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ABSTRACT

Examining the nature of the communication process as a factor in resolving teacher concerns with discipline problems, this report identifies and defines networking in the school setting and summarizes a study of 500 exemplary schools by the Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) Commission on School Discipline. The report discusses various networking applications within schools, between schools, or among different school systems. The PDK Commission study sought to identify school programs and community projects that successfully ameliorated school discipline problems by establishing close liaison with parents, community agencies, and community resources. Its efforts resulted in a directory of such projects and a handbook of effective practices for use by other districts. The paper also discusses obstacles to networking in education, including the time required, lack of communication, publicity avoidance, and difficulty in replicating successful networking programs. Recommendations for the use of the PDK network are provided. (JEH)

Networking and Accessing School Discipline Programs

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Teaching is a lonely profession. Teachers are often isolated and separated from each other within the school context. They work and teach within the confines of their classrooms without substantial support from various significant others. But teachers are not the only ones to experience this sense of aloneness. All school personnel -- cafeteria workers, security persons, tutors, principals -- express certain feelings of estrangement and isolation.

Nowhere is the isolation more pronounced and perhaps more disquieting than in the area of school discipline. Teachers occasionally talk about curriculum matters or plan lessons together, but teachers and administrators seldom actually plan how to teach greater self-discipline to students or how to involve students in creating a school environment more conducive to improved student self-discipline.

In 500 exemplary schools studied by the Phi Delta Kappa Commission on School Discipline, communication, the sharing of ideas, was clearly evident. In fact, a salient characteristic of exemplary schools is that people within them work together and discuss ideas with respect to all aspects of the school program, not just discipline problems. In this paper the authors will examine how the nature of the communication process can be a factor in resolving teachers' concerns with discipline problems, and how the communication process could be improved through the establishment of networks.

Networking: What Is It?

Miles (1978) defines a network as "a set of social actors exchanging socially relevant materials" (p. 2) and networking as the "deliberate efforts to create or strengthen networks" (p. 3). Networking fosters new linkages that enable educators to achieve a particular goal. A network may be built on either a formal or informal structure. It may have been started through a (formal) meeting or a publication, but its effectiveness depends on the informal links between people. The informal linkages provide solidarity and an essential degree of support. The PDK data on exemplary schools provides a practical example:

> Charles Mitchell, principal of Franklin School in Newark, New Jersey, started "living room dialogues" by bringing doughnuts to a parent's house on Saturday mornings and inviting other parents to come. Out of these meetings, which grew to include staff members, parents, and community persons, grew an advisory council and parent group so strong that they painted the entire school inside and out. An inner city school that once was covered with graffiti now has none.

School personnel must convince constituents that they are trying to do something that will result in better outcomes (conditions) for students. Trust must evolve so that information and resources can be shared to mutual benefit. Sarason (1971) speaks of a school as creating a "constituency." The constituency is established when two parties or organizations can see that it is to their mutual benefit to work together. That constituency is created in small steps by person-to-person contact (Franklin School described above is a good example of this phenomenon), and that constituency concept is also the basis for networking.

We can identify several kinds of networking for use in improving schools; (1) networking within a building; (2) networking between schools; and (3) networking between schools in different school systems or different cities.

Many of the Phi Delta Kappa schools reported that they have highly cohesive staffs (including non-certified personnel) which work well together. An internal "network" of trust and cooperation is necessary before an organization can effectively create external networks. Improving school climate (particularly as it relates to discipline) necessitates involving a majority of the staff in making changes. Communication and mutual support among the staff are necessary for networking to succeed within a building. For example, The Ohio State University is conducting a race desegregation training institute to improve school discipline in three junior high schools in Cleveland and two middle schools in Columbus. The approach depends on developing the school as an organization. Eight factors related to school discipline are considered critical:

(1) The way in which people in the school work together to solve problems;

(2) The way authority and status are allocated and symbolized in the school;

(3) The degree to which students feel they belong in the school and that it serves them;

(4) The way rules are developed, understood, and enforced;

(5) The ways of dealing with students' and staffs' personal problems;

(6) The appearance and utilization of the physical facilities and the impact of technological features such as schedules, intercoms;

(7) The relationship between the school, the community, and homes it serves; and

(8) The quality of the curriculum and instructional practices.

Enhancing intra-school faculty communication was the initial major goal. One of the most interesting and effective communication and trust-building techniques was a weekend survival camping experience. Participants were formed into teams. They helped each other rappel down cliffs, climb rope ladders, and cook food over an open fire. Creating a truly effective intra-school network involves, in part at least, engaging in some kind of sharing experience that provides for a degree of interdependency.

Networking can also take place between schools within the same school district. Two schools in Columbus, Ohio, that have worked in the Ohio State project reported that teaming up with other schools makes it possible to better use resources and to provide mutual support. The schools, for example, share consultants to help provide staff development and student leadership training.

A third kind of networking is that which takes place between school districts, or rather between individual schools which happen to be in different school districts. A serendipitous result of the Ohio State project was the refreshing and enthusiastic interaction between urban schools in Columbus and Cleveland. While the outcomes of such interaction are difficult to measure, participants' eagerness to share experiences indicates a positive effect.

The network concept as described in this paper has a capacity to facilitate school networking with the following benefits: (1) staff members in like situations (rural, urban city, newly desegregated, etc.) can access each other for support and ideas; (2) schools labeled exemplary can support each other for continued growth; (3) schools which need resources can find a credible source for ideas; (4) school personnel can help each other create better school environments rather than continuing to be dependent on consultants from universities or private organizations.

Data Collection

The Phi Delta Kappa Commission has begun a process that could serve as a basis for a national network of schools interested in improving school discipline. The Commission's final product, however, is only a first step in creating a network focusing on discipline programs. The process followed by the Commission to access schools with exemplary programs is described below.

The Phi Delta Kappa Commission on School Discipline was established in

September, 1979, to work for one year to meet several objectives. Among these were:

> To identify school programs and community projects that have ameliorated school discipline problems by establishing closer liaison with parents, community agencies, and community resources.
>
> To develop a publishable Directory of such projects that will describe practices and provide personal contacts through which interested school and community members can receive help for implementing such programs in their school.
>
> To develop a publishable Handbook of practices that local citizens and school personnel can use to bring about closer liaison with community members and resources as a way of ameliorating discipline problems in their local schools.

The Directory is a response to the second objective and should be particularly useful in facilitating networking.* The Commission has developed it to be used independently or in conjunction with the Handbook which will be published at the same time. The Directory focuses on the following:

(1) It identifies many effective practices which are found in American and Canadian schools and pays tribute to the schools, communities, school staffs and students who have risen above the commonplace and defied the popular wisdom to demonstrate that schools can still serve students and society well;

(2) It makes it possible for school personnel or community members to establish contact with other educators and to share ideas for improving practice, thereby disseminating effective educational practices to more schools and more students; and

(3) It stimulates creative and productive thinking about the "discipline crisis" that has emerged during the last decade and has resulted in so much rhetoric, hyperbole, and mis-educational response.

*We included in the Directory every school which was nominated and which returned a survey form. The Commission simply did not have the resources to make discriminations about whether a school should or should not be considered "exemplary" nor could it follow-up each survey form returned to determine the validity of reported data. However, Commission members did see enough information to know that the majority of exemplary schools were engaging in activities that were worth reporting and were worthwhile for other schools that wish to have improved student self-discipline.

The _Directory_ should serve to facilitate communication. The _Handbook_, on the other hand, relates more to the conceptual basis of the Commission's efforts. In particular, it attempts the following:

1. To present the reader with a resource list of ideas either to use or to stimulate creative thinking about alternatives to school problems which are common in most schools:

2. To present some basic processes for initiating action and enlisting support in many schools and communities; and

3. To present the reader with a sense of the system of forces and the types of resources that are required for making successful changes in schools.

The first task of the Commission in developing the _Handbook_ and _Directory_ was to obtain the names of a group of schools reported to have exemplary discipline. Nominations for exemplary programs were obtained in a variety of ways. The Commission (1) undertook a review of the literature, including an examination of professional journals and government publications, and (2) made contact with federal agencies, including the NIE network, the Desegregation Assistance Center Network, and the Creative Discipline Network established by the American Friends Society. The project was advertised, and nominations sought, through newsletters of NAESP, NASSP, ASCD, AASA, and PDK. The Commission also relied heavily on the recommendations submitted by its members.

There was an overwhelming response to the request for names of schools with "good" or "exemplary" discipline. Over 1000 schools were nominated and nearly 500 schools and school districts responded to the Commission's request for additional information. The schools represented all areas of the country and a broad range of demographic characteristics. Schools nominated for inclusion in the sample were contacted and mailed a survey form (or questionnaire) that focused on both demographic and program-specific information.

Members of the Commission spent several days reviewing the questionnaires returned by the selected schools. Inductive analysis of the data produced a large number of categories for classifying the elements of exemplary programs. Categories were subsequently characterized as those "activities" or specific actions taken to improve the school environment. The activities were then clustered into ten broad areas, called "program objectives."

Within the ten broad program objectives, activities were maintained in as specific a form as possible. While activity data received could have been grouped into smaller sets, making analysis less complex, Commission members felt that such reductionism would have potentially deleterious effects (e.g., it could produce generalities which were unrelated to contextual factors).

In order to preserve some specificity in the information reported, the Commission retained some 100 categories for activities and over 200 categories for causes and symptoms of discipline problems. Even with the large number of fairly specific categories, it is difficult not to oversimplify; therefore, the Handbook is designed to provide quotations, examples, and illustrations of specific programs representing the types of activities described by schools. The Directory provides access to the schools themselves.*

Although nominators were given some general guidelines for submitting names of schools, the Commission made no attempt to specifically define "exemplary" or limit nominations to suit a particular philosophy or type

*The Handbook and Directory are currently being reviewed for publication by Phi Delta Kappa.

of program. The Commission simply sought to find schools that people perceived (for one reason or another) as successful in providing a disciplined school environment. After nominations were received, a representative sample of schools was selected (N=141) and a questionnaire was sent to the person who nominated that school asking for the reasons for the nomination. Respondents were asked to check all items (reasons) that applied. The Commission received 141 responses to the questionnaire. Of the respondents, 59% were employed in the school nominated; 29% had visited the school; 10% had a child who attends or attended the school; 30% knew staff members in the school; 23% had heard or read good things about the school; and 15% did not specify a reason. Of the nominators who provided information relative to their roles, 53% were school building administrators; 27% were central office staff members, 4% were college professors; 6% were teachers; 2% were non-certified staff members and 8% were in other roles.

The following chart indicates the reasons for nominations and the percentage of respondents who marked each reason:

	Reasons	Percentage of Respondents (N=141)
1.	Favorable reputation of school among colleagues.	81%
2.	Positive attitude on part of teachers.	87%
3.	Positive attitude on part of parents.	82%
4.	Positive attitude on part of students.	89%
5.	Positive media coverage of school.	70%
6.	Outside funding sources impact on the school.	27%
7.	Development of specific programs to improve discipline.	57%
8.	Marked positive shift in the discipline problems of the school.	55%
9.	Quiet classrooms.	47%
10.	High achievement scores by students.	76%
11.	Fewer discipline problems than normally would be expected for the school population served.	7%
12.	Other...	

For Item 12 respondents were invited to specify other reasons for the nomination. Some of their descriptive responses provide insight into the nominations:

> "Knowledge of the pupils and communication is the key in maintaining good discipline."
>
> "Students and teachers invest in and continually reinvest in the curriculum and its implementation."
>
> "Children have a maximum amount of responsibility for their own behavior."
>
> "School rules are developed so children make choices and decisions for themselves which are appropriate to their age/maturity level."
>
> "Children are allowed to experience the logical consequences of their actions."

Table 1 provides data on the levels and types of schools (N=408) which responded to the survey form. Schools were asked to identify themselves as elementary, junior high-middle schools, and high schools and to specify the type of location they served. (In the Directory listings, categories for levels are presented only as elementary and secondary.)

Accessing the PDK Network

The Directory lists over 500 schools which were nominated and responded to the Commission's request for descriptive information about their programs. The list of schools is organized by states into ten geographic regions of the United States. Canadian schools are listed separately.

For each school, the Directory lists the name, administrator and/or contact person, school address, and telephone number so that readers may make direct contact with school personnel to get further information or arrange for visits. Each entry also includes some basic information about the school: (1) type (public or private); (2) location (large urban, inner city, small urban, suburban, or rural); (3) grade level of students; (4) number of staff; and (5) number of students.

Table 1

Distribution of Schools

Percent of 408 Schools Responding						
Level*	Large Urban**	Large Urban Inner City	Small Urban	Suburban	Rural	All Schools
Elementary	45	49	44	40	31	42
Junior High/ Middle Schools	31	24	32	24	11	24
High Schools	24	27	24	36	58	34

*Designations are those used by the schools themselves, although a variety of combinations of grade levels exist within each category. For example, a school with grades 5 through 8 might call itself a middle school or junior high school. A school with grades K through 8 might call itself an elementary school. There were also a number of schools with one grade only and with grades K-12. K-12 schools are listed as secondary.

**Schools were asked to indicate the category into which they best fit. All large urban schools, other than those specifically designated as "inner city", are placed in the "large urban" category. Schools also had the choice of "small urban," "suburban," or "rural." Designations provided here are those used by the schools themselves.

In addition to the above information, each entry also includes an abbreviated list of activities reported by each school. The descriptors are necessarily brief and do not describe specific programs or unique operations in the school program. The Directory includes a chart of activities which summarizes for the reader the procedures considered important enough for school personnel to report them as characteristic of their successful school programs. More detailed descriptions and examples are presented in the Handbook.

Through the Directory, the reader is able to indirectly access the activities and programs of almost 500 schools. The Directory also opens the door for more direct involvement since sufficient information is provided to enable interested individuals to receive one-to-one assistance by contacting nominated schools and arranging for exchange of information and materials, telephone conferences, visits, or joint meetings.

Obstacles to Creating Networks in Education

While networking is a powerful notion, its implementation is often blocked by a number of obstacles. We must be aware of these obstacles if we are going to facilitate networking, particularly in the area of school discipline.

OBSTACLE ONE - TIME

Although networking does not really take a large amount of money, it does require time and effort. People must be willing to take the time to learn and to try new techniques. In The Ohio State University Discipline Training Institute, we found many individuals ready to spend hours and days of uncompensated time to get together with individuals from other schools. They wanted to find out how others were dealing with many of the problems they confronted. Without such commitment of time, however, networks, whether formal or informal, have little chance of success.

OBSTACLE TWO - COMMUNICATION

Often, there is a lack of information about the persons who would be helpful to a network. Faculty members at the Ohio State networking project on school desegregation have found that many organizations and agencies with similar programs exist side by side yet do not communicate or use one another as resources. Schools are even more difficult to access. There is a tradition of educational isolationism. Secondary teachers, for example, generally think they cannot learn anything from elementary teachers and vice versa. Barriers between departments are often so great that no one can see the advantages of direct communication.

OBSTACLE THREE - PUBLICITY

The third obstacle is more difficult to describe. Many schools which are doing exceptional work tend to try to keep a "low profile" within their own school district. The idea appears to be that too much attention can ruin a good thing. Being in the spotlight is not always easy. When a program is touted as excellent, people tend to criticize and find fault with it.

Members of the [illegible]ta Kappa Commission interviewed a group of Canadian principals who reported that they often bent rules and circumvented policies to create the desired outcomes for students, but they did not "advertise" what they did. They preferred to work quietly, without attracting a great deal of attention.

The Commission's work indicates that a lot more schools are enabling student self-discipline than the popular press and even educated opinion would lead one to believe. Not only did we receive more nominations than expected, especially for high schools, but we have reason to believe that there are more schools which could have been included that simply were not reached by our methods. Some 500 schools, for example, were nominated for inclusion in the Directory but did not reply to the survey. Comments from representatives of these schools reveal much about the complexities of identifying good schools. Some found the idea of being included threatening either because the publicity would jeopardize their school program or because it would attract inquiries that would increase demands upon their time and resources. Examples of their responses include:

> "We would prefer not to be listed because it would focus too much attention on us in our district."

> "We don't want to be included if you are going to publicize the address and phone number."

OBSTACLE FOUR - TRANSPORTABILITY

Another obstacle to networking is the exception that a successful program is instantly replicable or transportable. Such expectations lead to disappointment. Successful programs, such as those described in the PDK Directory and Handbook, depend upon unique interactions among individuals more than on policies, procedures, theories or purposes. When borrowing a technique or practice from someone else, it is wise and necessary to adapt it to local conditions. School personnel must be able to act upon the spirit more than the letter of a borrowed policy.

Recommendations: Using the PDK Network

The exemplary programs identified through the Phi Delta Kappa network are not intended as prototypes. Rather, they serve as case studies of how some educators have moved to enhance the quality of school life for both students and teachers. The Directory and Handbook produced by the Commission present selected programs which have reported success in reducing problems and improving discipline in schools. Much can be learned from sharing such information and from forming links between schools. The list of schools makes possible the creation of networks of communication for sharing ideas and providing mutual support to initiate growth and change. It is important to point out that no one school has for ready duplication all the characteristics and activities essential to help another school achieve success. Although the first inclination of school personnel may be to read about programs and try them out, such an approach may also prove harmful. We suggest several guidelines in forming networks and using information from the Directory and Handbook:

1. Before moving to contact schools and attempting to replicate programs, persons should conduct a needs assessment of their own school. Several instruments can be used to assess the nature of discipline problems in a school environment: [Wayson, The Discipline Context Inventory (1980); Wayson and Wynn, The Organizational Context Inventory (1979); Lasley, Helping Teachers Who Have Problems with Discipline (1981).] The Handbook contains a copy of the Discipline Context Inventory as well as guidelines for using it and for relating it to the causes of both good and poor discipline in the school environment. We suggest using that instrument to identify areas to be addressed.

2. After using an assessment instrument, school staff members should identify and prioritize areas on which they want to work. Then they can contact several schools that have programs which seem to have promise for dealing with the problem areas identified through the needs assessment. Accessing information

from other schools needs to be a thoughtful, logical process. Prior to a contact, questions should be designed to get necessary and essential information. Just asking people about their programs will not provide the kind of specific information needed. To make the best use of the network, schools must ask each other very specific questions which arise out of a real need to know.

3. Actions taken following a needs assessment should be tried, evaluated, and shared. Assessments are necessary on what does and does not work. Participants can provide feedback to one another. Much can be gained from developing a network through which schools can continuously communicate on the efficacy of implemented pilot programs.

Improving school practice is more than just developing a policy or trying a new idea. It involves, to a significant degree at least, continuous attention to the development of a network system. Networking within the school, with outside agencies, and between schools, offers a way to provide support and nourishment for improving the school environment with respect to discipline. The Phi Delta Kappa Commission has used the underlying processes of networking to create written resources. Those resources, the Directory and the Handbook, offer a starting point for other networks to develop and evolve.

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