

TOWARDS A COLLEGIAL APPROACH TO WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

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The perceptions of Irish principal teachers, whole-school evaluation trainers, and union representatives regarding the desirability of a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation were investigated. A sample of 30 teachers revealed widespread support for developing a more collaborative work culture for whole-school improvement endeavours. Practically all stated that they would like an opportunity for sharing one another's classroom practice. In fact, however, the majority (73%) remained in their own classroom to teach and experienced collaborative planning in an ad hoc fashion; teamwork was not a regular feature for most teachers. All principals welcomed and supported the concept of whole-school evaluation and team-based management. However, they resisted a formal role in implementing the process. A significant number of teachers had not been involved with their principal in an annual systematic review of curriculum delivery (58%), school leadership (85%), communication (77%), forward planning (69%), or staff development (62%). In 73% of the schools surveyed there was no written policy on staff development.

It is generally accepted that there are two main purposes for evaluation of performance: accountability and development. Rogers and Badham (1992) distinguish between the two by explaining that the purpose of accountability is to prove quality whereas development is to improve quality. The Irish government appears to be promoting a model of evaluation that satisfies both of these purposes. In its White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995), the provision of effective accountability procedures and the promotion of the highest standard of education are stated as key principles. It is an unfortunate inevitability that whole-school evaluation must necessarily satisfy accountability purposes. Our primary schools are accountable institutions and our primary teachers are accountable on three levels. They are accountable on a moral level to the children they teach, on a professional level to their colleagues, and on a contractual level to the board of management of the school in which they work and to the Department of Education and Science. Furthermore, it is envisaged by the Department of Education and Science and the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) that a process of whole-school evaluation will achieve a culture of continuous improvement. Other sources, such as the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1991) report on Irish education, the Green Paper on Education, *Education for a Changing World* (1992), the Report of the National Education Convention (1994), international research, and growing public interest are calling on schools to critically analyse and improve their programmes. Whole-school evaluation is not compulsory in Irish schools, but if schools are expected to become more effective, then they should be encouraged to continually engage in self-analysis.

A school's capacity for collaborative enquiry and reflection can only be manifested in an organizational culture which can cope with and respond to change. Reid, Hopkins, and Holly (1987) define school climate or culture as the shared values, beliefs, and priorities of a school, which are expressed by the way individuals in the school interact, how they behave towards each other, and their expectations of one another. School culture has been identified as a primary determinant of level of organizational effectiveness (Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth, & West, 1994; Jones, 1987). The values, beliefs, and priorities of a school will reflect its internal capacity to manage and sustain change (O'Neill, 1994). School improvement is possible only when the climate is collegial and the approach collaborative. This requires teamwork and a collaborative problem-solving approach to organizational development which will work well when participants perceive themselves as owners of the programme and its outcomes (West-Burnham, 1994). However, Caldwell and Spinks (1992) argue that collaborative muscle alone may not be sufficient; devolving power to schools should be matched by the empowerment of people inside schools. It would appear that an empowering attitude unlocks the creativity of employees, thus enhancing the job satisfaction of all involved. A further condition required for the successful implementation of whole-school self-evaluation is a participative style of leadership by the principal, who seeks the expertise of staff in making decisions for curriculum and organizational planning.

Hughes (1983) clarifies the complex interplay of management and leadership responsibilities of the principal teacher by proposing a dual model. He acknowledges that an administrator of a professionally staffed organization can also be its leading professional and emphasizes the interdependent relationship of both sub-roles. The principal's role necessarily involves administrative responsibilities but recent developments in clarifying role definition have clearly charged the principal with the responsibility for identifying goals, developing curricular initiatives, co-ordinating and implementing an internal whole-school evaluation programme, creating school policies, and allowing decisions to be reached in a participative manner. The leadership role of the principal is the most neglected aspect of the work of Irish principals (National Education Convention, 1994). It would appear that the dual model of leadership

places an intolerable burden on principals that is well beyond the capacity of any one individual to carry. At any rate, Irish principal teachers do not appear to be happy with their role of leadership (Connolly, 1987; Herron, 1992; McHugh, 1991), a fact that may have implications for the introduction of a whole-school evaluation process.

Quality of leadership is critical to the innovative process of whole-school evaluation and depends heavily on the leader's ability to win the goodwill of staff. In this situation, the principal needs to have regard for the concept of empowering staff and team-based management. Thus, the leadership function is broadened to include staff, who can be regarded as having managerial as well as academic responsibilities (INTO, 1994; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, & Ecob, 1988; Smith, 1990; Southworth, 1993). While without the support of the principal teacher, the whole-school evaluation enterprise is likely to fail, school leadership also needs to recognize that the process is organic, participative, and developmental in nature.

The introduction of a systematic whole-school evaluation programme is a significant innovation for most Irish primary schools. The problems involved in developing self-examination, whole-school reflection, innovation, and creative thinking should not be underestimated. Thorough preparation, vision, and unconditional perseverance will be required if the innovation is to become part of the school's normal organizational culture. Since innovation can be perceived as threatening, the introduction of new routines and practices can be met with strong resistance. Whole-school evaluation is a subjective activity and, as such, evokes feelings of anxiety and uncertainty as routine beliefs, values, and behaviours are exposed and examined. Undoubtedly, the management of such change is a crucial issue.

American researchers claim that innovations frequently fail to take effect because teachers are opposed to the way the changes are introduced. Management needs to have the capability and skills to foster the school's readiness for development, implement the innovation, support a cyclical structured approach, guarantee inservice support, and sustain the innovation. It would appear that the management of change is as important as the change itself (Ainscow et al, 1994; National Education Convention, 1994).

In the study reported in this paper, Irish primary school teachers were asked about the desirability of a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation. Three issues – a collaborative culture, the leadership style of the principal, and the management of change and development – were selected for special attention because they are recurring themes in the literature as well as providing a theoretical framework for examining whole-school evaluation (Ainscow et al,

1994; Reid et al, 1987; West-Burnham, 1994). The study canvassed the views of teachers, principal teachers, and Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) trainers.

METHOD

The perceptions of Irish primary school teachers regarding the desirability of a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation was investigated. The views of teachers, principal teachers and WSE trainers were obtained. Questionnaires and interviews were used to obtain data.

Teacher Questionnaire

The purpose of the teacher questionnaire was to obtain information on primary teachers' experience and their desire to have a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation. Subsidiary issues relating to the central aim were school climate, collegial evaluation, staff development, enquiry and reflection, review of curriculum and non-curriculum areas, staff involvement, leadership, and usefulness of the review instrument as developed by the investigators.

The questionnaire comprised three sections:

- (i) State of readiness for whole-school evaluation. Questions covered climate in school, description of workplace, opportunity for sharing one another's classroom practice, willingness to observe another teacher and offer feedback if a colleague so requested, staff as a team, and staff development policy.
- (ii) Enquiry and reflection. Information was sought on the value of the *Tuaraisc Scoile* as it related to guiding school planning, developing collaborative work cultures, and leadership styles. For example, participants were asked whether they had been involved with their principal and staff in an annual systematic review of curriculum delivery, pupil achievement, use of finance/resources, communication system, school ethos, staff development, planning, school leadership, and school organization.
- (iii) Review instrument which covered key components identified in the research literature as important for whole-school improvement: school leadership, school climate, effective communication system, enquiry and reflection, involvement in planning, staff development, organization/environment/ resources, and curriculum.

A series of related statements was included in each section and participants were asked to rate their opinion on a 4-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' A facility was provided whereby participants could mark an aspect 'Priority for Review.' The questionnaire was accompanied by a supplementary letter aimed at clarifying technical terms associated with the study, for example 'collegial,' 'evaluation' and 'whole-school evaluation.'

A pilot study was carried out which involved three individuals from the target population who were not included in the sample. Following the pilot study, minor amendments were made relating to clarity of instruction, initial rating scales, and the wording of statements.

The Interview

An interview was used to obtain the views of two groups: trainers in whole-school evaluation and a group of four principals. Purposive sampling was chosen as the medium for selecting subjects from both groups. One group comprised eight trainers who came from six counties. Of the eight trainers, six were principals and two were assistant teachers. The group of four principals was selected from the Letterkenny INTO branch register. All interviews were structured and the content of questions was organized in advance. The interview questions for both groups were complementary. For example, both groups were asked if they agreed that Irish primary schools needed to become self-evaluating in order to retain both public esteem and the capacity to change. Trainers were asked if they felt competent to facilitate a group of teachers in the process of whole-school evaluation. Principals were asked for their responses to increased staff participation in school planning, team-based management, and what they considered their role to be in the innovation. All the interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analysed.

Respondents

The survey population was drawn from the teaching community of the Letterkenny INTO branch in Donegal. Teachers were selected by identifying every fourth individual from the computer printout of the branch's register for 1994-1995. The total sample size was 30 out of a total population of 107. Seven of the teachers were male; 23 were female. Four were principals; 26 were assistants. Eleven taught in schools which had between 4 and 10 teachers; five taught in schools with 11 to 20 teachers; and 14 taught in schools with 21 or more teachers. WSE trainers consist of a group of 18 teachers who received training by the Department of Education in facilitating primary schools in whole-school evaluation activity. Eight were included in the study.

RESULTS

Teacher Questionnaire

The majority of teachers perceived their school climate as 'motivated' (Table 1) but said that collaborative planning and exchange of classes did not occur frequently (Table 2). Most teachers expressed a willingness to observe peers and offer feedback if a colleague so requested (Table 3). Staff teamwork was experienced by all respondents but not at the same level of frequency (Table 4).

Less than half of the teachers had been involved with their principal in a systematic review of curriculum delivery, school ethos, communication system, staff development, planning, school leadership, and school organization (Table 5).

TABLE 1

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS IDENTIFYING VARYING DEGREES OF MOTIVATION IN THEIR SCHOOL CLIMATE

Climate Classification	No of Teachers
Coping	8
Motivated	14
Highly Motivated	4

TABLE 2

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS IDENTIFYING VARYING DEGREES OF COLLABORATION WITH OTHER TEACHERS

Workplaces	No of Teachers
Planning and teaching alone	6
Planning with colleagues but remaining in their own classroom	13
Planning together and exchanging classes when appropriate	7

TABLE 3

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS EXPRESSING WILLINGNESS TO OBSERVE PEERS AND OFFER FEEDBACK IF A COLLEAGUE SO REQUESTED

	No of Teachers
Very willing	6
Willing	16
Unwilling	4

TABLE 4

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS IDENTIFYING VARYING DEGREES OF FREQUENCY IN THE OPERATION OF SCHOOL STAFF AS A TEAM

Frequency	No of Teachers
Always	3
Often	9
Sometimes	14
Never	0

TABLE 5

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS INVOLVED WITH PRINCIPAL IN VARYING ASPECTS OF INTERNAL SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Whole-School Areas	No of Teachers
Curriculum delivery	11
Pupil achievement	15
Use of finance/resources	14
School ethos	12
Communication system	6
Staff development	10
Planning	8
School leadership	4
School organization	9

All but one teacher said they would like an opportunity for sharing one another's classroom practice. With regard to a staff-development policy, 19 teachers said they had none. Twenty-five teachers responded positively to the idea of increased participation of all staff in reviewing the school for improvement. The concept of a collaborative work culture raised the important issue of leadership styles. Thirteen teachers categorized the style of leadership in their school as 'hierarchical'. An equal number indicated a participative style.

Interviews with School Principals

All four principals strongly agreed that a need existed, in the current climate, to review progress of school policies, practices, and performance. They strongly agreed, also, that whole-school evaluation should be a regular feature in primary schools. Each said that evaluation was already practised in their school, albeit in an unstructured and ad hoc manner. Each principal expressed strong reservations about being involved in classroom observation. Three principals considered that they lacked the qualification and expertise to fulfil that role

effectively. One principal rejected the role saying that it would upset the teacher-principal relationship. All four principals strongly favoured a collaborative work culture, increased staff participation, and team-based management. However, they said that they would be reluctant to commit their energies to a structured evaluation programme until they received more information on the concept, process, and approach.

Interviews with Whole-School Evaluation Trainers

All eight Whole-School Evaluation Trainers asserted that the primary purpose for engaging in whole-school evaluation activity was school development. Six stated that whole-school evaluation activity must also serve accountability purposes. Each supported a collegial approach to the innovation but believed that schools would need external support in the form of a facilitator or a team of specialists. Trainers identified the following anticipated constraints in the successful adoption of a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation: split staff; perceived lack of benefit; a perception by some teachers that it was laborious or a reproach; resentment of the extra paper work involved; insufficient preparation time; lack of energy, effort, commitment, and resources; internal staff conflict; perceived threat if poorly presented; the fact that a united staff may 'cover up' for any overall weaknesses that might exist.

All eight trainers assessed their training as adequate in preparing them to facilitate an introductory session on whole-school evaluation. Five stated that they would feel less competent to facilitate a five-week course (one night/week) believing that they would require the support of a pairing system or a longer period of training.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of teachers work in an organizational setting capable of supporting a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation. A significant number of respondents described the climate in their school as 'motivated', which might be taken as evidence of an internal capacity of a school to change.

While relationships in schools were predominantly co-operative, the majority of respondents remained in their own classrooms to teach. Almost half of the teachers strongly agreed that developing a collaborative work culture should be a key element in bringing about whole-school improvement. Even teachers who worked in schools where there was little sense of common purpose agreed that a collaborative approach is the way forward. Furthermore, the majority of teachers stated that they would welcome the opportunity to share one another's classroom practice. Most teachers expressed a willingness to observe

another teacher and offer feedback if a colleague so requested. It appears that teachers value formative colleague observation as a powerful means of reviewing their work and developing teaching strategies. Findings of research also indicate that a collaborative culture enhances an organization's effectiveness (Bell, 1992; Smith, 1990; Woods & Orlik, 1994). The evidence clearly shows that teachers in the Letterkenny area are not opposed to the concept of a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation. On the contrary, they would welcome a more collaborative culture and share little desire to perpetuate the prevailing culture of isolation and individualism.

The findings of the present study also confirm that staff development is a very neglected dimension in primary schools, a finding supported by the INTO (1994) and the National Education Convention (1994). Teamwork was not a regular feature for over half of the teachers in the study, and the majority stated that they did not have a written policy for staff development in their schools. If teamwork and staff development are fundamental conditions for increasing a school's capacity to evaluate its performance (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; Humphreys, 1993), then we could expect staff development to be inextricably linked to school development.

One must question whether management style prevents the growth of a collaborative work culture. The findings of the present study would seem to indicate that principals are not threatened by the collective strength of their staffs. On the contrary, they are strongly in favour of a collaborative work culture. All principals welcomed and supported an increased form of staff participation in relation to whole-school issues. There was unanimous agreement that whole-school evaluation required a high level of personal interaction between principal and teacher. Principals, however, resisted the adoption of a formal role in the evaluation process since it might jeopardise the relationship of trust and support required for securing staff participation. That said, only half of the teachers surveyed stated that they experienced a participative style of leadership in their schools. An equal proportion of teachers categorized school leadership as hierarchical, a finding that would appear to correspond to findings in other studies (Connolly, 1987; McHugh, 1991; Southworth, 1993). We would expect schools that experience a hierarchical style of leadership to have greater difficulty in a collegial approach to whole-school evaluation. Indeed, a hierarchical style of leadership would appear to be incompatible with a collaborative work culture since it reduces the effective co-operation of staff. Successful whole-school evaluation depends on the goodwill of staff; without which there would seem to be little hope of ever developing a culture capable of integrating innovation into established school routines.

A more crucial concern is the issue of existing school structures. Current organizational structures appear to be the main factor inhibiting meaningful collaboration and preventing school development in respondents' schools. The evidence suggests that there are a significant number of teachers who have not been involved with their principal in a systematic review of curriculum delivery, school leadership, communication, planning, and staff development. Schools can have little sense of where they are going without engaging in a collaborative approach to planning and development.

On the basis of these findings it is suggested that the Department of Education and Science prepare a 'Five Year Strategic Plan' which would gradually phase schools into the complex process of evaluation and planning for development. The plan should consist of a 'Readiness Programme' that would help schools prepare the conditions for whole-school evaluation, and harness their capacity as organizations to be reasonably autonomous in their drive for improved programmes. A readiness programme should provide training and improvement strategies for both principals and staff in the following key areas: accountability, staff development, collaborative work cultures, planning, school leadership, reflection and enquiry, school organization, curriculum delivery, communication, and school ethos. Failure to address these fundamental areas will effectively reduce a school's capacity to review and enquire, identify priorities, formulate a vision, devise, implement and evaluate action plans, participate in peer observation, draw out implications, and plan for change. Such an initiative would have to be supported financially by boards of management if the evaluation initiative is to sustain credibility.

It is also recommended that teams of 'experts' be established that would work with schools in their development of whole-school evaluation. Support teams have already been established to facilitate major educational initiatives, particularly in secondary school curriculum development. The concept is not as advanced in the delivery of primary education programmes although Education Centres have been involved in the co-ordination of the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme at this level. Facilitators in whole-school evaluation could lead teams of 'experts' in each Education Centre network.

If the Department of Education and Science can translate its commitment by allocating funds, time, training, and continuing support, schools will then need to consider some significant issues. New infrastructures to encourage active collaboration and systematic evaluation for whole-school improvement will be required. The notion of leadership will have to be reinterpreted to include sharing the leadership function among all members of staff. This implies that principals will need to create a culture of participation which may mean that some principals will have to change the way they lead. It also implies that the

staff must be willing to take more responsibility for managerial tasks that may be delegated to them – all the more reason for training principal and staff together in leadership approaches and functions. Schools will also be expected to establish policies and planning for school development. The policy should be school-focused while simultaneously addressing the needs of the staff as a team and as individual professional learners. The plan should contain the school's priorities for development, outline action plans, and state when targets are expected to be achieved.

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