effective learning. In the pursuit of awareness-building communication which seeks to expand the domain of meaning, ample attention must be devoted to involving staff personnel who can selectively reinforce the discriminations that are being learned. Moreover, when trained personnel are present, communication takes on a self-correcting quality; meanings that deviate markedly from those intended by the source are less likely to evolve. Just as it is easier to teach correct form for tennis or golf from the outset, rather than trying to change bad habits that have

previously been acquired, it is simpler to engender shared meanings initially than to attempt to create a community of meanings from widely disparate experiences. Trained staff can certainly facilitate this process.

As previously indicated, however, it may sometimes be necessary to change existing meanings, rather than starting from scratch to engender new ones. The authors suspect, for example, that most persons already have meanings for the phrase, "accountability programs." Unfortunately, these meanings are frequently denotatively inconsistent--e.g., the equating of "accountability programs" with "assessment" has already been mentioned--and connotatively at odds with the intended meanings of the source. In such situations, the process of developing shared meanings that are consistent with source intent is even more complex, since the old, incompatible meaning must be extinguished and replaced by a new meaning more harmonious with that of the source.

In a sense, what is involved is <u>persuading</u> someone to adopt new meanings for symbols and words associated with educational accountability programs. First, of course, a careful attempt must be made to assess the present meanings held by various relevant publics. Such an attempt to inventory meanings attests yet again to the importance of systematic research concerning present attitudes toward educational accountability programs. While it is possible to make educated guesses about such questions, these guesses will never take the place of carefully designed and executed empirical studies--even though it begins to sound like a broken record, the authors believe this point merits repetition once again.

After an understanding has been acquired concerning that meanings that persons assign to various concepts associated with educational accountability--and assuming, of course, that some of these meanings are incompatible with source intent--messages that aim at altering these meanings must be constructed and transmitted. Since the intent of such messages is persuasive, several generalizations which are buttressed by previous research should be heeded. Most of these generalizations deal with actual techniques and strategies for message construction.

1. Use two-sided rather than one-sided messages.[11] Keep in mind that you are trying to change an existing meaning that persons hold for a concept. Thus, the receivers are initially opposed to the position taken in the message. To devote the entire message to arguments favoring your own definition reduces the likelihood that they will accept it. Rather, acknowledge the fact that another meaning, or other meanings exist, demonstrate the inadequacy or inappropriateness of the definitions encompassed by these meanings, and only then present arguments for the greater utility of the definition you wish to establish. Here is an example of the contrasting approaches:

> One-sided message. Presently there is considerable interest in the topic of educational accountability programs. Perhaps many of you are uncertain about the kinds of activities embraced by such programs. Permit me to explain some of the dimensions of such programs and several of the benefits to be derived from them. First...

Note that this approach to definition, or specifying meaning, begins

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[11]For example, refer to Hovland, Carl I., et al. The Order of Presentation in Persuasion. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957.

with the questionable assumption that receivers have no meaning for the term, "educational accountability." As the source attempts to specify meaning, considerable resistance may develop among receivers. They are likely to think, "Well, I know what 'educational accountability' means, and the things he's saying do not jibe at all with my meaning." Such cognitions give rise to competing responses and lessen the probability of successful influence. Note how a two-sided message alleviates this problem..

> Two-sided message. Presently there is considerable interest in the topic of educational accountability programs. Because of this interest, most people have an idea of what is meant by "educational accountability." For instance, many persons equate the notion of educational accountability with assessment testing. Considering the publicity that such testing programs have received, this fact is hardly surprising. Still, assessment testing, which itself is a rather complicated notion, is only one aspect of a total accountability program. Moreover...

Use of a two-sided message lets the receivers know that the source is aware of their present definitions, or meanings, for key terms. Such an explicit recognition of awareness is important, particularly for receivers of reasonably high intelligence. By acknowledging the existence of these competing meanings and by demonstrating their inadequacy, the source, in a sense, "clears the minds" of his receivers and increases their receptivity for the meaning he wishes to engender.

The preceding statement underscores an important point about a two-sided persuasive message. Its purpose is not the mere listing of various meanings--a sort of dictionary approach--but rather convincing receivers

that meanings presently held are inadequate or lack utility and persuading receivers to embrace the meaning stipulated by the source. Thus, a well-reasoned, compelling position concerning the deficiencies of presently held meanings is necessary if the new meaning is to be adopted.

2. Place the most important points at the beginning and end of the message. Research consistently reveals a "U" shaped pattern of information retention: receivers most frequently remember material that is presented early or late in the message. In a similar vein, arguments that occur first or last are usually more persuasive than arguments found in the middle of the message.[12] Thus, when seeking to persuade receivers to alter their meaning for a concept, a message source might profitably hew to the following strategy: discuss and refute the most commonly held present meaning for the concept at the outset of the message. Present the preferred definition at the end of the message and develop arguments for the greater utility of the definition proposed. Use the middle of the message to refute other, less commonly held meanings or for "filler" material of less importance.

3. Draw conclusions explicitly. Sometimes it is tempting to leave what appears to be the obvious left unsaid, to allow receivers to draw their own conclusions. In most cases, this temptation should be resisted.[13]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] For example, refer to Hovland, Carl I., Janis, Irving, and Kelley, Harold. Communication and Persuasion. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953.

Part II of this report emphasized the importance of perception in message reception; to at least some extent, receivers organize incoming information to fit their prior beliefs and attitudes. Thus, subtlety can create persuasive problems for the message source: without a clearly stated conclusion, what was intended as an indictment of the adequacy of a presently accepted definition may be perceived as support for it. To be "crystal clear" in the conclusions drawn is not to insult the intelligence of the relevant receivers; instead, clear conclusion-drawing reflects an understanding of the complicated perceptual problems involved in getting receivers to change their minds.

4. In general, aim for a moderate amount of emotional arousal on the part of message receivers. There exists a voluminous literature on the effects of emotional arousal (particularly fear arousal) on message reception and persuasive impact.[14] As might be expected, there are no simple, sovereign generalizations to guide a source in determining optimal receiver arousal. It is, however, generally agreed that the relationship between emotional arousal and subsequent degree of persuasiveness is curvilinear; i.e., if arousal is either extremely low or extremely high, persuasive impact is minimal. In the former case, motivation is so low that receivers see little need for changing their minds--in this situation, altering their definitional stance regarding a key term or concept--

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[14]For a summary of this research, see Higbee, Kenneth L. "Fifteen Years of Fear Arousal: Research on Threat Appeals." Psychological Bulletin 72(1947): 426-444.

in the latter instance, motivation is so high that competing responses produce distortion or avoidance behavior. Unfortunately, the authors cannot provide a precise specification of what constitutes optimal emotional arousal, since it is likely to vary markedly from one group of receivers to another. A satisfactory solution to this riddle demands careful audience analysis--a commitment to the previously mentioned receiver orientation--on the source's part.

Thus, we arrive at the following capsule description of a message maximally calculated to alter receiver meanings regarding specific terms or concepts: the message should be two-sided, important points should be presented at the beginning and end, conclusions should be explicitly drawn, and the source should aim for a moderate amount of receiver emotional involvement. The authors hasten to emphasize that these recommendations do not constitute a persuasive panacea; they are statements about what will work best most of the time for the majority of receivers. Further honing of message strategies requires a source who is quite sensitive to the cues presented by particular receivers, i.e., one who can make accurate discriminations among the various sets of stimuli presented to him.

While we have presented these message strategies within the context of the specialized persuasive purpose of changing receiver meanings, it should be clear that they apply to a host of other specific persuasive aims. In fact, whenever messages about accountability programs seek to engender greater acceptance on the part of some relevant public, these strategies represent an important weapon in the source's persuasive arsenal.

One final point should be underscored. Throughout this section, the emphasis has been on change. Obviously, the meanings of some receivers may already correspond with those desired by the source. These receivers should not be ignored, for they represent valuable allies and potential opinion leaders. Sometimes in their zeal to rally converts, communicators forget to provide periodic reinforcement for those who already share their views. Effective dissemination demands that some communication be directed at this task, particularly in a complex situation where receivers are certain to be exposed to numerous conflicting messages.

Involvement: An Essential Ingredient for Gaining Acceptance

In order to practice what we preach, the authors begin by stating a conclusion that has been implicit throughout much of this report: to obtain public acceptance of an accountability program, probably no single variable is more important than receiver involvement. Part II of this report alluded to some ways that involvement can be used advantageously by a message source; e.g., involvement heightens commitment and creates a situation where opportunities exist for the occurrence of counter-attitudinal advocacy. In this section, some techniques of involvement will be considered and some possible explanations for their effectiveness will be explored.

Involvement can often be achieved by providing opportunities for group participation in decision-making or the implementation of a program. The cognitive mapping example discussed earlier demonstrates skillful use of group participation. Recall that the decision to cognitively map

children had already been made; participation by parents occurred during the initial implementation phase of the program. Parents were not only told about the merits of such a program, they also participated in discussions of the pros and cons of cognitive mapping and were mapped themselves. The time and effort required to achieve their involvement yields several likely benefits. Consider these benefits in the more general sense:

1. Interaction has a cathartic effect by allowing persons to air and discuss reservations they have about programs. Even when a two-sided message is employed, it is difficult for the source to anticipate all the possible opposing arguments to which receivers may subscribe. By involving the intended receivers actively in the communication process, the source takes himself off the hook by allowing the receivers themselves to enumerate their arguments. Often, these arguments do not reflect serious opposition to the particular program, but rather, minor reservations that some people may harbor. The very act of talking about these concerns--i.e., "blowing off steam"--may suffice to overcome resistance. When relevant receivers act only as passive recipients to a persuasive message, this opportunity is absent.

2. Involvement heightens the level of commitment. Attitude change, cooperation with tasks, and behavioral undertakings all demand that receivers must be committed to educational accountability programs. Although it is possible to speak of an individual's "private commitment" to an idea or ideal, commitment is largely a public process. Like it or not, most persons are apt to support a program more strongly if they have spoken favorably about it to other people, or if they have performed

other kinds of supportive behaviors that are open to public scrutiny. Obviously, involvement makes possible the performance of such behaviors. In the give-and-take of group interaction individuals make assertions that commit them publicly to support of a program.

Moreover, involvement also creates a climate for social support. How others feel and act has a strong influence on our own behavior. When a person is cast in the role of passive message recipient, it is frequently difficult for him to assess how others feel. Conversely, involvement with others in discussions and other activities provides him with the social information he needs to make this assessment. In addition, group members who support the program will provide reinforcement, both for each other and for those group members who initially doubt the program.

While it may seem rather obvious, one precautionary note merits emphasis. When attempting to provide for receiver involvement, the source must be able to analyze accurately the prevailing group climate. For after all, a public commitment in opposition to the program can be just as damaging as public statements of support are helpful. Thus, under certain circumstances, it may be counter-productive to expose a group of receivers to a heavy dose of involvement. Once again, the key to avoiding such a problem lies in the source's maintenance of a consistent receiver orientation.

3. Involvement creates conditions conducive to counterattitudinal advocacy. Recall that in Part II of this report, the authors suggested that if individuals can be induced to say things that conflict with their prior beliefs, they will often change their beliefs to conform with

their public utterances. This special case of commitment is known as counterattitudinal advocacy. Of course, it is possible under certain conditions to coerce someone to take a counterattitudinal position; however, the authors are not primarily concerned with coercive use of counterattitudinal advocacy, since they realize that such means are not usually available to proponents of educational accountability programs, nor is it likely that the means would be used even if they did exist. What is more significant here is the likelihood that people who become involved in group discussions will wind up engaging in a good deal of counterattitudinal advocacy. As they interact, they will begin to identify attractive aspects of accountability programs and to verbalize these favorable features to others. The net result is likely to be some attitudinal and behavioral changes consistent with the goal of increased acceptance of accountability programs.

The implications of the preceding discussion of the advantages of involvement are readily apparent for a dissemination model. In order to involve receivers, they must be communicated with in manageable numbers. Thus, the authors return to a previously stated proposition concerning the importance of trained staff members at the local level, at least when dealing with taxpayers and parents. For smaller relevant publics--e.g., educational administrators or testing specialists--involvement poses less of a problem, since the numbers involved can usually be accommodated in group settings.

Involvement can also take the form of carrying out actual tasks associated with an educational accountability program. By planning a

dissemination model that makes use of wide-based participation, problems of gaining public acceptance can be reduced. The authors suggest that there are numerous local level tasks that can be delegated to volunteer help: distribution of pamphlets, leaflets, or other written messages dealing with educational accountability programs, organization of study seminars or discussion groups, assistance in the schools themselves, etc. To say that ultimate responsibility for the overall program must lie within the State Department of Education in no way implies a lack of flexibility in providing for maximum involvement at regional or local levels.

The authors realize that a dissemination model which is based on wide involvement is a high cost enterprise, in terms of both time and effort. Still if the criteria of communication effectiveness and subsequent program acceptance are paramount, the loss that results from failure to ensure wide involvement far exceeds the costs of fostering it.

Dissemination from a Social Action Perspective: Techniques and Considerations

As is the case with the diffusion of any new idea, gaining awareness and acceptance of educational accountability programs requires an effective program of social action. Let us next examine in detail a model for viewing the social action process and consider its implications for the development of an effective model for disseminating information about accountability programs. Examination of the model should reinforce the importance of the techniques discussed earlier in this report.

FIGURE 1 presents a model which outlines the various steps of the

social action process.[15] The process begins: (1) with an analysis of the prior social situation, (2) leads to the identification of a problem situation, and (3) culminates in the establishment and evaluation of changes calculated to alleviate, or to eliminate, the perceived problem. Between the time when the problem situation is first identified and the time when changes to remedy the problem are instituted, many individuals and groups are involved in the social action process. Who are these individuals and groups and what elements are essential to effective programs of social action such as the establishment of educational accountability programs?

1. The Social System. Note that the entire social action model found in FIGURE 1 is bounded by the existing social system. Obviously, any collective action which aims at fostering change takes place within this system. Understanding of the system, then, is a primary requirement for successful social change. The boundaries of the system extend far beyond the confines of the particular group--in this case, the governmental agencies and educational associations--in which the change is contemplated; they embrace the values and objectives of the entire society or culture. To violate dramatically these shared values and objectives is to ensure the failure of educational accountability programs or any other form of social action. Consequently, those charged with securing change must be thoroughly acquainted with the limitations imposed by the total social system.

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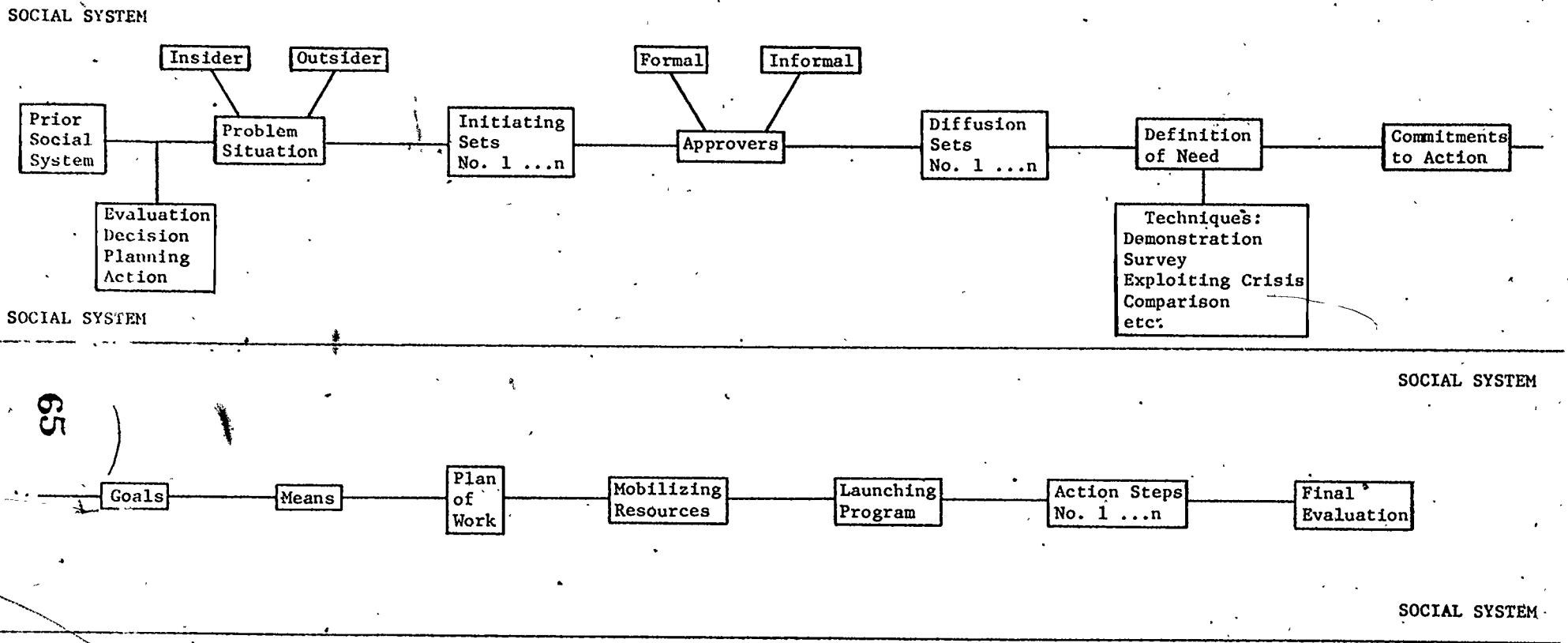
[15] This model was developed by the National Project in Agricultural Communication at Michigan State University and is copyrighted by the Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

FIGURE 1

SOCIAL ACTION PROCESS



2. The Prior Social Situation. For any proposed social action, including of course the establishment of educational accountability programs, there will usually exist past experiences in the social system which may be related to the action under consideration. Those charged with implementing educational accountability programs have probably heard such criticisms as, "He favors change for change's sake," or "He's interested in change only because it suits his own self-interest." Many times these criticisms stem from a failure to relate the changes proposed to elements of the prior social situation. When these prior elements are overlooked, the innovation is perceived by many as an isolated event which has little bearing on the overall social context.

3. Problem Situation. As was discussed and illustrated in Part I. of this report, social action usually begins when two or more people, who after carefully analyzing both the total social system and the prior social situation, agree that a problem exists and that something must be done to remedy it. Action may be instituted by members of the particular organization or organizations involved (Insiders) or it may be sparked by individuals who are outside of, but whose interests are consistent with the organization (Outsiders)--in the case of accountability programs, both insiders and outsiders are essential to identification of the problem situation. Thus, the Evaluation and Planning of the program are accomplished by the cooperative endeavors of members of both groups. As the authors have consistently stressed, those charged with the development of accountability programs must seek to identify and to involve both relevant insiders and key outsiders in initial Decision and Action.

4. The Initiating Sets. Although a relatively small number of people may originate a social action program such as the development of accountability programs, it is always necessary to secure the assistance and sympathies of others who share a concern for the problem. These Initiating Sets are the beginning links of a communication network which will serve to heighten awareness about the merits of the proposed change. Too frequently, programs fail because of the initial unwillingness or inertia of some to involve others in the initiation of the action program. An effective change agent will quickly single out those individuals and groups who can assist in "getting the program off the ground."

5. The Approval Stage. In every social system, there are certain people or groups who possess the authority to pass on proposals and to make them legitimate ideas. It is usually easy to identify those who possess the Formal power to "make or break" a program. They are the officials who occupy positions of responsibility within the formal structure of relevant organizations, the individuals who control the purse strings, and the outsiders who exert great impact on the workings of the various relevant organizations. Often overlooked, however, are the Informal approvers: those who, despite the lack of formal titles or offices, serve as organizational opinion leaders, those who have direct channels of communication with formal approvers, and those who are held in esteem by outsiders whose attitudes are essential to the success or failure of the program. As the authors have repeatedly emphasized, it is imperative that these approvers be identified and their "stamps of approval" obtained by those charged with instituting educational account-

ability programs. Without such approval, programs are almost certainly doomed to failure.

6. The Diffusion Sets. Having defined the problem and having initiated action to deal with it, it is now appropriate, assuming that formal and informal approval has been obtained, to take the problem to a larger audience. Here, the diffusion sets are of invaluable assistance. These individuals help to extend the communication network that began with the initiating sets; they serve as educators and opinion leaders in the larger professional or social community. The authors have already discussed several techniques for involving members of the diffusion sets. An effective change agent will employ the services of these people: (1) to alleviate deep-seeded fears of change, (2) to illustrate the existence of educational problems that must be eliminated, and (3) to educate the larger community concerning ways in which changes will be beneficial.

7. Definition of Need. This step is, of course, closely linked to the actions of the diffusion sets. Many times a need may exist without careful definition; and, as a result, people may have vague feelings of apprehension and unrest without being clearly conscious of the reasons for their feelings. In order to demonstrate that the existing problem is really "an ill-defined opportunity," numerous Techniques may be employed. These include Demonstration or Trial, Survey or Questionnaire activities aimed at identifying the attitudes of members of the social system, Program Development Committees, Basic Education, Exploiting Crisis, Comparison and Competition, Building on Past Experiences, and Routing of Complaints to ensure that they reach Formal and Informal approvers.

While other techniques for defining the need may be employed, selective use of the ones listed above should help those in positions of responsibility to establish the need for and the desirability of educational accountability programs.

8. Commitments to Action. Frequently, programs seem to lose momentum following definition of the need. People agree that problems exist and that something should be done to remedy them, but for some reason, some of the required action steps are never taken. This discrepancy between success in problem identification and problem solution often results from a failure to secure commitments to action from those individuals whose participation is essential to the success of the program. As repeatedly emphasized, a person who has committed himself publicly to a course of action is much more likely to "follow through" than is an individual from whom no such commitment has been elicited. The moral here is a simple one: it is mandatory that those whose participation is crucial to the program's success extend a public commitment to carry on with the needed action steps.

9. Goals and Means. Once they have been defined and articulated, the needs themselves imply certain goals and targets for accountability programs. Often, however, people have more difficulty in agreeing how to do something than they do in defining what needs to be done. Thus, goals and means are intimately related. In addition, the availability of certain means is dependent upon the attitudes of Formal and Informal approvers, a factor which may necessitate further inquiry and investigation by those charged with implementing accountability programs. If

goals and means are well coordinated, however, a useful Plan of Work should evolve.

10. Mobilizing Resources, Launching the Program, and Taking Action Steps. These stages of the social action process are tailor-made for those persons who enjoy doing things; i.e., they involve the implementation of steps that have already been dictated by prior planning. Furthermore, if the earlier steps of the process have been carried out successfully, relatively few problems should arise in moving the program forward. If on the other hand, these earlier stages have been circumvented, ignored, or handled ineptly, numerous difficulties and barriers may develop which will impede the progress of the program.

11. Final Evaluation. Perhaps it may seem superflous to mention the final evaluation stage; nevertheless, the authors wish to emphasize its importance. By this time in the process, a great deal of effort and energy has been devoted to bringing about the needed changes. Psychological commitment to programs makes it extremely difficult to view the results of change objectively, and, as a consequence, that old bugaboo, selective perception, may lead those who have been intimately involved with the program to see only the favorable consequences and to overlook the unfavorable ones. Objective and continuing evaluation is, therefore, a necessity, and the authors will have more to say about evaluation in the final section of this report.

12. Alternate Courses of Action. Throughout the entire process of social action, there exists at any point the possibility that alternate courses of action may prove to be superior to the ones originally contem-

plated. Those charged with implementing accountability programs should not blind themselves to these alternatives; they should not become so committed to the original program that they are unable to accommodate their thinking to new approaches that may develop. After all, change is not sought for change's sake; rather, the development of educational accountability programs is predicated on the assumption that they can eliminate, or alleviate, certain problems associated with the educational system.

In the preceding pages, the authors have presented a model for viewing and analyzing such social action programs as the development of educational accountability programs. It is hoped that this model will assist those charged with instituting these programs in identifying individuals and groups who can help in bringing about change. Even so, caution should be used in the interpretation of the model. Let us examine a few of the limitations that must be attached to it.

It can be seen that the model attempts to divide a dynamic continuous process into discrete stages. While division and categorization offer certain analytic advantages, it should be stressed that any such attempt must always, of necessity, result in oversimplification. Thus, many of the stages listed separately in the model occur conjunctively in real-life situations. One may be establishing diffusion sets, seeking acceptance by formal and informal approvers, and attempting to secure commitments to action in the same period of time. Likewise, it is entirely possible that in some instances the sequence of events should be arranged in a different order than it appears in the model. In fact,

some situations may call for a completely different order of procedure than the one presented above. The model suggests that all, or at least most of the stages are usually essential to effective social action, but it does not imply that they must always occur in the same order.

Also, the model should not be interpreted to mean that the various stages must be passed through one time and one time only. Each stage may conceivably be viewed as a miniature social action model in itself. One may have to seek out formal and informal approval at each step of the process; one may wish to employ the initiating and diffusion sets from the time that problems are identified until the time that needed changes are instigated, and one may have to obtain commitments to action on numerous occasions. The entire process is more complex than the model pictures it.

Even with these limitations, however, the authors believe that the social action model constitutes a useful way of viewing the process of dissemination of information concerning educational accountability programs. By attending to the steps outlined and by employing some of the techniques discussed earlier in this section, those charged with the implementation of such programs should be able to heighten awareness and to create a more favorable climate for public acceptance.

Summary

In this section, some specific techniques for disseminating information about, and gaining public acceptance of educational accountability

programs have been considered. Techniques for engendering and changing meanings have been discussed, and the importance of involvement at all stages of the process has been stressed. Finally, the authors have presented the elements of a social action model which help to organize and to underscore the important steps to be taken for the successful development of a dissemination model.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION

After the objectives of communication have been defined, the relevant publics identified and analyzed, and the techniques of dissemination chosen and applied, the task of evaluating communication outcomes remains. Any successful program must attend closely to the important undertaking of continuous evaluation. The authors want to suggest at least three crucial tasks of evaluation.

1. Assessing the initial attitudes, understanding and information levels of relevant publics. The authors have repeatedly commented on the difficulty of assessing the effects of a dissemination campaign without a relatively accurate "fix" on the present attitudes and information levels of relevant publics. While some guesswork is possible, it seems accurate to say that few systematic studies have been conducted to determine how people feel and how much they know about educational accountability programs. Until such baseline information is available, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the impact of any efforts to increase public awareness and create greater acceptance of accountability programs.

2. Pretesting messages to be used. Certainly, the best laid plans of mice and men do often go astray; this fact is as true in communicating with others as it is in any other human endeavor. While error can never be totally eliminated, it can be markedly reduced by systematically pretesting messages to be used in communicating with relevant publics. Rather than relying entirely on the judgement of

message sources--no matter how carefully these judgments may have been arrived at--it is well worth the time, cost, and effort involved to draw samples from relevant target audiences and to test the impact of the messages upon them. There is a saying in the social sciences that a good pre-test can prevent a disastrous experiment. Such a caveat also holds for an extensive, broadly based communication campaign of the kind used in disseminating information about educational accountability programs.

3. Periodic assessment of dissemination effects. If pre-communication measures of attitude and information level are available and if one has a reasonably good idea of the kinds of messages to which relevant receivers have been exposed, assessment of the impact of a dissemination campaign on receiver attitudes and knowledge can be carried out. The authors want to reemphasize that without such periodic stocktaking, message sources have a thoroughly human tendency to delude themselves about the impact of their efforts. Only by periodic empirical research is it possible to determine the relative success or failure of an information campaign. Moreover, such research also provides a better picture of strengths and weaknesses; it reveals which messages are producing the desired outcomes and which ones are not.

CONCLUSION

In this report, the authors have suggested some systematic procedures that can be utilized by states as they move toward the development of educational accountability programs. Each of the steps outlined: (1) identification of the appropriate message source, (2) specification of communication objectives, (3) analysis of relevant publics, (4) determination of particular dissemination techniques, and (5) evaluation of communication outcomes is an essential ingredient of a recipe calculated to produce maximum communication effectiveness. While the road to greater public understanding and acceptance of educational accountability programs is a rocky one, the procedures and techniques discussed in this report should reduce the burden of those travelers concerned with improving the effectiveness of our educational system.