Lenses Used Determine Lessons Learned

Howard S. Adelman and Linda Taylor
University of California, Los Angeles

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ("No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001), low performance urban schools can expect even greater scrutiny and pressure to improve. Assistance will be needed from wherever it can be found. In particular, the demand for innovative ways to help classroom teachers enhance their effectiveness will increase.

The articles presented in this issue of Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation (JEPC) by Meyers (this issue) and by Rubinson (this issue) highlight the complexity and frustrations that arise when major innovations are brought to school sites. These case studies also illustrate how easy it is to fail. Fortunately, these innovators appreciate the importance of sharing their experiences so that we all can learn from them.

In discussing lessons learned, each innovator has used a particular set of lenses and concepts, and readers who look at things in the same way will benefit from the analyses. However, as we suggest later, use of different lenses and concepts leads to different lessons learned that also may be instrumental in advancing the enterprise of student support.
CONSULTATION OR SYSTEMIC CHANGE?

Meyers's (this issue) decisions to use organizational and cross-cultural lenses were reasonable choices. However, we think that the complex set of interventions under study requires analysis from a systemic change perspective. From what is described, the interveners were advocates and agents for change (i.e., change agents) rather than consultants. That is, the interveners in this case undertook two fundamental organizational change agendas at the school: (a) to make major program innovations and (b) to make major systemic changes. Each of these agendas is complex and interrelated and involves much more than is usually described as consultation. Another set of concepts used by Meyers (this issue) is packaged under the construct cross-cultural (i.e., in her analysis, this broader lens gives way to the concept of racism). The complexities here are immense and warrant much greater attention. From an organizational change perspective, cross-cultural applies not only to persons but also to organizations. For example, there are differences between school culture and the cultural milieu of interveners coming from a non public school organization (e.g., the university). These differences can be barriers to creating readiness and implementing school programmatic and systemic changes. Although not our focus here, we think it also worth noting with respect to Meyers's focus on race that, from an organizational change perspective, one must differentiate institutionalized racism from personal racism, and in both instances, it is essential to distinguish when racial politics is complicating the actions of interveners and intervenees.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Looked at from the perspective of systemic change, it is highly probable that a different set of data would have been gathered and different interpretations made. For example, frameworks that outline phases of the change process describe the first phase as creating readiness and as including the processes involved in negotiating initial agreements (Adelman & Taylor, 1997). Creating readiness (including negotiation of agreements) is a concept that applies to the interwoven agendas of making program innovations and making systemic changes. From this viewpoint, several unanswered research questions arise related to Meyers's experiences:

1. Did the initial contracting clarify the expectations related to each of the two agendas and in enough detail to convey the costs to the
school so that the school staff could make its decision based on a reasonable cost-benefit analysis?

2. Did the interveners have the necessary training to enable them to carry out both agendas effectively?

3. What interventions were designed and implemented in addition to contracting to enhance staff motivational readiness and capability related to pursuing both agendas?

Although conceived primarily as a process for supporting students at risk for failure in general education classrooms, the members of the problem-solving teams discussed by Rubinson (this issue) also were advocates and agents for systemic changes. Their stated intent was to assist teachers by creating and implementing “strategies for meeting instructional, behavioral and motivational challenges.” This intent played out in different ways and a significant number of the teams failed to thrive. Rubinson’s analysis emphasizes a range of factors related to school culture and structural regularities that led to failure-to-thrive teams and, more generally, made systemic change difficult. The major factors she discusses are mistrust of the project, mistrust and poor relationships among staff, inability to connect with and involve teachers, staff mobility, stressful conditions at the schools, the lack of knowledge support staff have about classrooms and instruction, tendencies to attribute student problems to within-child etiology, conflict about appropriate staff roles and functions, conflict about agendas stemming from the problem-solving teams’ orientation to addressing students needs, and the credit or curriculum-driven orientation of high school classrooms.

A different set of concerns (and lessons learned) arise when systemic change concepts are used to understand the problems encountered as innovations are introduced at school sites. We can best illustrate the point by highlighting lessons derived from the literature on systemic change and from our experiences in the field. It is a poignant, common finding that mandated systemic changes often lead to change in form rather than substance. Nevertheless, introducing any innovation into a school system calls for policy that supports the innovation, application of sophisticated systemic change models, and use of personnel who are trained as change agents. Given there is policy support and personnel who can effectively facilitate the change process, substantive change requires paying considerable attention to creating readiness in terms of both stakeholder motivation and capability, and ensuring there are appropriate supports at each stage of transition. The mistrust and psychological reactance experienced by Rubinson’s (this issue) problem-solving teams reflects a common reality re-
lated to systemic change that must be strategically addressed in creating readiness for change and facilitating transitions. Meyers's (this issue) emphasis on contract negotiation recognizes one facet of all this. However, building authentic agreements and commitments also involves strategies that ensure there is a common vision and valuing of proposed innovations and attention to relationship building, clarification of mutual expectations and benefits, provision for rapid renegotiation of initial agreements, and much more (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Bridges, 1991). Authentic agreements require ongoing modification that account for the intricacies and unanticipated problems that characterize efforts to introduce major innovations into complex systems. Informed commitment is strengthened and operationalized through negotiating and renegotiating formal agreements among various stakeholders. Policy statements articulate the commitment to the innovation's essence. Memoranda of understanding and contracts specify agreements about such matters as funding sources, resource appropriations, personnel functions, incentives and safeguards for risk taking, stakeholder development, immediate and long-term commitments and timelines, accountability procedures, and so forth.

Efforts to alter an organization's culture evolve slowly in transaction with the specific organizational and programmatic changes. Early in the process, the emphasis needs to be on creating an official and psychological climate for change, including overcoming institutionalized resistance, negative attitudes, and barriers to change. New attitudes, new working relationships, and new skills all must be engendered, and negative reactions and dynamics related to change must be addressed. Creating this readiness involves tasks designed to produce fundamental changes in the culture that characterizes schools. Substantive change is most likely when high levels of positive energy among stakeholders can be mobilized and appropriately directed over extended periods. Thus, one of the first concerns is how to mobilize and direct the energy of a critical mass of participants to ensure readiness and commitment. This calls for proceeding in ways that establish and maintain an effective match with the motivation and capabilities of involved parties. In this respect, a review of the literature clarifies the value of (a) a high level of policy and leadership commitment that is translated into an inspiring vision and appropriate resources (e.g., leadership, space, budget, time); (b) incentives for change, such as intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognitions, rewards; (c) procedural options that reflect stakeholder strengths and from which those expected to implement change can select options they see as workable; (d) a willingness to establish an infrastructure and processes that facilitate change efforts, such as a governance mechanism that adopts
strategies for improving organizational health, including one that enhances a sense of community; (e) use of change agents who are perceived as pragmatic (e.g., as maintaining ideals while embracing practical solutions); (f) accomplishment of change in stages and with realistic timelines; (g) feedback on progress; and (h) institutionalization of support mechanisms to maintain and evolve changes and to generate periodic renewal (Argyris, 1993; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Connor & Lake, 1988; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Miles & Louis, 1990; Replication and Program Services, 1993; Sarason, 1996).

Any major innovation begins with a vision of what a desired new approach would look like and an understanding of how to facilitate necessary changes. One without the other is insufficient. Innovators have a triple burden as they attempt to improve student support. The first is to ensure that substantive organizational and programmatic restructuring ideas are on the agenda for consideration. The second is to build consensus for change. Finally, they must pursue effective implementation—including specific strategies for financing, establishing, maintaining, and enhancing productive changes. Sustaining substantive systemic changes requires processes that establish local ownership and ongoing support on the part of policy makers and school staff. Sustainability is a matter of making specific systemic changes and is achieved through solid policy commitments, well-designed infrastructure mechanisms, allocation of adequate resources (e.g., finances, personnel, space, equipment) to operationalize the policy, and restructure of time to ensure ongoing staff involvement.

From the previously mentioned perspective, a different set of lessons learned can be garnered from the experiences reported by Meyers (this issue) and Rubinson (this issue). A most fundamental lesson is the need to create readiness and facilitate transitions. When innovations are introduced, there often is a strong tendency toward setting actions into motion without taking sufficient time to lay the foundation needed for substantive change. In marketing new ideas, it is tempting to accentuate their promising attributes and minimize complications. In negotiating agreements, policy makers at a school site frequently are asked simply for a go ahead rather than for their informed commitment. Sometimes they assent mainly to get extra resources; sometimes they are motivated by a desire to be seen by constituents as doing something to improve the school. This all tends to produce pressures for premature implementation that results in the form rather than the substance of change—especially when administrators are under the gun of political accountability measures that make unrealistic demands for quick and dramatic results in students' achievement test scores. Although formulation of policy and related agreements take con-
siderable time and other resources, their importance cannot be overemphasized. Failure to establish and successfully maintain substantive reforms in schools probably is attributable in great measure to proceeding without clear, high-level, and long-term policy support.

In-depth planning for ongoing capacity building to enhance the functioning of change agents is another primary ingredient. How well innovations and systemic changes are implemented depends to a significant degree on the personnel doing the implementation. All personnel involved in establishing a major innovation must develop in ways that ensure appropriate motivation and capability, and sufficient time must be redeployed so they can learn and carry out new functions effectively. All changes require constant care and feeding. Those who steer the process must be motivated and competent—not just initially but over time. The complexity of systemic change requires close monitoring and immediate follow-up to address problems. In particular, it means providing continuous, personalized guidance and support to enhance knowledge and skills and counter anxiety, frustration, and other stressors. To these ends, (a) adequate resource support must be provided (e.g., time, space, materials, and equipment), (b) opportunities must be available for increasing ability and generating a sense of renewed mission, and (c) personnel turnover must be addressed quickly and in ways that rapidly bring new staff up to speed. Because teams usually are the mechanism of choice for so many school initiatives and systemic changes, particular attention must be paid to increasing levels of competence and enhance motivation of all stakeholders for working together. Our experiences have taught us that stakeholder development needs to be conceived as spanning four stages: orientation, foundation building, capacity building, and continuing education.

**ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT: INNOVATION OR REVOLUTION**

Looking at efforts to innovate student support from the perspective of systemic change processes is necessary but not sufficient. If we are to fully benefit from the experiences shared by Meyers (this issue) and Rubinson (this issue), we need to place them in a big picture context related to student support. From this perspective, the work of these two innovators also illustrates some realities about the status of the various elements that constitute student support.

It is essential that we all appreciate that the enterprise of student support currently is in the throes of significant upheaval, and efforts are afoot
to plant the seeds for revolutionizing how student support is conceived and provided. Although Meyers (this issue) and Rubinson (this issue) focus on the problems related to innovation, others are concerned about addressing a variety of criticisms that have been directed at the field of student support services. Leaders in the field are calling for pupil service professionals to take a proactive stance to advance the state of the art (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, 2001). Certainly, one aspect of this is to pursue innovations. However, as John Maynard Keynes (1936) cogently observed: "The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones" (preface). Those concerned with enhancing student support are at a point at which we desperately need to escape old ideas so that new ideas can take root. In many ways, the failure of the innovations described in the two articles represents another example of just how hard it is to make the escape. The status quo is a powerful enemy of major innovation.

What is the current state of affairs? Historically, at most schools, student support efforts have developed in a piecemeal and reactive manner. Specific problems were identified, and some services and initiatives were introduced. Legislative mandates have introduced required services and often skewed who gets served and how services are provided. Whenever special funding opportunities appear to underwrite some form of student support, many districts and schools scramble to get their share and then reshape their practices to meet the funder’s requirements—until the funding ends. Innovators and researchers bring special projects and some schools buy in, and some new strategies are tried until the project ends, usually within a period of a couple of years. The failure to sustain in such cases has been labeled projectitis. As is widely recognized, the result is a set of student supports that are poorly conceptualized, fragmented, overspecialized, counterproductively competitive, often unsustainable, and marginalized in policy and practice (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Currently, efforts such as those described by Meyers (this issue) and Rubinson (this issue) are directed toward expanding the scope and impact of student supports. They are focusing on more than students who already are manifesting severe, pervasive, and chronic problems. The intent is to support the many as well as the few. Innovators are working to expand the breadth of student supports to encompass early-after-onset interventions, prevention, and a focus on promoting healthy development. The strategies involve more than direct services and consultation about specific students. A major focus is on program and staff development and systemic changes. To accomplish all this, a variety of strategies
emphasize bringing personnel together to collaborate in cooperative, coordinated, and integrated ways.

However, as the articles stress, innovators are encountering trouble. From our perspective, the difficulties described in the two articles are best viewed as symptoms not causes. We view the root of the problem as being the current marginalization of student support in school reform policy and practice.

What do we mean by marginalization? Stated simply, most student support programs, services, and special projects are viewed as supplementary (often referred to as auxiliary services) and operate on an ad hoc basis. The degree to which marginalization is the case is seen in the lack of attention given to such school activity in consolidated plans and certification reviews and the lack of efforts to map, analyze, and rethink how resources are allocated. Educational reformers virtually have ignored the need to reframe and restructure the work of school professionals who carry out psychosocial and health programs. As long as this remains the case, innovations related to student support concerns are seriously hampered. More to the point, the desired impact for large numbers of children and adolescents will not be achieved. Ending the marginalization of student support will not occur through piecemeal innovations. Indeed, piecemeal innovations are unlikely to be implemented and sustained successfully until the problem of marginalization is redressed. From our perspective, it is time to revolutionize student support. Building on what has gone before, we submit the following propositions as lessons learned. First, we suggest that many specific student and schooling problems are best pursued as an integrated part of a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum of interventions designed to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. For another, we submit that comprehensive, multifaceted approaches are only feasible if the resources of schools, families, and communities are woven together. A corollary of this is that the committed involvement of school, family, and community is essential in maximizing intervention implementation and effectiveness. (See Adelman & Taylor, 2000, for a discussion of each of these propositions.)

Revolutionizing student support means revising prevailing school reform policy in ways that incorporate the previously mentioned propositions and that unify the diversity of professionals and programs under an umbrella concept. Such a policy shift is fundamental to ending the marginalization of student support. Revolutionizing student support also means expanding and reorganizing the way schools design and implement such support. This encompasses expanding the scope of what is done into a full continuum of interventions and moving from a laundry list of
strategies to consolidate best practices into a delimited set of content (programmatic) areas. Such a transformation will refocus the use of resources in ways that develop the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive systems that are needed if we are to be effective in addressing the most significant factors interfering with students learning at school. The transformation will also include establishment of new leadership roles and mechanisms to guide the development of student support systems. These new infrastructure elements will be well positioned to evaluate the potential value of proposed new innovations, set priorities for their introduction, and ensure they are implemented and sustained with fidelity.

Implied in all this, of course, are very full research and capacity-building agendas. The point is: Defining future agendas based on lessons learned depends on whether one's lenses are focused on improving contract negotiation, implementing problem solving teams, enhancing consultation processes, pursuing systemic change, and revolutionizing the entire student support enterprise. In any of these cases, it is well to remember Keynes (1936) point—the process begins by escaping old ways of thinking.

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Howard Adelman is Professor of Psychology and Codirector of the School Mental Health Project and its federally supported national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. His research and teaching focuses on addressing barriers to students’ learning (including educational, psychosocial, and mental health problems). In recent years, he has been involved in large-scale systemic reform initiatives to enhance school and community efforts to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development.

Linda Taylor is a Clinical Psychologist and Codirector of the School Mental Health Project and its federally supported national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. Throughout her career, she has been concerned with a wide range of psychosocial and educational problems experienced by children and adolescents through her work as codirector of the Fernald Laboratory School and Clinic at UCLA and Project Director and provider of clinical services in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Her current work involves systemic reform initiatives designed to enhance school and community efforts to address barriers to learning and enhance healthy development.