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The Cycles of School Change: Toward an Integrated Developmental Model

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ABSTRACT: The extent to which schools adapt to their specific community contexts has been of interest to educators for some time. Researchers now recognize that "educational leadership is a socially bounded process ... subject to the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised" (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 1). An understanding of the impact of this intersection of leadership and culture on educational change and reform processes has remained problematic. This paper presents an eight stage integrated model of school change, a model which suggests that the achievement of educational reforms is a two-cycle process. Drawing upon earlier models proposed by Hallinger and Leithwood (1996), Wilber (2000), and Dimmock and Walker (2002), we argue that many educational reforms will fail because schools rarely move from the four stages of cycle one to those of cycle two.

RÉSUMÉ: Depuis quelque temps, les enseignants s'intéressent à la mesure dans laquelle les écoles s'adaptent à leurs contextes communautaires spécifiques. Aujourd'hui, les chercheurs reconnaissent que "la tendance de l'enseignement est un processus socialement limité ... soumis aux traditions culturelles et aux valeurs de la société dans laquelle il est exercé" (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 1). La perception des conséquences causées par la rencontre "Orientation et Culture sur le changement dans l'enseignement et sur les processus de réforme" est restée problématique. Ce papier présente un modèle intégré en huit étapes du changement scolaire, un modèle qui sous-entend que la réussite des réformes dans l'enseignement est un processus à deux cycles. A l'appui des modèles proposés précédemment par Hallinger et Leithwood (1996), Wilber (2000), et Dimmock et Walker (2002), nous soutenons que de nombreuses réformes dans l'enseignement seront vouées à l'échec parce que les écoles ne passent pas souvent le pas du processus des quatre étapes d'un cycle à celles du deuxième cycle.

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In this paper we present an integrated model of school change. The article seeks to address the question of how, and to what extent, do schools adapt to their specific community contexts? Through our individual and collective work we came to believe that the theoretical models available were inadequate for this task. Dimmock and Walker's (2002) cross-cultural school-focused model is one often used by researchers who are exploring the intersects of leadership and culture in the process of school change. In three respects this model did not appear to offer a desired level of comprehensiveness. First, it presented a bounded school culture that could be distinguished from that of the community and wider society. In our experience, these boundaries are porous and the school culture cannot be considered as an isolated construct. Second, it did not allow for differentiation between the community culture and the national/societal culture, thus marginalizing communities of diversity and difference. We consider it inappropriate to assume that a hegemonic societal culture is replicated in all communities. And third, it relied upon a structural analysis that did not account for individual and social development in an integrated way. We believe that schools are socially constructed and that human interactions are more robust drivers of educational change than are organizational structures.

To compensate for these weaknesses in the model we have developed a model that synthesizes the cross-cultural school-focused conceptualization presented by Dimmock and Walker (2002) with two other models. To address the first and second weaknesses we utilized Goddard's (2001) adaptation of the Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) preliminary model of leadership and culture. To address the third weakness we adapted Wilber's (2000) model of interior and exterior development at the individual and collective levels. In this article the composite model is presented and discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Expanding the Definition of Culture

Within the field of educational administration, the role played by culture in the formulation and exercise of educational leadership has been gaining recognition over the past decade. Dimmock and Walker (2002) noted that "theory and policy in educational administration and leadership are more strongly contextually bound than many researchers and policy-makers in the Anglo-American world are prepared to

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acknowledge" (p. 2). These authors and others (e.g., Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Heck, 1997) have observed that culture refers to more than the idiosyncratic climate of the school but rather includes the broader societal culture within which the school is located and functions. Acknowledging this broader definition of culture, Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) developed a preliminary model of leadership and culture that recognized the effect of the majority or dominant societal culture on leadership processes within the institutional structure and culture of the school. However, as Goddard (2001) argued, this model assumed that the culture of the school was representative of the societal culture and that the norms and expectations for education, as held by various constituent groups, were similar. To date, few researchers have explored the implications of the model in situations where the local cultural milieu is different from that of the dominant society. Such situations clearly exist in urban inner-city schools serving predominantly immigrant, aboriginal, and other minority communities.

Issues of Minority Communities and School Administration

The majority of Canadian teachers and school administrators are still white middle class Anglophones (Lockhart, 1991) who come from outside the inner city area. The organization and delivery of education in the inner city involves issues of school organization, leadership, teaching, and culture that are substantively different from those encountered in the suburban milieu with which these educators are more personally familiar (Gibb, 2000; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Nieto, 2003). For example, Canadian studies have found that the proportion of visible minority people in a neighbourhood has a strong direct correlation with neighbourhood poverty levels. Even when controlling for socioeconomic factors, Kohm (2002) found that behaviour problem scores increased when children lived in less affluent neighbourhoods that had high unemployment rates and low levels of social cohesion. Higher incidences of behaviour problems in schools are, in turn, strong indicators of low levels of academic success (Green, Campbell, Stirtzinger, DeSouza, & Dawe, 2001). It appears, then, that high numbers of visible minority students can be an indicator of poverty in the neighbourhood served by the school. These studies support the received wisdom of educators that high levels of poverty lead to behaviour problems that, in turn, result in low academic achievement.

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We would treat such suggestions with some caution. Although we recognize the apparent correlations referred to above, we do not believe that a clear cause-effect relationship has been established. Many new immigrant families, although poor, make significant sacrifices in order to facilitate academic success for their children. It appears to us that a lack of overt parental involvement in schools ought not be considered *prima facie* evidence of disinterest in education. Administrators and teachers must recognize that many different realities affect the perceptions and expectations brought to bear on the school's institutional culture and structure, and on educators' interactions within that structure and culture.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) observed that "most published theory and empirical research in [educational] administration assumes that leadership is being exercised in a Western cultural context" (p. 100), a point reiterated by Dimmock and Walker (2002, 2005). Attempts to understand the relationship between societal culture and principal leadership are a relatively new area of research with a small database of empirical studies. We have identified research conducted in the United Kingdom (Male, 1998), Mexico (Paradise, 1994), Singapore (Stott & Tin, 1998), the Marshall Islands (Heck, 1996), and Malaysia (Berrell & Gloet, 1999). The only similar work being conducted in Canada is a study situated in northern schools (Goddard & Foster, 2002; Goddard, Foster & Finell, 2004). There is a growing body of literature addressing urban inner city education within the United States context. In Canada, Maynes and Foster (1998) catalogued urban poverty educational programs across the country and others (e.g., Smith, 1999; St. Jacques, 1999; Wilms, 2002) have investigated the effects of poverty on different student populations. There appears to be little or no research that explicitly addresses issues of leadership in ethnoculturally diverse urban settings in Canada. We believe that the composite model presented here will provide researchers and practitioners alike with the means to examine individual schools and gain an increased understanding of the ways in which interaction of minority cultures, external context of the school, and the style of leadership in the school contribute to perceptions of school effectiveness.

Integrating Individual and Collective Action in Various School Contexts

The above discussion clearly indicates that the nature of the interactions between external school contexts, minority cultures, and the leadership

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styles of principals in schools, is dynamic and multi-faceted. The models which we examined and discussed above tend to give snapshots – still photographs of the issues studied, at each moment they were visited and revisited. Extrapolations or tendencies are identified by looking and mapping backwards.

Human situations, however, are never static, but develop daily at the confluence of moment-to-moment interactions between individuals and their contexts. Individual motivations, while exerting fundamental influence on the collective culture of a school, tend to escape detection by researchers mapping cultural developments of the collective. The interactions happen within as well as between individuals, and they occur amid varying organizational and cultural roles and levels of contexts. Bolman and Deal (1995, 1997) have made significant contributions to the exploration of individual influence on, and multifacetedness of, school culture. In this paper we suggest that a more robust understanding of how school reform initiatives impact on, and are impacted by, larger social forces within the community is required.

Developing an Integrated Model of School Change

The model presented here is an attempt to further the work of others in the field. Like Dimmock and Walker (2002), we believe that the contextual boundedness of many Anglo-American researchers needs to be challenged. Our own work has provided us with understandings of educational leadership in a number of ethnoculturally different milieux, including eastern Europe, northern Canada, and the west Pacific. In developing the model we drew specifically upon the work of Bohac Clarke (2002), Goddard (2001), Hallinger and Leithwood (1996), Suddards (2004), Dimmock and Walker (2002), and Wilber (2000).

Dimmock and Walker's (2002) cross-cultural school-focused model consists of four elements located within a series of four concentric circles (p. 18). The four elements are organizational structures, leadership and management, curriculum, and teaching and learning. These four elements are located initially within the school, which in turn is surrounded by the organizational culture. The school boundary separates these two inner rings from the two outer circles, which are the regional-local culture and the national/societal culture respectively. In Hallinger and Leithwood's (1996) model principal beliefs and experiences, principal leadership, in-school processes, and school outcomes are shown to interact not only within the institutional

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structure and climate of the school but also within the wider societal culture (p. 106). In his extension of that model, Goddard (2001) sought to differentiate between the idiosyncratic societal culture of the community and the majority societal culture of the country at large. He argued that these could be separated into two dimensions, the lived and the learned, each of which impacts differently on the various stakeholder groups within the school (Goddard, Foster & Finell, 2004). Wilber (2000) developed an integrated four-quadrant model of human development that described the intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social dimensions of individual and collective human behaviour and was shown to be helpful in analyzing issues in the world of education, including a temporal and dynamic component (Bohac Clarke, 2002; Suddards, 2004). In this integrated model of school change the various elements are shown to follow a four-stage cycle (see Figure 1).

Using Wilber's notion of the four quadrants, and the assumption that individuals first care about themselves, in the Maslowian sense, before reaching out to their immediate community and beyond, we envision life in schools in terms of developmental cycles. Since students, parents, and at least some teachers *cycle* through schools, and since September is a symbolic marker, we are assuming that there is always a "stage one."

In stage one, *individual mobilization*, students and teachers develop their personal views of the school and their own place in it. Cummins (2001) observes that "teachers define their own identities through their practice and their interventions with students" (p. 653). As they develop these interpersonal relationships, students and teachers begin to challenge their taken-for-granted beliefs (Nieto, 2003) about each other and about themselves. Teacher responses to this growing awareness can include higher expectations of student success and the development of more variety in both the content of the curriculum and in the assessment models utilized by the teacher. The development of culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum (Adbal-Haqq, 1994; Goddard, 2002) can lead to student self-actualization and to recognition of racism, bias, and other stereotypical behaviours. Among minority children it can also lead to a conscious reaction against what are perceived as characteristic behaviours of the dominant or majority class. Ogbu (1987) described this as cultural inversion, which is represented in the "oppositional nature of [the] cultural frame of reference and identity" (p. 330).

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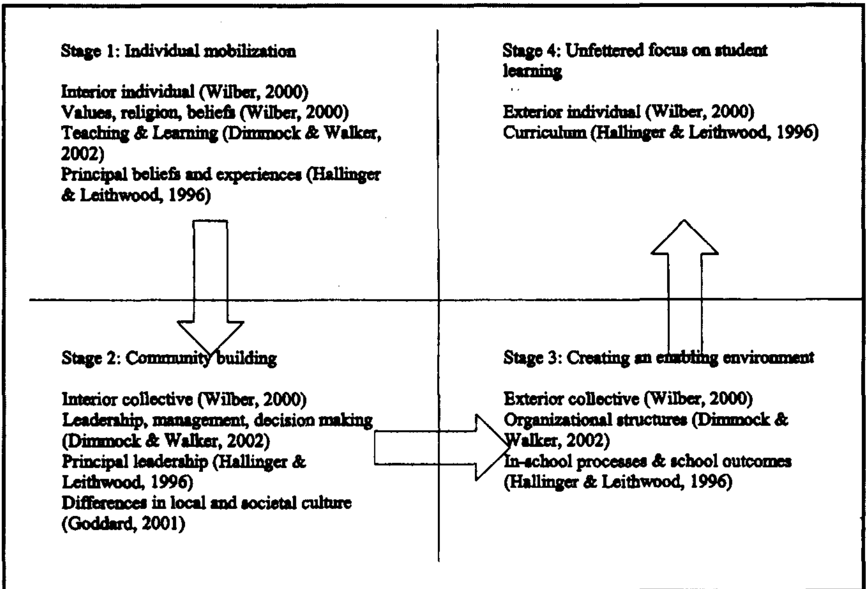

Figure 1. An integrated model of school change – cycle one.

In stage two, *community building*, the school culture evolves beyond the basic individual security issues to enhance community perceptions of school performance and include the meaningful participation of parents (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). Here principals are catalysts, willing to take a moral stand on their beliefs and bringing teachers together in collaborative approaches to student learning. Through such strategies as the development of teacher study groups (Kohm, 2002; Lick, 2000), staff and students adopt the school culture in a deep personal way and, indeed, "take responsibility for making sure the [school] culture survives" (Callicoatte Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002, p. 41). Here the differential effects of race, ethnicity, low income, gender (Ryan, 1998; Thomas, Sammons, Mortimore, & Smees, 1997) are recognized and accounted for in the school. As the school begins to better establish itself as a community, and as an integral part of the community it serves, so "the importance of taking into account background factors and prior attainment using appropriate value added models in order to estimate the influence of the school is clear" (Thomas et al., 1997, p. 467). As

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Bingler (2000) suggests, the school becomes the center of a healthy community.

In stage three, *creating an enabling environment*, the school begins to focus on outcomes such as provincial assessments and school rankings, and on external perceptions of these measures. Schools are being judged, in part, on their ability to improve achievement among all groups of students (Haycock & Jerald, 2002). The test results are used to support the development of policy and procedures (Lindsay, Halfacre & Welch, 2001), resulting in evidence-driven or evidence-supported decision-making. When they base their decisions on data instead of on preconceptions, teachers begin to move beyond viewing student abilities through the lens of a deficit model. As Cummins (2001) argued,

> When we choose to frame the discourse about underachievement primarily in terms of children's deficits in some area of physiological or linguistic functioning, we expel culture, language, identity, intellect, and imagination from our image of the child, and we eliminate these constructs from our image of the effective teacher of that child. (p. 654)

This is not to discount the effect of individual learning disabilities entirely. However, there are many deficits which are grounded in social or cultural realities rather than in individual psycholinguistic capacities. Through their individual growth during the first two stages, teachers recognize that performance on standardized tests is only one part of the story of student development, and the school ensures that a holistic picture of the child is (re)presented to the external community.

In stage four the school evolves *an unfettered focus on student learning*. The school and parents are aware of students' needs and agree to pursue vigorously all resources available externally. In order to be able to exert this extra energy for entrepreneurial external focus, the school must have its "house in order" and budgetary goals must be clear and shared. Here there is on-demand psychological and ability testing, and individual needs are met through the development and delivery of individual program plans (IPP). Resources are directed to ensure the success of the IPPs, and schools actively intervene in students' lives. Knowing that children who live in poverty are often under-nourished, programs are established to provide breakfast programs for the children (V. Hanham and S. Kelley, Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. Personal communication, June, 2003). Student and parent support groups are established, acting as advocates for the school (Foss & Buckner, 2000), and parental involvement and awareness of the school programs are

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increased. In ethnoculturally diverse communities, student buddies are assigned to guide foreign-born students through the cultural maze of the educational bureaucracy (Menken & Look, 2000). Schedules are constructed that do not further marginalize those children who have limited English proficiency, but rather provide support and resources to permit effective teaching and successful learning to take place (Goddard & Foster, 2002).

Educational change is not a static process, where a school might achieve a certain level of effectiveness and then become organizationally complacent. Rather, development occurs in a spiral progression. Elements of educational reform are revisited at different times during the reform process, but at the time of each interaction the context of the change has evolved. Thus, participants in educational reform are constantly revising and renewing the strategies used to maintain the perpetual motion of educational reform. The synthesis that occurred through the combination of the models permitted a clarification of relationships between the various elements. Further, we were able to develop a big-picture or holistic picture of the life of the school, and come to accept multiple understandings of school effectiveness.

The activities outlined in Figure 1 suggest that institutional change occurs in a cycle, with the school moving through the four quadrants in sequence. We would suggest that schools move though at least two cycles of development, and that each cycle takes approximately two years to complete. There is a fit here, then, with the common practice of principal rotation happening at five year (or two-cycle) intervals. Such rotations are predicated on the professional craft knowledge that continued school growth requires regular injections of new leadership. In an earlier life, the first author was told by many colleagues that in their first year new principals should do nothing but observe, make changes in the second, consolidate those changes in the third year, bask in one's success in the fourth, and in the fifth year start looking for another position as boredom would set in. In this article we provide a theoretical construct which explains and supports this practice and folklore. Lest we leave the impression that we expect school developmental cycles to be completely predictable and orderly, we should again emphasize the dynamic nature of human interactions, within their own and with other *holonic levels*. For example, a district policy may completely disrupt a school context and culture, in which case a survival mentality can propel a school community to rise swiftly through

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developmental stages that might normally take a full two year cycle to complete (Crawford & Bohac Clarke, 2006).

We would suggest that allowing schools to continue to evolve permits them to move from Cycle one to Cycle two. Here the school has a bigger goal, that of effecting societal change (see Figure 2).

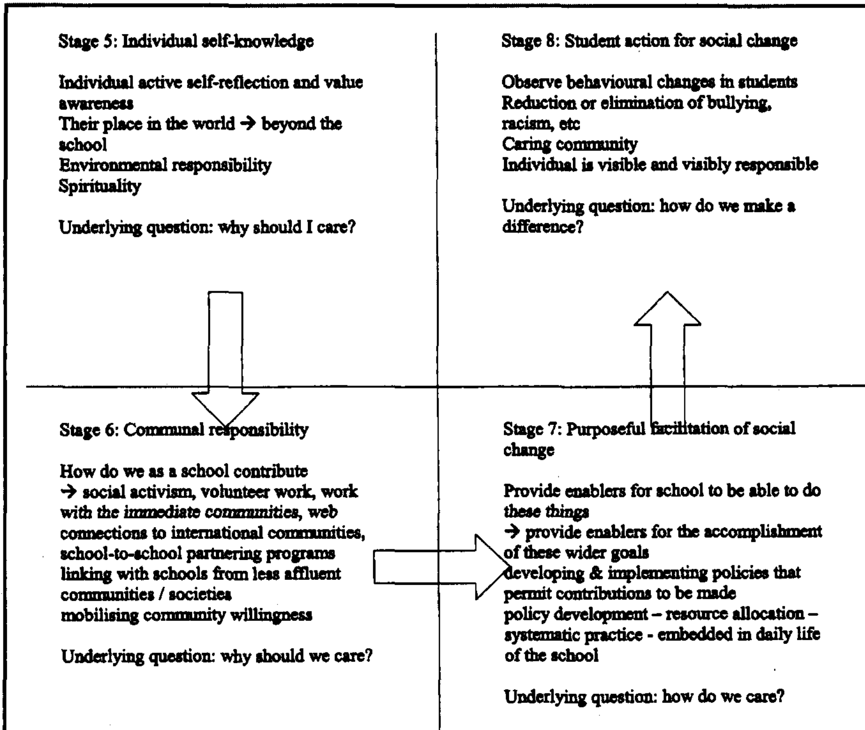

Figure 2. An integrated model of school change – cycle two.

Cycle two also consists of four stages, through which the school progresses in sequence. In the first of these, which is stage five on the overall model, the individual engages in active self-reflection and value awareness. Through such *individual self-knowledge*, students are encouraged to consider their place in the world at large, beyond that of the confines of their school or community.

In stage six, the focus of knowledge moves from the individual to one of *community responsibility*. Here the students are encouraged and

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assisted to develop an activist agenda, one that permits them to engage not only with their immediate communities but also with those from the wider national and international context.

In stage seven, the work of social change becomes embedded in the daily life of the school. Not only the work of a few dedicated teachers and students, the accomplishment of wider societal goals is now perceived to be a *raison d' etre* of the school itself. Such *purposeful facilitation of social change* becomes part of the philosophical underpinnings of the school organization, with resources and staffing being directed towards this goal.

In the final stage, the organizational focus of stage seven becomes part of the individual focus of each student. This results in *student action for social change*, with teachers stepping back to permit students to enact individual responses to issues of social justice and equity. Each individual is both visible and visibly responsible to the development of a caring community.

This idea that schools must move from one cycle to a second might help us to understand the failure of many recent educational reform initiatives. As Levin (2001) observed, many reforms "are not primarily aimed at teaching and learning, but focus instead on school organization, governance, finance, curriculum, and assessment" (p. 27). This suggests to us that the school is attempting to achieve a purposeful facilitation of change (stage seven) without first attending to the needs of the individuals. In other words, the school is attempting to engage in cycle two change without first achieving cycle one completion (see Figure 3). The administrators, staff, students, and parent members of the school community are therefore unprepared for the challenges inherent in taking a social transformative stance. It would appear that, to get to cycle two, schools need to have strength and willingness to address politically sensitive issues. If they have not first developed an understanding of their role as a place for student learning (stage four), then they are unable to move through self-knowledge to community responsibility and individual action (stage eight). The development of critical citizens capable of facilitating social development is thus an explicit goal of schools and of the educational reform process.

One of the reasons for the failure to make this transition is the received folk-wisdom that education should not be political and that educators should not take a stand. This perception holds even though we know that schooling is in essence a moral enterprise. We would argue that when cycle one has been completed, and the basic needs of the

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school have been met, then there will develop a willingness and desire to tackle politically sensitive issues. However, it is difficult to move to stage two due to the high levels of transience among teachers and administrators, who as a result are always dealing with stage one issues.

Ultimately teachers burn out working with stage one people all the time, so in terms of what they do for the community they are fated never to get to stage two themselves. Those who do not burn out, or who get a chance to become leaders before they burn out, tend to expand their perspective to stage two. At this point there exists a professional vision which, unfortunately, is often only realized after a transfer to another school. It would appear that schools need to have a critical mass of people who think beyond themselves, and that the development of such a cohort will require determined planning on the part of school and system level administrators.

This integrated model might help us to explain why teacher happiness with school reforms did not necessarily lead to improved school outcomes, although these might happen over time. If we accept the notion of a school life-cycle with eight stages, each assuming different levels of importance at different places in the school life cycle, then we can better interrogate our understanding of the perceptions of school effectiveness. School effectiveness, when seen from each of the quadrants in the two stages, can present entirely different and often conflicting perceptions of the same school.

We would therefore disagree with those school reform researchers of the earlier 1990s who dismissed school improvement efforts that increased school morale but did not appear to have an immediate impact on student achievement. An understanding of school life cycles would lead us to accept that, in a struggling school, increasing morale may initially be more important than raising student achievement scores. Similarly, a school cannot simply move towards social transformation without first grounding itself in the academic imperative of student learning success.

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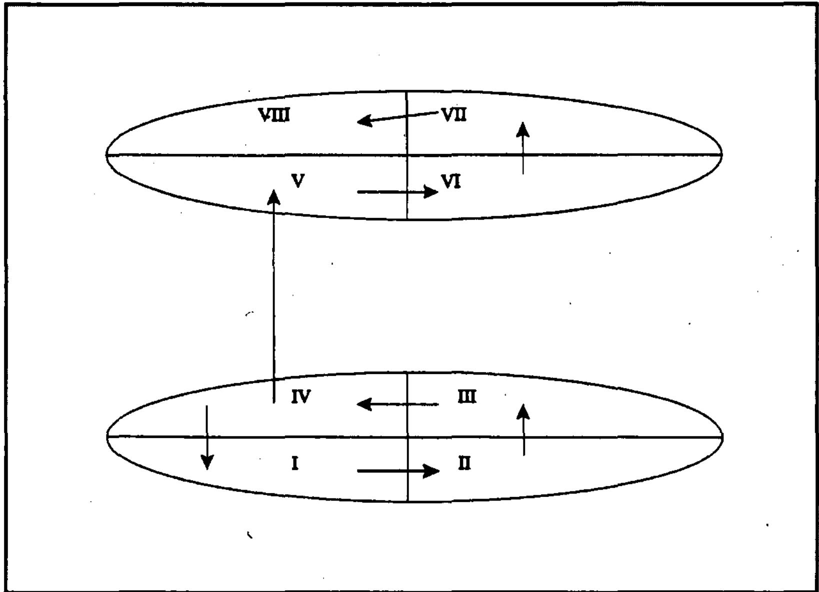

Figure 3. An integrated model of school change.

Implications

The integrated model of school change developed here allows researchers, practitioners, and policy makers alike to understand the life cycle of a school. It should be noted that different groups and different individuals will be at different points on the cycle. Whereas one individual may look beyond the current situation, others may not. In any one school the relevant stakeholders might have conflicting understandings, depending on where the individual is located in the quadrants. The location of that quadrant influences what the individual perceives as important. A school administrator who can place the different players on their appropriate quadrant can plan for the life cycle of the school.

It should also be noted that student movement through the cycles does not happen in a cohort-step model. Rather, individuals might achieve different levels from their classmates, posing other challenges for the school administrator. Student transfers and staff turnover can contribute to the uncertainty, as individuals take their experiences and vision with them. The critical mass required for sustainable change is not achieved as individuals move on; those who are left behind may

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perceive the potential of a progression to a second level (or higher level) but they know that they themselves are not at that point.

This integrated model of school change may help to explain why the reported high levels of teacher happiness with proposed school reforms (Schneider, 2003) did not necessarily lead to a concomitant improvement in school outcomes. It may be that teachers recognize the desirability of stage eight functioning and believe that introduced school reforms will result in student action for social change. When this does not happen immediately, due to the school functioning at a lower level of either cycle two or even cycle one, then frustration sets in and teachers become disillusioned. An awareness of the school life cycle, and a recognition that sustainable change only occurs over time, would help assuage the frustration. The quadrants described here assume that different levels of importance can be ascribed to different places in the school life cycle.

Through this research we have provided an indication that school change happens in a cyclical fashion. Further, we have explained how schools might not emerge from the quadrants of first cycle change. Through this process we have identified some of the gaps in previous models and gained an increased understanding of the perceptions of school effectiveness. It has been shown that school effectiveness, when seen from each of the four quadrants on two cycles, can present entirely different and often conflicting perceptions of the same school. The model also helps to explain why those school improvement efforts of the 1990s that sought to increase school morale did not appear to have an immediate impact on student achievement. Finally, this work has provided a realization of the differing schools of school effectiveness that has led us to recognize the importance of considering school life cycles in educational change; for example, in a struggling school, increasing morale may initially be more important than raising student achievement scores.

In extending the theoretical models presented by Goddard (2001), Hallinger and Leithwood (1996), Dimmock and Walker (2002), and Wilber (2000), this research has made an original contribution to the research base in this field. Through an increased awareness of an integrated model of school change within the context of ethno-culturally diverse communities, school principals will be better able to analyze and understand their own practice. In coming to know more about the change process in schools, our views of school effectiveness must also change. The degree to which it is appropriate for schools to become

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actively involved in a social change agenda will change as the school develops and grows towards the upper quadrants of cycle two change.

Conclusions

It would appear that there are eight components to educational change, and that schools move through these in an incremental fashion. Many schools do not make the transition from quadrant four of cycle one to quadrant five of cycle two; rather, they return to quadrant one of the first cycle. The reasons for this are not clearly understood and require more investigation. Some research questions that need to be addressed are:

- Does change always happen in a spiral manner?
- Can schools build on their strengths?
- Can schools repeat cycle two, or is attainment of quadrant eight an impossible goal?
- Does the second cycle focus on societal change and, in the process, take the school beyond the institutional change of cycle one?
- Does cycle one change involve individuals who tend to look inward and focus on self, whereas cycle two change requires a coherent unit with a sense of community?

Further research studies designed to address these questions would help further the utility of the model.

It would appear to us that successful principals tend to have a broader view, and look beyond the "we need more money" approach of their colleagues. Rather, they try to build relationships, not only among the staff but also among students and community.

We are interested in discovering whether an otherwise successful school loses strength and purpose after one cycle due to a loss of its teachers, many of whom are promoted to other schools where they then act as disciples and begin cycle one change events once more. The link to *stagnant schools* might also be tied to the difference between holding or losing staff, and students, who have successfully completed one cycle. Issues of teacher turnover, parent mobility, and the structure of student grade organization need to be further investigated.

We believe that this integrated model of school change may provide insight in to the development of effective schools. Such schools are not merely those which achieve high scores on standardized assessment tests. Rather, an effective school is one which provides a strong academic program that is sensitive to local context and that has, as an explicit

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goal, the development of critical citizens who will contribute to social transformation and change.

Further, we believe that the two cycle approach provides a strong endorsement of schools as social activist organizations, a trend that is becoming more and more important given the scale and pace of current global change. Cycle one change is explained by a number of researchers and has been a stalwart of the educational change literature. Cycle two change permits us to understand how schools might move from a focus on the individual to one on societal change. In linking cycle one and cycle two together in an integrated model of school change, we can better understand how and why many highly regarded change processes were unsuccessful. An understanding of the cyclical nature of change, and the long term approach that is required for such change to be institutionalized, are necessary steps to sustainable educational change.

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