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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Project MILE (Moline Improvement in Literacy Education), a school/university partnership program between the University of Northern Iowa and Moline (Iowa) Public School District #40. The project called for a long-term collaborative effort in order to develop a complex and sophisticated level of university involvement with a single school district, which would allow for observation of successes and failures and provide opportunities for refinement of training efforts based on feedback. The project combined the prescriptive and catalytic models of organizational intervention, as teacher educators served as consultants to bring new information and strategies to the school teaching and administrative staff and as facilitators for staff-directed instructional, organizational, and curricular change. The project specifically sought to train faculty members in implementation of a language learning program based on a whole language philosophy. The paper offers a brief overview and rationale of the 5-year project, an outline of the intervention model implemented, details regarding the methods for implementing the project; discussion of methods for establishing trust (ascribing a heightened sense of professionalism to the teaching staff, attributing greater respect for faculty decision making, and empowering faculty to set their own course for literacy learning), and a review of successes and shortcomings of the model. (Contains 14 references.) (JDD)

A Districtwide Staff Development Program for Transitioning from a Basal to a Whole Language Literacy Program: The Teacher Educator's Role as a Partner in the Change Process

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Running Head: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A DISTRICTWIDE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR TRANSITIONING FROM A BASAL TO A WHOLE LANGUAGE LITERACY PROGRAM: THE TEACHER EDUCATOR'S ROLE AS A PARTNER IN THE CHANGE PROCESS

Introduction

The traditional university missions of teaching, research, and service are perhaps nowhere more important than in teacher education, where research and service to schools in support of teaching are critical to the improvement of our nation's schools. Goals within these broad missions guide our professional lives, and for us provided impetus for the school/university partnership project which is the focus of this presentation. Kurt Meredith, my collaborator on this project, and I recognized some important goals related to the project and our roles as teacher educators. These include the following. First, we wanted to do more than pass on to schools the latest theories and practices in instruction and curriculum, regardless of the level of implementation. What we wanted was to teach preservice students and practicing teachers those educational practices that we knew would be successful, based on real-life experiences. We have learned that the "hit and run" 1- and 2-day school encounters where one drops in, disgorges wisdom, and leaves before the sun comes up insulates one from outcomes--if, in fact, there are any--and prevents reflection or questioning the validity of the wisdom being so disgorged. We also believe research designed to yield data for publication purposes, while promoting education advances, establishes an unidirectional relationship, rather

than a reciprocal one (Carter, 1993). This we did not consider particularly growth enhancing for either party. A long-term relationship allows observation of both successes and failures, and it provides opportunities for refinement of our efforts based on feedback. In other words, it seemed necessary that we stay long enough to put the heat to our ideas and see if we get a soufflé or scorched eggs.

Second, we sought to conduct collaborative research that would advance the knowledge base for improved teaching practices and understanding of teaching and learning. Third, we sought to promote a relationship supported by connectedness and sharing between the university and the educational community. Fourth, we sought to remain in touch with the lives, learning, and experiences of public school children so that we would know that what we taught our students would meaningfully connect with the students with whom they would work in their classrooms. At the heart of these goals was the desire to remain on the forefront of educational issues as they are expressed in real teaching and learning situations.

The educational areas of particular interest to us are literacy education, school restructuring, and instructional practices. The school/university partnership program being presented here today afforded us the opportunity to meet the goals outlined. The program I shall describe is a long-term collaborative effort among the university, teachers, and administrators in a single school district. We discovered that maintaining such a long-term relationship with a school district allowed for a much more complex and sophisticated level of involvement. This appears to us to be a superior match for

university and school systems as they attempt to deliver a very complex and sophisticated service within a complex social system. The hit-and-run involvement described earlier is almost always superficial. It can yield misleading feedback which may find its way into university preservice teachers training.

Coincidental to our interest in long-term involvement with a school district, the recent educational reform and whole language movements have prompted numerous school districts to target long-term changes in their literacy learning programs (Darling-Hammond, 1990). If school reform history tells us anything, it is that most reform efforts will fail (Orlich, 1989). Fortunately for us, we began work with a district both interested in effecting long-term permanent change and aware of the pitfalls of previous reform efforts. To be successful, districts must recognize the enormity of effort, complexity, and time required to successfully accomplish permanent instructional change across an entire school district; adequately estimate the level of resources, inservice, and staff commitment needed to effect change; address the core elements of change, school culture, and organizational structure (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Lewis, 1990; Orlich, 1989); and recognize that an adequately developed intervention model for change is essential (French & Bell, 1984; Glickman, 1990).

Without a well-developed model for change, districts often become lost in the change process. Frequently, they lose sight of their original goals, or as Orlich (1989) reports, abandon their efforts midcourse. What is worse, without a clear model, real change may

occur but go unrecognized, be prematurely preempted using faulty criteria, and wrongly abandoned as ineffectual or unsuccessful.

This presentation will outline Project MILE (Moline Improvement in Literacy Education) a 5-year longitudinal staff development program funded by a reading improvement grant from the state of Illinois. The project is a comprehensive program, designed and delivered through a partnership between the University of Northern Iowa and Moline Public School District #40. The project employs a combination of two of Blake and Mouton's (1976) organizational development intervention strategies, prescriptive and catalytic. In combining the prescriptive and catalytic model of organizational intervention, teacher educators serving as consultants were able to bring new information and strategies to the teaching and administrative staff. Yet, the teacher educators served as facilitators for staff-directed instructional, organizational, and curricular change.

The intent of this two-part model was to bring new ideas and information to teachers to be used as resources with which to work as they guided the overall curricular, instructional, and cultural changes. The prescriptive elements were informational. Ideas pertaining to instructional practices and curricular control were shared. A model for thinking and learning was presented. The catalytic component was characterized by teacher-directed efforts and decision making regarding change implementation, development of philosophy and goals, definition of curricular content, and construction of assessment and progress monitoring and report systems.

Consultants' roles were quite different during the catalytic phase. Their roles served two new functions. The first function became process-oriented, guiding decision making, identifying resources, defining research procedures to monitor changes and training teachers to teach each other. The second function was to serve as gadflies in the Socratic sense (i.e., to agitate, irritate, and remind teachers of their thinking, their own stated goals and beliefs, their previous learnings, and to view the impact of their decisions for the future).

Another crucial consideration was reflected by Timar & Kirp (1989) and Lewis (1989), who observed that most school reform interventions have failed because they did not affect long-term change in the school culture. This project was specifically designed to address the culture of the school, in addition to the attributions of the faculty toward the value of their work, the curriculum, the organizational structure of the district, and daily classroom instructional practices.

In addition to the description of Project MILE this paper also focuses on the benefits which involvement in the project brought to the University of Northern Iowa, the teacher educators involved, and the students in their respective classrooms. Included in the presentation will be: (a) a brief overview and rationale of the 5-year project; (b) an outline of the intervention model implemented; (c) some detail regarding the methods for implementing the project, considering both concerns of the school district and the teacher education institution involved; and

(d) discussion of methods for establishing trust, ascribing a heightened sense of professionalism to the teaching staff, attributing greater respect for faculty decision making, and ultimately empowering faculty to set their own course for literacy learning in the district. The model has proven to be a particularly dynamic and effective model, and the successes will be shared. There have also been some outcomes that were not as positive as had been anticipated. We believe these shortcomings can be identified and avoided in other settings and these will also be reviewed.

Implementation of the Program

The project began with a series of meetings with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction of the school district. Through these meetings, three goals of instructional change, curricular change, and changes in the school culture were targeted. This was done by analyzing the expressed concerns of the teachers collected through needs assessments and reviewing literacy and school change literature to determine how best to respond to the district's needs. We concluded that to effect dramatic change in student performance, considerable time would have to be spent developing effective teachers and effective learners. Improved instruction and a change in school culture oriented toward supporting instructional change were the keys to meeting this need.

In fact, impacting the discouragement related to community perception of school performance required impacting the school culture that was maintaining the negative self-perception and the ineffective instructional program. The literature and our own previous work with effective district change made evident the

modeling. The first was to model the instructional strategies by employing them in our staff development workshops. We would teach the content of the strategy while actually employing the strategy. Following the modeling, teachers analyzed their experience, looking for strengths, benefits, and descriptions of how they would use the strategies in their own classrooms.

Further modeling occurred when we provided teaching demonstrations in the elementary classrooms. These model teaching lessons were videotaped and the tapes were used in teacher workshops for demonstration and reflection. These initial workshops were offered to a wide array of elementary faculty.

Development of the Teacher Leader Cadre

One of the major accomplishments of the project was the development of a cadre of 12 teacher leaders trained to serve as resources in the district. This group of teachers, selected for intensive training, was initially selected by building principals. The cadre was formed to provide instructional expertise and leadership to each elementary building. Their preparation included extensive inservice training in the use of language as a tool for learning across the curriculum. They learned how to serve as teacher leaders in their individual schools, and they prepared workshops to be delivered to their teaching peers. Specifically, during the first year, their preparation included 9 full days of inservice training during the year and a week of inservice in the summer. Their training was divided into two phases. The first phase focused on teachers learning specific strategies and using them in their classrooms. The second phase focused on cadre members developing workshops and

learning how to be a resource to other teachers in their individual schools.

Expectations for the cadre were twofold: first, to be master teachers, able to serve as instructional models and resource people within the buildings; and second, to provide their own training workshops to other district faculty who had not had access to the same intensive training. With this dissemination plan, it was thought the district could accomplish two additional goals: (a) to ultimately provide intensive training to all faculty and (b) to reduce reliance on outside consulting services to sustain school change by developing a core faculty able to provide the enduring energy and guidance that school reform requires.

The cadre role as trainer of colleagues served an additional purpose. It provided cadre members with considerable motivation to learn and experiment with the materials presented since they knew they would one day have to present the information themselves and have to share their personal experiences with the strategies. The shared terror of this anticipated role led to the rapid cohesion of this group of instructional leaders. Additionally, by implementing the program in their own classrooms, they quickly became credible experts within the district. As their success and the success of their students became apparent, their influence grew.

We identified four other areas which needed attention to fully support instructional change. They were: (a) writing instruction, (b) coordination of special with regular education instructional services, (c) development of building principals as instructional leaders, and (d) creation of a cadre of teacher leaders within the

middle school to carry forward the reforms begun at the elementary level. These four needs were then targeted in the initial intervention plan, and inservice programs were provided to address these areas.

Targeting principals was especially important because of the role they could play in instructional leadership. Again, the literature is fairly clear in demonstrating that in schools with active, instructionally aware, and involved principals, student achievement is greater. We began providing training to principals that was less intensive, but similar in content, to the training cadre members were receiving. They also received training in how to serve as instructional leaders. This put Moline ahead of subsequent Illinois state legislation mandating that principals serve as instructional leaders in their buildings. The Moline principals are now prepared to be accountable for the instructional practices of the teachers in their buildings as the legislation dictates.

This prescriptive portion of the program was considered well under way when cadre members, and then others, began to implement the alternative instructional practices, refine then and reintroduce them. Another indicator was when cadre members began providing additional inservice programs to district staff, serving as resource people, providing model teaching and assistance so that others could refine their implementation of the program.

The catalytic model became the predominant approach as cadre members began using our consulting services more as a sounding board for their own ideas. At this point in the project we, as consultants, provided direction for fine-tuning instructional change

ıd assisted teachers and principals in implementing their reform program.

It was also at this stage in the change process that the district formed the Committee for the Study of Reading to give the faculty guidance during the change process. The committee made up of cadre members and other faculty members spent much of the first year reading and learning about literacy, with a final goal being a review of the reading goals of the district. A major result of the work of this committee was the development of the Moline Comprehensive Language Learning Philosophy and Goals (Steele & Meredith, et. al. 1991a). That document represents the culmination of considerable review of the research on literacy and is a significant departure from the district's previous statement of philosophy. Consistent with the new philosophy and goals statement, the academic domain examined by the committee was expanded to include the broader concept of language learning. Language learning became viewed as the umbrella term embracing the tools of learning: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. Their objectives then centered around putting the language learning philosophy and goals into practice. The consultants served as facilitators, guiding faculty toward the successful attainment of their stated objectives.

The net result of this intervention model on instructional practices has been fivefold. First, it exposed faculty to recent research and practical training to increase their knowledge level and reduce their reliance on familiar, but ineffective, instructional practices. Second, it placed their teaching within a comprehensive instructional framework which guides them in their instructional

decision making. Third, it empowered faculty to take responsibility for both their instructional practices and the further enhancement of their knowledge base. Fourth, it gave teachers the confidence and skills to try new instructional approaches in their classrooms. Fifth, it provided principals with an understanding of the instructional leader role and gave them the tools to begin functioning in that capacity.

Curriculum

Curricular change in Moline represents, to some extent, an outcome of the changes that occurred in instruction and school culture. Faculty pressure to alter curriculum also serves as a measure of the success of the prescriptive phase of the consultation model, signaling a transition to the catalytic phase. It was not until we were able to accomplish positive change in instruction that teachers began to question the appropriateness of the content of their teaching. As instructional goals changed, the materials required to attain those goals began to receive more teacher scrutiny.

Secondary to these events, but stimulating to curricular change, was our focus on instructional change across the curriculum. The integrated, whole language approach as introduced precipitated considerable reflection upon not only reading curriculum, but other content as well.

In response to the desire to change curriculum, we orchestrated three major projects. The first was to guide the Moline Committee for the Study of Reading through the process of selecting reading language arts materials--especially, to assist them with the decision to either adopt or reject a basal reader. The second project

was to assist with the development of a first- through sixth-grade thematic unit program to serve as one curricular component of an alternative to a basal reading series. Third, we assisted cadre and committee members in their development of a second round of workshops, training faculty members in implementation of the new literacy program based on a whole language philosophy.

Implementation of a language learning program based on a whole language philosophy is complex and alien to many faculty. To be successful, teachers must know how to take control of instructional decisions and learn to rely on themselves as decision makers, rather than on teachers manuals from basal programs or language arts textbooks. These changes require time and extensive inservice. The cadre and committee now conduct much of the inservice and serve as resources in each building to assist other teachers in their efforts toward implementation of the program. We continue to provide training to help the committee members develop the workshops they provide their colleagues on implementation of the program. Currently, every teacher in the district has participated in intensive staff development. Cadre and committee members have presented 40 workshops within the district, many of them repeated at state conventions and many more given at the request of neighboring districts. In addition, we continue to provide inservice for other district personnel in areas of identified need.

Culture

Changing school culture is probably one of the most difficult tasks confronting a school reform consultant. Yet, such change is essential if lasting improvement is to occur. Thus, our plan for

affecting curricular and instructional change evolved out of a plan for altering school culture.

Whatever the school culture, there is a dynamic interaction between people that sustains it. Like the law of physics that an object in motion tends to stay in motion on the course prescribed by its motion, school culture remains in motion unless considerable counter force is applied.

One of the central forces sustaining school culture is the clique of cultural leaders who oversee and control the status of others relative to cultural objectives. Our first task was to design a plan that would alter both the cultural objectives and those perceived as the cultural benchmarks. To alter these cultural elements, we adopted four primary approaches.

First, we established professionalism and the rubric of the professional educator as the cultural norm for behavior in the schools. Second, we developed the teacher leader cadre to serve as the new benchmark by which professionalism would be measured. Third, we encouraged establishment of an open-door classroom policy, suggesting that professional educators should meet in grade-level meetings to share their instructional successes and their concerns. They should observe each other at work, share ideas and successes, and function as colleagues. Fourth, we placed considerable attention on principals and their role in supporting professionalism, risk taking, and empowerment.

Complementing these main efforts were our presentations to the school board, intended to solicit their support for the promotion of professionalism. We also encouraged the board to assist in

informing parents and the at-large community about the changes taking place in the district and how they could become more involved.

Previous sections of this paper have described creation of the cadre and inservice to principals. These two steps alone quickly brought considerable attention to instructional issues. Establishing the perception of professionalism as a day-to-day working construct, being less tangible, was far more elusive.

We addressed these issues up front in the grant supporting the Moline project. Since we believe teacher preparation to be a serious matter, we believe it must be viewed seriously by those receiving the training. Treating staff development seriously would likewise give a sense of importance to those involved. Thus, the grant was written to provide substitute teachers so that all inservice programs could be provided during the school day. Staff development sessions have not been held at the end of the teaching day and there have been no combination inservice programs and faculty meetings. Further, the location of the meetings was transformed from a stuffy, over-heated, third-story attic room into a comfortable setting where adults could learn: air conditioning was added, the floor was carpeted, coffee and fruit were provided at all meetings, a new overhead projector and screen were purchased, and all materials were provided in notebooks to facilitate future reference. We set clear expectations for teacher behavior during inservices and while they were trying new skills in their classrooms. We taught teachers to monitor their own growth and have assisted several in bringing

chronicles of their professional development to publication in local and state journals.

Faculty response to these changes in how inservice is provided has been remarkable. Many teachers express a sense of personal transformation. They describe themselves rejuvenated, as respected "professional educators," rather than as "school teachers." They see their primary functions quite differently, as partners working with their students to promote academic growth, rather than as child care workers with uncertain goals.

Assessment and Evaluation Plan

The final ingredient needed to affect long-term change in Moline was the development of an assessment plan which would accurately reflect the curriculum while providing relevant feedback regarding instruction. Consequently, we viewed issues of assessment as a synthesis of the three main thrusts of the reform program.

There was very little prescriptive work done with regard to assessment. By the time assessment issues emerged, the committee was well-trained to identify assessment issues and needs. These were outlined and assessment strategies described. What the committee was not able to do was develop the actual assessment procedures and methods. The evaluation plan (Steele & Meredith, 1991b) is a comprehensive, portfolio-based assessment plan which was piloted in the district during the 1991-1992 academic year, revised during the summer of 1992, and will be fully implemented in the district over the next 2 years (Steele, Meredith, Erickson, Dittmar, & Tice,1993).

Outcomes for Teacher Educators

This is a brief overview of a complex, long-term project. It has afforded my colleague and me opportunities to work with over 240 faculty members over a 5-year period. We have worked with them in inservice settings and in their classrooms as they implemented the instructional and philosophical changes brought about by Project MILE. The benefits of our effort in the district appear to be present and measurable. The benefits to us and to the university program, we believe, are enormous.

The first outcome for us was anticipated and alluded to earlier. Intensive involvement with teachers, as Project MILE required, demanded that we stay ahead of the literature. That pressure came from a number of sources. As implementation proceeded and teachers experienced success, they sought to build on those successes--they demanded to know more, to understand better. They kept coming back and saying, "Great! What next?" As their sense of professionalism grew, they became independent learners, increasing their own participation in professional organizations and reading journals and professional publications. This drove the dialogue to a higher level. Analysis of theories, ideas, and instructional strategies became more thorough. Justification for views and directions became necessary, as ideas were no longer accepted uncritically or rejected unconstructively. So-called "expert" credentials had to be earned. They were not simply accorded by proclamation.

It could get down-right exhausting. It may be instructive to note that this level of scrutiny of ideas is the exact opposite of what

the "expert" teacher educator typically encounters teaching preservice students who respond as open vessels for the receipt of ideas. An example of teachers driving us to higher levels of searching came with the call for development of an alternative assessment plan to reflect the district's new comprehensive language learning philosophy and goals. This was initiated by the faculty and drove Kurt and me to become extremely knowledgeable in the area of the rapidly expanding literature on portfolio assessment and alternative evaluations. On our, own we would have not attacked the literature with the intensity and purpose promoted by this project, and it is not likely we would have ever conducted the extensive efficacy research we ultimately conducted in support of this project.

The second outcome was the collaborative relationships established between school and university that led to the sharing of faculty at both cites. Since the school district is 2 hours away from the university, we could not routinely bring faculty to our class to present on various topics. However, we were able to videotape Moline classes and present these in our university classes. Through the videotaped lessons, Moline teachers brought life to the university classes that came from the immediacy of the experiences with children. University students on occasion struggle to attach classroom learning to future real-life experiences. Teacher involvement can make that connection. Further, our graduate students have been able to identify internship experiences which explicitly meet their needs because of the ability to identify classroom teachers involved in very specific instructional or research activities. Students are better able to tailor their intern setting to

their academic interest because the efforts of large numbers of faculty are known. We should add that working collaboratively has established the trust and mutual benefit that has opened doors for graduate students to enter and work in the schools in a positive and supportive climate.

Third, the school faculty has come to represent an expanded network of professional resources. When we first came to the school district, we brought books, journals, and other reference materials to share with the teachers. Now, it is just as likely that our visit with the teachers will result in their sharing with us pertinent journal articles or texts they have discovered to be of value.

Fourth, we believe strongly in the need to maintain contact with the children who will ultimately benefit or suffer from educational efforts. Through modeling teaching strategies, team teaching, observing and videotaping in classrooms, we have maintained direct contact with children. Further, through collaborative research we maintain indirect contact.

Fifth, long-term contact provides opportunities to conduct efficacy research which provides feedback regarding the worth of the theories and practices one preaches. A setting such as this also allows teachers to become research partners. Research outcomes, for the teachers, become more meaningful for they can see the results in tangible terms. The year-long pilot of the portfolio assessment program provides an example of teachers as research partners. Teachers involved in this pilot study engaged in extensive research using the assessment plan, keeping a journal of their experiences with the plan, observing student reactions, observing the effects of

the plan of the instructional program, and interviewing parents and students about the plan. The same teachers who conducted the research assisted in the revision of the assessment plan, based on their intensive research. The result is an extremely effective and efficient assessment plan which is being implemented by all teachers in the district this year.

Sixth, writing about and sharing what has occurred in the district is extremely important to the field and to the university faculty member's professional life. One downside to intensive involvement of the kind described here is that the time demands often militate against writing. However, a relationship of this sort does facilitate collaborative writing efforts and we have coauthored several articles with the teachers and have several more underway.

Seventh, through this effort the University has been viewed as a partner in school restructuring. The relationship has not been threatened by a sense of district, misuses through nonreciprocal efforts, or intimidation. Mutual respect has been engendered as each agency has come to appreciate what benefits can be derived through the relationship and what each can provide the other.

Finally, this project has invigorated many faculty within the schools. This has, in turn, invigorated us and we have taught our students with greater conviction, greater enthusiasm, and stronger belief in what we are teaching. The cost is high, for the greatest cost is time. It takes us off campus, it takes us away from writing, but it makes all our work, including writing, more genuine, more authentic, more meaningful, and more useful.

When a long-term relationship with teachers is maintained one can do so much more than collect data and report "findings" to their students and the educational community at large. What we can do is tell stories about teaching and learning. Kathy Carter (1993) writing in Educational Researcher said it perhaps better than I. She writes:

> With increasing frequency over the past several years we, as members of a community of investigator-practitioners, have been telling stories about teaching and teacher education rather than simply reporting correlation coefficients or generating lists of findings. This trend has been upsetting to some who mourn the loss of quantitative precision and, they would argue, scientific rigor. For many of us, however, these stories capture, more than scores or mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understandings of what teaching is and how others can be prepared to engage in this profession. (p. 5)

Project MILE has given us the opportunity to tell stories to our university students about teaching and learning so that they, too, can experience the complexities and understanding of what teaching is.

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