

How Can Schools Accomplish Humanistic Change?

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Although cooperation and energy are crucial for humanizing our schools, systematic strategies for organizational change which are themselves humanistic are essential. Consultation in organization development (OD) offers methods for encouraging staff members to collaborate humanistically in solving their own problems.

HANGING in the hall between the bedrooms of my two children is Emmy Lou Packard's eye-catching print entitled "Let's Pull Together." It presents 28 black and white children of different ages energetically pushing and pulling a revolving platform above an angry looking, blood soaked earth, while reaching upward toward blue doves, a bright orange sun, and a calm sky. The children's earnest expressions, their uplifted motions and postures, and the vivid colors trigger in me a deep feeling of 16 years ago when fellow civil rights activists and I sang "We Shall Overcome" and "Black and White Together." While Packard's print may more accurately depict those hope-filled years prior to the assassinations of Dr. King and the Kennedy brothers than this post-Nixon period, it still captures for me the

reservoir of energy that exists in America for humanistic change.

The themes inherent in Packard's "Let's Pull Together" are associated with some of my current thoughts about accomplishing humanistic changes in schools. While the children in the print are working together with substantial force, they are not clearly organized nor will their burst of cooperative effort long be sustained without some attention to formal organization. Their unbounded energy, just like the temporary zeal of the civil rights movement of the early 60's, will not persist unless it can be harnessed, systematically formulated, and institutionalized. Our culture will not be humanized by cooperative energy alone; its very institutions must be restructured for humanization to persist. And humanistic change in schools is a case in point. Although cooperation and energy are crucial for humanizing our schools, systematic strategies for organizational change which are themselves humanistic are essential.

During the past decade, thousands of

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stalwart supporters of school change have spent substantial energy in temporarily pulling together. They have sought schools with more openness, directness, authenticity, and supportiveness. They have pushed for more individualization, cooperation, variety, and whole-person relationships. But while their spirit and energy for humanistic schooling has been substantial, they have not typically been capable of building the organizational

skills, norms, and structures within local schools to sustain and deepen such change. Their good intentions and unlimited energies have not been accompanied by skills of social architecture.

The Staff Culture: A Target for Humanistic Change

Educators typically have focused their energy on humanizing relationships between teachers and students. In so focusing, they have accepted the culture of the staff largely as it presents itself, rather than seeing it as the subject of humanistic change in itself. In practice, this orientation has supported attempts to train individual teachers, through in-service courses, not to intervene directly with the faculty as a social system. Moreover, many curriculum specialists have ignored the importance of creating self-renewing, vital, and growing school staffs as a primary base for educational improvement. Too often innovative curricula have been superimposed on faculties rather than the staff itself developing new instructional programs out of its own problem solving. Humanistic staff relationships have not usually

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Emmy Lou Packard's print entitled "Let's Pull Together"

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been viewed as prerequisite to humanistic instructional changes.

Moreover, humanistic innovations, once adopted, have often not survived because the staffs in which they were installed could not accommodate them. Basic features of staffs such as their interpersonal norms, vested power interests, and perceived budget limitations can interfere with the viability of new practices. It is difficult, for example, to implement cross-age tutoring or peer-mediated learning when staff norms support self-contained classrooms and when teachers expect one another always to be in control of students. For programs of peer teaching to flourish, staff norms about the boundaries of classrooms and student discipline, along with the role definitions of teacher and student, would have to be altered. A few teachers pulling together to make this change would not be sufficient.

Vested power interests on the staff also can come into play when attempts to alter

patterns of participation at faculty meetings are made. Little chance for changing interaction patterns during staff meetings exists unless those with formal and informal power are interested and skilled in altering their influence styles. A rigid view of the budget can also restrain humanistic change. It may be more appropriate, for example, that a teaching team have a regular part-time aide in lieu of a budget for substitutes. If the budget for substitutes cannot be altered in staff members' minds to hire paraprofessionals, the team's development and effectiveness could be impeded. In short, since humanistic innovations often require a change in staff "culture," the staff itself should be a predominant target for humanistic change.

Organization Development for Humanizing School Staffs

Consultation in organization development (OD) offers methods for encouraging staff members to collaborate humanistically in solving their own problems. In focusing on the staff culture as a target of change rather than on individuals, OD aims at modifying the staff's group norms and regular work procedures, not just the concepts and feelings of individual staff members. To accomplish staff changes, OD involves the entire staff in the assessment, diagnosis, and transformation of its own group goals, the development of group skills, the redesign of its own organizational structures, the humanization of its working relationships, and the assessment of results.

The measure of a successful OD project is that a staff has developed the capacity to solve its own problems by using its own resources and by reaching out proactively to use external resources. Internal staff resources may include information about different curricula and different students, empathy for the feelings of others, willingness to take risks, and supportiveness of others. But, the true human resources of the staff become available only when administrators and teachers call upon one another for fresh ways of looking at things, when

each staff member is unafraid to offer personal thoughts and feelings, and when a staff can move a new idea into action.

OD differs from more traditional educational change strategies in its democratic emphasis. Many school consultants have tended to look at school problems as defined by district-office administrators and then later to recommend solutions to these problems. Rarely do such consultants remain with a school long enough to get to know all staff members or to help carry the recommendations into action. OD consultants, in contrast, do not accept the problems as defined by the administrators alone, but rather explore the perceptions of all staff members. Recommendations for change do not come from the consultant alone, but also from staff members themselves. The consultant then helps staff members to design and implement innovations they have generated. Three phases of OD projects are basic:

Improving Communication Skills. A school OD project aims first to build increased trust, openness, and ease of communication among staff members by helping them develop the communication skills of: paraphrasing, describing behavior objectively, describing feelings directly, checking impressions, taking surveys, gatekeeping, convening, and giving and receiving constructive feedback. These skills constitute basic building blocks of OD projects.

Developing Humanistic Norms. Once

communication skills have been introduced and practiced, the OD process builds on the already existing reservoir of staff members' interests in school improvement to help ameliorate some of their real problems. Staff members are encouraged to state some frustrations they encounter and are taught to use a sequence of problem-solving steps. The collaboration required to complete the problem solving reduces frustrations and also brings the satisfaction to most staff members that they have participated in the solution. Changes in school norms occur only when the staff members actually behave in more open and honest ways. In other words, the problem solving does not become effective and the OD process is not flowing until some plans are being implemented.

Structural Changes. The OD process next aims to help staff members transform the results of their problem solving into new definitions of roles and procedures. These new organizational patterns should be formally decided upon by staff members, and agreements should be made about the action stages for carrying them out. An OD project is not complete until new functions, roles, procedures, or policies are built. These new staff structures must not be just ideas; they must be formal, institutionalized, and budgetarily supported. Humanized schools cannot exist only on staff members' desires and energy to pull together; they must also have organizational structures to support the humanized climate.

Resources on Organization Development

Richard Arends, Jane Phelps, Martha Harris, and Richard Schmuck. *Organization Development in Schools*. Eugene, Oregon: Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1973. An audio-slide presentation useful for introducing school faculties and other educational groups to organization development.

Richard Arends, Jane Phelps, and Richard Schmuck. *Organization Development: Building Human Systems in Schools*. Eugene, Oregon: Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1973. A booklet of introductory information about organization development of the type school personnel need as they consider entering into an OD project.

Richard Schmuck and Matthew Miles. *Orga-*

nization Development in Schools. Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Corp. (formerly National Press Books), 1971. A collection of empirical assessments of OD projects. The history of school OD, problems of entry and design, and techniques of data feedback are also discussed.

Richard Schmuck, Philip Runkel, S. Saturen, R. Martell, and C. B. Derr. *Handbook of Organization Development in Schools*. Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Corp. (formerly National Press Books), 1972. A basic source of the theory and technology of school OD. Chapters include basic concepts, skill practice episodes, group exercises, diagnostic strategies, and organizational procedures. □

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