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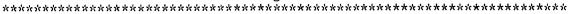   Decision Making; *Power Structure; School
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ABSTRACT
              Teachers in "good" schools often provide considerable
input into curriculum decisions and other types of school policies.
They are considered to be "empowered." This paper argues that the
apparent empowerment of teachers in these situations is actually the
opposite: In good schools superordinates do not empower teachers;
instead, teachers empower their superiors. Methodology involved
analysis of the practices of 30 secondary schools recognized as
excellent by a panel convened by the Office of Educational Research
and Improvement (OERI) for the Secondary School Recognition Program
(SSRP) during the school years 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85. Data
were derived from the written comments of principals and site
visitors. Findings indicate that for teachers, the shift in power is
one of kind rather than degree. Many of the strategies intended to
empower teachers actually empower their superiors by giving
superordinates a greater amount of information about classroom
activities upon which to act. In return, teachers gain a different
kind of influence, that of authorized power. In the process, the
organization is more likely to become typified by common
·nderstandings and how best to achieve them. (LMI)

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HOW TEACHERS EMPOWER SUPERORDINATES: RUNNING GOOD SCHOOLS

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HOW TEACHERS EMPOWER SUPERORDINATES: RUNNING GOOD SCHOOLS

Teachers in "good" schools often provide considerable input into
curriculum decisions and other types of school policies. These teachers
also assume greater responsibility for supervision and inservice
activities. In a word, they are "empowered." That is, according to
popular usage of the term, they have been delegated the authority to make
responsible decisions about what constitutes appropriate practice. This
paper argues that the apparent empowerment of teachers in these situations
is actually the opposite: In good schools superordinates do not empower
teachers; instead teachers empower their superiors.

Department or grade chairpersons, building administrators, and
district line staff are all superordinate to the regular classroom teacher
in the typical school hierarchy. Classroom teachers in good schools--at
least in those schools recognized as excellent in the Secondary School
Recognition Program--empower these superordinates in at least two ways.
First, by increasing the visibility of their instructional performances and
their decisions about the scope and sequence of the content of their
classes, teachers give outsiders access to information about classroom
activities. Traditionally, controlling access to important information has
been a main source of power for participants who occupy lower positions in
an organization. The less knowledge outsiders have of lower participants'
behavior, the lower their ability to influence that behavior. Conversely,
in schools, when others learn more about what goes in classrooms, they
become armed with crucial information on which to base recommendations for

change and with which to determine if the changes have been made. Second, opening up classrooms and decision making makes the school's program less mysterious and unintelligible to outsiders. This can heighten the credibility of an already-successful program in the public's eye, thereby enabling higher-ups to wrestle more successfully for resources they may have been unable to obtain otherwise.

Teacher empowerment of superordinates is a necessary step to the development of a shared ethos--the cornerstone of effective schools. Only through more frequent interaction about and observation of professional role performances--such as occur in the frequent meetings of school-level curriculum councils and sophisticated supervisory sessions that typify good schools--can wide knowledge and acceptance of expectations for behavior be achieved. The public recognition and increased availability of resources that such schools also tend to enjoy reinforce the salience of the behaviors that engendered these desirable byproducts. In the process, individual teachers may feel more efficacious--a term perhaps better-suited for the phenomenon Maeroff (1988) labels as "empowerment"--but they diminish a major source of their ability to influence others and improve the ability of others to do so.

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

Power, according to Mechanic (1962:351), is "any force that results in behavior that would not have occurred if the force had not been present." It is a property of social relationships, either among actors or between actors and a product of social interaction such as norms; it is not a characteristic of an individual (Scott, 1981:276). Power exists only where there are opportunities to exercise it on others. Thus, an

individual cannot be termed "powerful" unless some reference to other

individuals can be inferred. For example, to say that a principal is

powerful means that he or she is able to get students, teachers, the

superintendent, or the school board to behave in ways that they probably

would not have if the principal had not been present. Likewise, a

norm--e.g., "students should treat each other respectfully"--is powerful

only in so far as it is able to engender actual conformity to it.

Authority--legitimized power--generally adheres to a position and is

distributed such that those in the most prestigious positions have the

greatest amount of it. Organizational members accept and consider it

appropriate that certain position occupants will attempt to exercise

influence over them. But power travels on a two-way street. Lower

participants can and do wield considerable influence over peers and

superordinates alike. Although the sources of this power do not reside in

the formal set of norms governing organizational behavior, they are

available nevertheless. Mechanic (1962:356) claims,

> The most effective way for lower participants to achieve
> power is to obtain, maintain, and control access to
> persons, information, and instrumentalities [equipment,
> machines, money, etc.]. To the extent that this can be
> accomplished, lower participants make higher-ranking
> participants dependent upon them. Thus dependence
> together with the manipulation of the dependency
> relationship is the key to the power of lower
> participants.

That teachers as lower participants in an organization can and do have

power over peers and superordinates is occasionally acknowledged but seldom

studied. In fact, Common (1983:342) argues that failure to account for

such power has rendered predominant models of school change ineffective for

affecting practice and asserts that "the real power in schools is the power

of teacher consent." The source of much of the power that teachers

typically have is their control over outside access to what goes on in the

classroom. Regardless of what the formal curriculum says should be taught,

closed classroom doors and the ubiquitous posters covering any glass panels

in the door enable teachers to teach what and how they want. Thus,

teachers can dissent in practice to that which they are expected to assent.

As Mertens and Yarger (1988:35) put it, "Much of the authority teachers

exercise is the authority they achieve when they shut the doors to their

individual classrooms."

Knowledge is power and the absence of it places an actor in a

vulnerable position. Superordinates' knowledge of the actual instructional

program under their supervision depends for the most part on what is

learned from teachers. Yearly observations and occasional classroom

drop-ins do not provide adequate information on which to base required

changes in practice. So not only are teachers able to adjust, adapt, or

ignore formal expectations about content but also they can control the flow

of information about classroom activities to those with the authority to

alter the situation. The result is that teachers often have tremendous

ability to induce superiors to act in ways they ordinarily might not or,

more to the point, prevent them from acting at all.

Superordinates' dependence on teachers for crucial classroom

information is directly related to the invisibility of teachers' role

performances, a well-documented condition of the occupation (Lortie, 1975).

The extent to which an actor's role performances are visible to others

determines the ease with which others can obtain enough knowledge about

those actions to affect performance. Nyberg (1981:539) agrees:

"Individuals are vulnerable in direct relation to their visible

responsibility." Ralph Ellison's (1947:9-10) classic, <u>Invisible Man</u>,

clearly details the power of invisibility for those often in subordinate

situations:

> I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to
> awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to
> awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous
> as sleepwalkers. I learned in time though that it is
> possible to carry on a fight against them without their
> realizing it. For instance, I have been carrying on a
> fight with Monopolated Light & Power for some time now. I
> use their service and pay them nothing at all, and they
> don't know it. Oh, they suspect that power is being
> drained off, but they don't know where...Now, aware of my
> invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented
> strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was
> shut off and forgotten...I myself, after existing some
> twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my
> invisibility.

Empowering teachers alters two aspects of teachers' traditional use of

power: the authority upon which teachers exercise influence and

the locus of the power. First, teachers have always enjoyed considerable

autonomy in their individual classrooms; discussions of teacher empowerment

propose coupling authority with this autonomy. Mertens and Yarger

(1988:35) define the empowerment of teachers as "having the basic authority

and power to practice teaching based upon professional knowledge." The

move to empower teachers, then, is a move to grant teachers the formal

authorization to influence several aspects of school operation that in the

past they have shaped through only informal means.

Second, to be empowered also means that an actor has been enabled in

some way to influence more effectively the behavior <u>of others</u>. The

implicit target of teachers' authority in most discussions of empowerment

appears to be other teachers. That is, having increased responsibility for

determining how certain aspects of the school program should operate

enables teachers to better influence the behavior of their colleagues.

This is different from the past in which power resided with individual teachers who buffered their particular classrooms and rarely attempted to shape the behavior of colleagues. No proposals seem to have been proffered that would enable teachers to gain authority to influence directly the behavior of superordinates, other than as advisors on certain policy matters.

The remainder of this paper argues that many of the strategies that appear to empower teachers actually empower superiors because they require teacher behavior to become more visible, thereby opening the gates through which previously hidden information about school operation can flow. The shift in power for teachers is one of kind not degree; in the quest for authority teachers lose the major source of their considerable informal power. Only superordinates realize an actual gain in their ability to influence others. However, based on the experiences of schools in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's (OERI) Secondary School Recognition Program (SSRP), increased teacher visibility and the empowerment of superiors is a necessary step to the development of a shared ethos in a school.

TEACHER AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE IN GOOD SCHOOLS

The specific examples of school practices used in this argument are drawn from a sample of secondary schools that were recognized as excellent by a panel convened by OERI for the SSRP during the school years 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85. Certainly no claim can be made that these schools are America's best, but it is reasonable to presume that the sample contains at least a healthy number of good ones. Three hundred and eight such schools were identified over the three-year period. Of these, 30 were reviewed.

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The school files contain two sources of data. One is the school principal who supplied information to a series of questions about the school's organization and operation. The other is a site visitor selected by OERI who spent several days at the school talking to students, teachers, administrators, school board members, and citizens. The visitors summarized what they heard and saw on site visit guides. These reports were uneven. Some visitors supplied conclusions dotted with examples while others listed raw observations and comments.

This paper needed to identify a catalogue of practices. The administrators' and site visitors' comments were equally useful for this purpose. The catalogue was intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive of the mechanisms that affected teacher participation in school decisions.

A hallmark of these schools was the increased responsibility teachers had for determining how the school should operate. Typically, teachers provided considerable input into the curriculum (including selection, scope, and sequence of courses), in-service, and evaluation. In addition, more than a majority of schools also had mechanisms by which teachers played a role in hiring principals and new teachers and had some budget responsibilities.

The above categories of teacher input by themselves would not distinguish the SSRP schools from most. Individually, teachers in many schools participate in such decisions. It is the collective nature of the decision-making in the SSRP sample that seems to be atypical; the schools had groups that worked. Almost every school had active committees of teachers and occasionally administrators, citizens, and/or students that regularly met to discuss the above issues. A variety of names--"Advisory

Council," "Curriculum Council," "Curriculum Planning Strategy Group,"
"Curriculum Cabinet,"--were used, but they all denoted viable, vital, and
valued groups in the schools, according to administrators and SSRP site
visitors. In addition, a majority of the schools had adopted and/or
adapted procedures for observing and evaluating teachers that required
considerable interaction between regular classroom teachers and their
supervisors. More often than not, the front-line supervisor was a
departmental chairperson. Indeed, encouraging these teachers to become
instructional leaders was a commonly-echoed refrain in the schools.

Not surprisingly teachers felt good about working in these schools.
According to them, practices such as the above "yield ownership,"
"emphasize a positive climate," "allow great professional freedom," and
make the school "a great place to work." Teachers and administrators alike
noted that they all worked toward a single, shared goal--a group
characteristic of good schools well-documented in the effective schools
literature.

The community as well responded positively to the school. Almost all
of the citizens interviewed commented how accessible the school and its
programs were, noted that their participation on various committees was
solicited, and complimented the faculty on its high quality. This positive
affect apparently paid handsome dividends for the schools in terms of
community support (See Wilson and Rossman, 1986).

The above accounts parallel closely many of the descriptions and
admonitions contained in the growing literature on teacher empowerment
where the goals of increased teacher responsibility, autonomy, and pride
are espoused as desirable (e.g., Lightfoot, 1988; Maeroff, 1988). Specific

accounts of efforts to improve teacher empowerment detail practices similar

to those in the SSRP files, e.g., the participative structure of schools in

a California district (Sickler, 1988).

SHIFTS IN POWER

Practices like the above alter the use of power and its distribution

in a school by altering the availability of information about classroom

activities. But for teachers the change is one of kind not degree.

Superordinates are actually the actors who become empowered.

Teachers' use of power is affected by such practices in two ways: (1)

from informal power to authorized, and (2) from individual to group

exercise of influence. First, teachers' informal power is based on their

ability to shut off the outside world from most of their classroom

performances. As long as students do not share their knowledge of what

goes on behind closed doors, the teacher is free to select content, to

employ teaching methods, and to value student responses in whatever manner

he/she wishes. The practices used in the above schools essentially

transfer to teachers the authority to make most of the decisions they had

made informally for years. Scott (1981) labels this "authorized" power, to

indicate that the social norms legitimizing this exercise of influence are

shared by those above the teacher in the organizational hierarchy.

Second, the practices place chairpersons, teachers as a group, or

subg oups of teachers in the position of exercising influence as opposed to

the mostly individually-exercised informal power that typically obtains

among teachers. For this transfer of the locus of power to result in the

actual ability to influence others, teachers must accept and consider appropriate the superordinate position of the chairperson, group, or subgroup over the individual. Scott (1981) calls this "endorsed" power.

When teachers' influence is both authorized from above and endorsed from below, it would appear that their power has been increased. However, the practices do not empower teachers in the sense that they have been enabled to influence others more; they simply have achieved the means by which they can influence each other differently. That is, teachers collectively determine behavior in areas where they formally made individual decisions. With the locus of power shifting from the individual teacher to superordinate entities, the former suffers a net loss of power while the latter enjoys an increase.

The practices described above actually empower superiors. First, increased discussion of actual practice as occurs in the various forms of supervision, during curriculum council meetings, and the like open up the classroom to the outside world. Those responsible for evaluating teachers have greater access to information about what teachers actually do and are better able to determine discrepancies between actual practice and expected practice. Whether the others who evaluate teachers are administrators or chairpersons, the point is that those in a superordinate position to the classroom teacher have gained knowledge with which to influence better those in a subordinate position. Indeed, when those being evaluated perceive that the evaluator has detailed knowledge of the working situation, the subsequent evaluation is much more likely to be accepted as valid (Dornbusch and Scott, 1975).

Second, greater rationalization of the school program increases credibility with the public. The various council meetings (which often include citizens), the formal definitions of the school program, and the

heightened visibility of the program in action remove the considerable mystery that often surrounds school activities. Community members served by the schools recognized in the SSRP have frequent opportunities to see if the school is conforming to their notions of what schooling ought to be like. Because the SSRP schools appear to be successful on a wide variety of indicators, this comparison more often than not is favorable for the school. Incorporating prevailing community definitions of good practice into its operation legitimizes the school (Meyer and Rowan,1977) and, based on the SSRP schools' experiences, improves the chances of administrators' attracting increased levels of resources. In other words, many of the practices described above enable administrators to obtain money and material from the school board and the community that they might not have been able to obtain otherwise.

If the above analysis is correct, strategies typically thought to empower teachers actually empower their superiors. Indeed, the strategies contribute greatly to superordinates' effectiveness in that they are in a better position to obtain the knowledge and resources necessary to improve the school's operation. The next section argues that opening up access to classroom activity improves a school's overall effectiveness as well.

SHARED ETHOS AS THE CORNERSTONE OF GOOD SCHOOLS

Driving good schools is a common understanding of purpose and of how to best go about achieving that purpose. According to Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984:64),

> Good schools project a raison d'etre. The school's mission
> that is asserted by individual staff members may seem
> imprecise, but collectively the staff has arrived at an
> agreed upon set of behaviors and outcomes that are
> sufficiently specific to acculturate new organizational
> members and control the behavior of veteran members. They
> are organizations with a sense of themselves.

In other words, most staff members know about and adhere to similar
definitions concerning what good practice is and ought to be.

Fuller and Izu (1986) argue that while shared beliefs about goals and
practice typify good schools, the mechanisms through which these conditions
are generated have been more opaque in the literature. The two
authors illuminate this issue by demonstrating that organizational factors
internal and external to the school can promote convergence of beliefs.
The SSRP experiences can address matters internal to the school better than
they can external factors, although the fact that most of the SSRP schools
are suburban schools serving predominantly homogenous student populations
supports the contention that school environment is significant.

Two research traditions provide important insights into the
intraorganizational processes that affect how expectations for behavior
become widely shared in a group: reference group theory and cultural
socialization. Reference group theory helps explain "the responses of
individuals to their interpersonal and more extended social environment"
(Merton, 1968:335). An important distinguishing property of groups is the
degree of role performance visibility or observability within the group.
Merton (1968:374) notes,

> ...social groups so differ in organization that some
> promote efficient "feed-back" of "information" to those who
> primarily regulate the behavior of members, while others
> provide little by way of efficient feed-back. The
> structural conditions which make for ready observability or
> visibility of role-performance will of course provide
> appropriate feed-back when the role-performance departs
> from the patterned expectations of the group. For under
> such conditions, the responses of other members of the
> group, tending to bring the deviant back into line with the
> norms, will begin to operate soon after the deviant
> behavior has occurred. Collaterally, when there are
> structural impediments to such direct and immediate
> observability, deviant behavior can cumulate, depart even
> more widely from the prevailing norms before coming to the
> notice of others in the group...

Thus, increased visibility of teachers' role performances to superordinates, such as occurs in the SSRP schools, enables supervisors to reinforce conformity to certain expectations for behavior and to address deviations. Over time knowledge of what is expected becomes diffuse enough throughout the group that new members quickly learn what is accepted as appropriate practice in the school. The result is a school that has widely shared definitions of good practice.

In developing a typology of cultural systems, Williams (1970) emphasizes their normative structure. Two key components of a culture's normative structure are the distribution of knowledge about norms and the extent of conformity to them. Thus, a more precise way to talk about a shared view is to say that most staff know what the important expectations for behavior are, recognize to whom the expectations apply, and adhere faithfully to the expectations.

For these conditions to occur, there have to be means for communicating the expectations, reinforcing them, enforcing them, and seeing them carried out. In Williams' (1970) analysis, the other two key components of a culture's structure are the transmission and enforcement of behavioral expectations. To refer to a shared commitment then should conjure up an image of the considerable amount of discussion, observation, praise, and admonishment that lurks behind a school's ethos. Additionally, and importantly, schools may have not only well-defined expectations for professional and student behavior but also well-established patterns of rules, roles, and relationships for supporting them. Important considerations concerning sharedness within an organization, then, include questions about what norms are shared, by whom they are held, and how effectively they guide behavior.

Increased visibility of role performances and frequent discussions
about the curriculum and instruction, while diminishing the base of power
for lower participants, are integral to the development of group norms.
Many of the practices described above clearly accomplish this. Thus,
administrator empowerment in this manner is a necessary step toward
achieving the core characteristic of what appear to be some of America's
best run schools.

CONCLUSION

Many of the strategies intended to empower teachers actually empower
their superiors by giving superordinates a greater amount of information
about classroom activities upon which to act. Empowering superordinates
enables them to function as leaders more effectively. In return, teachers
gain a different kind of influence, namely authorized power. In the
process, the organization is more likely to become typified by common
understandings about its purposes and how best to achieve them. Even
Ellison (1947:503) wondered whether some greater good might be achieved in
becoming visible:

> And, as I said before, a decision has been made. I'm
> shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the
> hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but
> coming out nevertheless. And I suppose it's damn well
> time. Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of
> it. Perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've
> overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that
> even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to
> play.

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