

ONTARIO PUBLIC SUPERVISORY OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION

And

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL

WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR – TOGETHER

Featuring: Dr. Michael Fullan and Dr. Ben Levin

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Reporter: Bev Miller

WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR – TOGETHER

Building Our “Collective Capacity”: System and School Leaders Learning Together

Welcome/Opening Remarks: Michelle Forge, OPSOA Joanne Robinson, OPC

On behalf of OPSOA and OPC, Michelle Forge and Joanne Robinson welcomed participants to this eighth leadership symposium. They pointed out that the session would highlight the importance of senior system and school leaders working as teams to build “collective capacity” at the school and system levels. They went on to state the three goals for participants: learning about the educational research underpinning the importance of principal/supervisory officer collaboration; hearing the importance of building shared visions and implementing shared goals and expectations; and reflecting on the current system opportunities for principal/supervisory officer collaboration and the impact this has on organizational and institutional development. They also outlined aspects of the ICP 2011 World Convention taking place in Toronto from August 15 – 18, 2011 and encouraged participants to take advantage of this outstanding educational opportunity. In concluding their introduction, Michelle Forge and Joanne Robinson explained that personal circumstances meant that Dr. Andrew Hargreaves was unable to take part in the symposium, but that Dr. Ben Levin had graciously agreed to take his place in the proceedings.

Greetings: Tony Pontes, President of OPSOA Vicki Shannon, President of OPC

What's Worth Fighting For – Together

**Dr. Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, O.I.S.E./UT
Special Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Education in Ontario**

**Dr. Ben Levin, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Education Leadership,
O.I.S.E./UT**

Introduction

Fullan explained that the day would be divided into three parts:

Part 1 – Ben Levin’s work regarding high school reform in Ontario, material contained in his upcoming book, *More High School Graduates*

Part 2 – Michael Fullan’s work, *Motion Leadership – The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy*; the ‘moral imperative realized; and the ‘wrong drivers’ in international perspective

Part 3 – A number of ad hoc issues resulting from Ben Levin and Michael Fullan’s work in a number of initiatives and the action implication of these issues

PART 1 - Dr. Ben Levin

Introduction

Levin began his presentation by stating that the high school graduation rate has increased significantly in Ontario, going from 68 per cent in 2003-04 to 81 per cent in 2009-10. Students are aiming high and achieving more as a result of a broader range of outcomes. He did, however, point out there is empirical evidence on the limits of prediction. In other words, educators need to be cautious about making predictions about students. A study, “The Distribution of Canadian Youth across Educational and Geographic Characteristics by Post-Secondary Education Group” shows we are in danger of underestimating what students can do. The evidence indicates that many students who struggle in high school and have low scores on tests end up successfully enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

Connecting with Students

One important action which results in higher graduation rates is knowing the status and progress of every student in a high school and intervening as soon as there are signs that a student is experiencing difficulties. This type of focus and intervention requires systems and processes, not just good will. In Ontario, we are paying attention to the needs of individual students and addressing these needs so that they are earning high school credits. There are also specific groups within schools who require special attention. These include returnees, young teen parents and minority groups. Furthermore, it is very important that the student voice be heard – at the classroom, school and district level. If students are given the opportunity to have a voice in their education and if the teaching and learning contexts provide an opportunity for them to explore their passion, the likelihood of their success increases.

Program Structures

The goal of every high school should be to provide a program mix that enables a good outcome for every student. In practice, this raises the following issues:

- What requirements must be met by all students?
- How can the school accommodate student interests?
- In what ways can the school accommodate particular sub-populations?
- What are the organizational issues with regard to curriculum and instruction?
- Are there timetabling issues around what to teach and when to teach it?
- Who teaches what subjects at what level?

Community Connections

Schools should be deeply rooted in and connected with their local and broader community. This requires developing a specific strategy in order to build partnerships with the following:

- Parents and families
- Community groups
- Employers
- Post-secondary institutions

Teaching and Learning

It is imperative to improve daily teaching and learning so that students become engaged in their learning experience in school. An excellent resource that supports this recommendation is, “What Did You Do in School Today?” A recent language arts study indicated that only 43 per cent of students are interested in the program and are feeling successful, while 30 per cent find the program boring and 19 per cent find it really hard. A study of students’ feelings around their mathematics’ learning experiences resulted in similar findings. The overall evidence indicates that the intellectual engagement of students is low. To remedy this negative situation, the following elements should be incorporated in daily classroom practice:

- Deep thinking
- Intellectual rigour
- Substantive conversation

In order for teaching and learning to be effective, collaborative efforts by teachers are necessary. For example, moderation of student work is one of the best vehicles for ensuring open conversations about expectations, student needs, teaching strategies, and assessment for and of student learning. We should also be providing opportunities for student voice and choice, by bringing into the schools the interests of students as part of the learning experience and encouraging independent learning that unlocks the passions of students. Another factor to consider is the use of technology. This is an excellent means for encouraging student engagement because it gives the students a stake in how we conduct learning in our schools. Finally, challenging and engaging students have to be a priority if we want them to experience successful achievement and feel positive about their educational experience.

Implementation Issues

The following are the main implementation issues in attempting to improve education for students:

- Sustained effort
- System-thinking (not just school by school)
- Leadership development
- Work with the profession
- Strong use of research evidence (especially true for high schools)

Activity

Participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Given what Ben Levin has said and experienced, what has become clearer about high school reform?
2. What still troubles you regarding high school reform?

Participants' responses, both negative and positive, are presented below and include comments added by Levin and Fullan:

- Learning must be purposeful. Students should understand the rationale of the learning as well as its relevance.
- Boredom is the enemy.
- Anything can be relevant under the right circumstances as long as the material is presented in an interesting way and the teacher demonstrates passion for the subject.
- We try to reengage students, but many times we do this in the wrong way. What we need to do is say, "We want you here" and "We will meet you half way."
- One strategy that has been used is to obtain a list of students who do not return to school in grades 11 and 12, plus the number of credits they have accumulated, and then to reconnect these students with the school. This results in more students graduating.
- The question was raised whether to destream grades 9 and 10, but this is highly unlikely to occur. The issue is that courses at that level, both Applied and Academic, should be challenging and engaging. The teacher's approach is important; it should be both welcoming and challenging.
- Principals have to be involved with teachers as both learners and leaders.
- The degree to which principals participate as learners with teachers to determine student needs and possible solutions is a critical factor in improved student learning and achievement.
- Often there is a disconnect between the school and the family once students are enrolled in high school, yet parents have a very strong influence on their older children. Therefore, there is a need to build the school, parent and student triangle.
- Student voice is important, and for this reason, we need to hear it. Once students have more voice, they take more ownership for their learning, including regular attendance in their classes.

PART 2 – Dr. Michael Fullan

Motion Leadership

Leadership is about causing positive movement. The "skinny" refers to the smallest number of things one has to know about something; in terms of change savvy, it is knowing how to get to action sooner rather than later. It is amazing how much one can accomplish in a year. In other words, speed of quality implementation is possible.

Beware of Fat Plans

The size and prettiness of a plan is inversely related to the quality of action and the impact on student learning (Reeves, 2009). An implementation plan should not be developed for the planners, but for those who must implement it. The core goals and priorities of the plan should be kept to a minimum and should be easy to remember. If you are obligated to create a fat plan, also create a skinny plan for local implementation, and then send the fat plan up the ranks while sending the skinny one down to the real implementers. Most importantly, never think that the fat plan is actionable.

Communication During Implementation Is Paramount

Communication during implementation is far more important than communication prior to the implementation, for the reason that communication in the abstract, in the absence of action, means nothing, and, therefore, lacks value. Moreover, two-way communication is very important during the implementation period, because during this time emotions run deep. Such two-way communication will sharpen the vision and deepen the implementation, for it will provide the context for problem-solving to occur.

Excitement Prior to Implementation Is Fragile

Excitement in advance of doing something is understandable, but fragile. It is true that group leaders are energizing, but they can also be annoying. It is also worth noting that if the excitement level is too great, there can be a certain amount of disappointment as implementation begins. This can have an adverse psychological impact on those given the task of implementation.

It's Okay to Be Assertive

Being assertive is permissible, but one has to first earn the right to be assertive. At the same time, it is important to realize that there is often a certain amount of inertia at the onset of an implementation, which requires one to kick start the change process. It is also worth noting that one needs to be as assertive as will be accepted at any given time.

Assertive leadership is dependent on the following three conditions:

1. when leaders have built trusted relationships;
2. when it turns out leaders have a good idea;
3. when they empower people from day one to help shape and assess the idea (enthusiasm is not sufficient).

Moral Imperative Realized

Personal experience that brings success leads to moral imperative realized. In other words, what changes teachers' minds and motivates them for future action happens through their own

personal experience. Most important to remember is that moral purpose will come; it may be dormant and rise to the surface or it may be newly created through personal experience, but it will definitely come. Therefore, it is imperative that one never predict that some people will fail to do something or fail to change. It is also important to give people respect even before they deserve it, in order to get them engaged in the process of change.

Three Killer Slides

1. All effective leaders combine resolute moral purpose with impressive empathy (understanding others as if you were them).
2. What energizes educators is realized moral purpose (accomplishment).
3. Mutual allegiance and collaborative competition are a powerful, compatible combination. Mutual allegiance is evident when teachers think “our students” and principals in networks of schools think “our schools”. When people push the limits, they become competitive in a positive and friendly way because they want to get better and better once they start to experience success. Fullan terms this phenomenon, “Moral Olympics”.

Activity

Participants were instructed to form triads and to discuss two questions within their group:

1. What strategy are you using in your school or district that is successful?
2. What is one problem you are facing?

International Confirmation

There is growing interest on the part of world leaders in policies/strategies for whole system reform. Within this context, Ontario has become the envy of many jurisdictions as a result of its success.

Indicators of the current interest in system reform include the following:

- PISA 2010 – OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) conducted a survey of half a million high school students in over 70 countries, testing the ability of fifteen-year-old students to extrapolate and apply their knowledge to novel situations. The strongest overall performers were Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Finland, Canada, Japan and New Zealand.
- Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform – This two-day summit held in Toronto and hosted by Premier McGuinty brought together experts and education policy makers from across the globe to share ideas and look at new ways to help solve the challenges facing students.
- McKinsey and Company Education Report 2010: “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better.”

- OECD, Teacher Summit, New York in March 2011 – Fifteen countries were represented at this summit, its focus being the quality of the teaching profession and what the United States could learn about improving the quality of teaching.

Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform (Centre for Strategic Reform)

WRONG vs RIGHT DRIVERS

<p>Accountability This is a strategy that emphasizes targets and has consequences for not doing well. It also encompasses teacher performance appraisal.</p>	<p>Capacity Building In 2003, Ontario made a decision to focus on capacity-building. It, therefore, created LNS (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat) to uncover best practices and partner with the system to implement these. It was a non-punitive approach, focused on capacity building and was non-judgmental. The process involved leading with capacity-building and following with accountability. In Ontario, the approach has been to avoid overt accountability.</p>
<p>Individual With a focus on individual performance that includes merit pay, there will not be system reform.</p>	<p>Group A focus on improving the group is the approach that will change a system. If a teacher is in a school with high social capital(a climate of collaboration where group interaction is very powerful) both the poor performing and high performing teachers will improve.</p>
<p>Technology Technology has outraced pedagogy in the last 40 years.</p>	<p>Pedagogy Pedagogy must be the driver in the classroom, and technology has to be the supporter.</p>
<p>Fragmented Implementation is a hodgepodge affair.</p>	<p>Systemic The school, district and province are aligned and their approach and focus are coherent.</p>

Note: The four drivers outlined in the right hand column work at changing culture.

Mckinsey & Company Education Report 2010: “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better”

- A system can make significant gains from wherever it starts and these gains can be achieved in six years.
- Each stage of a school system improvement journey is associated with a unique set of interventions that move the system from fair, to good, to great, to excellent. In effect, a unique intervention cluster exists for each improvement journey.

Achieving the basics	Getting the foundations in place	Shaping the professional	Improving through peers and innovation
Fair to Poor	Fair to Good	Good to Great	Great to Excellent

Note:

1. Transparency is powerful because it results in accountability. The important thing to keep in mind is that while transparency is crucial, the approach must be descriptive, not judgmental.
2. The balance of capacity-building and accountability shifts as systems improve their performance, in that the accountability portion lessens.

Concluding Remarks

- We live in a world surrounded by targets, yet we want to build capacity.
- At the local level, we should focus on the positive of capacity-building and culture-building.
- In order to move from a focus on the individual to one on the group, we should establish groups of principals that learn from each other and establish clusters of schools that are networks where educators work together every day collaboratively.

PART 3 – Dr. Michael Fullan and Dr. Ben Levin

Ad Hoc Issues

1. The report resulting from the OECD Teacher Summit held in New York in March 2011 points out that successful educational systems demonstrate the following:
 - Building a high quality teaching profession
 - Recruitment and initial preparation
 - Teacher development and support
 - Teacher evaluation and compensation
 - Teacher engagement in reform
2. Part of the “ownership package” is the involvement of the various educational associations in the reform process.
3. When respect for the teaching profession is given before it deserves to be respected, respect will later be deserved.
4. Accountability is part of the equation, but it is not the driver.

5. There has been some question concerning the narrowness of the measures of student achievement, to the neglect of items that include student well-being. Such items can be measured; it is a matter of clarity.
6. In Ontario, reform started with literacy across the curriculum, and since the initial implementation, there has been growth from Levels 1 and 2, to Level 3. However, there has been no change at Level 4; the success rate has remained at 10 per cent. There is a need to move students from Level 3 to Level 4.
7. Students of the upcoming generation require higher level thinking skills in the 21st century. There are eight essential skills that fit this category, including problem-solving, creativity and digital literacy. In fact, in future there will be a digital-based curriculum for grades 3 – 8 so that educators are directing students in the appropriate and effective use of technology. The agenda in Ontario is to move more students into performance at Level 4. This means that more study and precision are needed to understand the eight essential higher level thinking skills and the best practices to develop them. Fullan’s next book is *Higher Order Leadership for Higher Order Skills*.

Triple I Framework

Leadership consists of three components:

- Improvement - Improving existing practice
- Innovation - Creating something new
- Inspiration - Motivating people

Activity: Participants were instructed to work individually, writing down the names of political, historical and cultural leaders who had one or more of these traits. Next, they were to do a ‘give and get’ around the room, adding to their list. The final step was to return to their home group to discuss their findings. Some suggested names included the following: Pierre Trudeau, Betty Friedan, Stephen Douglas, Hilary Clinton, and Ghandi.

Follow-up Discussion:

<p>Ben Levin</p> <p>In education we do not need every teacher innovating; rather, we need the disciplined application of knowledge. In other words, the emphasis needs to be on application.</p>	<p>Michael Fullan</p> <p>Alberta has frontend loaded educational reform with inspiration, while Ontario has focused on improvement during the past seven years. In achieving improvement, inspiration will follow and act as a motivator for continuing improvement. Inspiration has to be based on capacity and skill.</p>
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Activity: Participants were instructed to identify and discuss, in their groups, where they would locate their school district and the province on the “Triple I” grid.

Follow-up Discussion – Ben Levin and Michael Fullan

People in education need a measure of how they are improving. This requires a set of softer indicators so that they can gauge their progress. Such an innovation would provide a judicious balance of accountability and capacity-building. In order to develop internal accountability, the main focus should be: “How much improvement have you made based on where you started?”

Data was not used for the first three years of reform in Ontario. After three years, educators were ready for data. Once data is used and there is transparency, this is accepted. In fact, people start wanting the use of data to track performance.

It is important to involve people in developing the indicators that are considered appropriate. As well, while these external measures have value, there can also be internal ones that suit particular contexts. What is important to remember is that there must be indicators.

The difficulty with Alberta lies in the fact that they have experienced success, but are unable to pinpoint the drivers of this success. This is the result of ad hoc improvement rather than systemic thrust.

There is a gap between the public’s view of the level of success in Ontario education and the reality of the significant success achieved. One reason for this disparity is the high level of expectations held by the public and the fact that these expectations continue to increase over time. In effect, educators are victims of their own success. They know they have a really good educational system and they want it to be even better.