

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Thinking About School Improvement	1
Introducing School Improvement	1
School Improvement Broadly Defined	3
The Work of the Principal in School Improvement	6
The Power of Relationships	8
Effective Leaders Promote Learning Communities	10
The Process of School Improvement	10
Suggested Readings	14
2. Principals Promote a Healthy Culture and Climate	17
Introduction	17
Defining School Culture in a Context of School Improvement	18
Cultures are Built on Values, Assumptions and Norms	18
Framing Assumptions, Values and Norms in the Context of School Improvement	19
Putting Culture into Context – Using Metaphor to Express Culture	22
Formal and Informal Cultures and Subcultures	23
Markers of School Culture	24
Mission Statement and Other Documents	24
Policy Statements	26
Programs for Students	26
Programs for Teachers	28
The Learning Environment	29
The Health of the School Culture	29
School Climate	31
Two Dimensions of Climate – Academic and Social Climate	33
Leadership – Building Culture and Climate	34
Key Norms: Collaboration and Trust	37
Characteristics of Collaborative Cultures	37
Building Collaborative School Cultures	38
Norms	38
Collegiality and Collaboration	39

Trust	40
Caring Builds Trust	41
Suggested Readings	42
3. Principals Support Teacher Leadership	43
Introducing Teacher Leadership	43
The Need for Teacher Leadership	44
Teachers as Leaders Develop the Instructional Program.	45
Teachers as Leaders Make Positive Changes in the School	45
Teachers as Leaders Share Their Expertise with Others	46
Teachers as Leaders Shape the Culture of the School	48
A Starting Point for Teacher Leadership – Scanning the Environment	48
Knowledge and Skills for Teacher Leaders	53
Motivation for Teacher Leaders	55
Organisational Barriers to the Emergence of Teacher Leadership	56
Cultivating Teacher Leadership	57
Provide Professional Development and Mentoring for Teacher Leaders	57
Assuming Leadership Can Be Risky Business for the Newcomer to Leadership	58
Suggested Readings	58
4. Principals Build Strong Teams to Sustain School Improvement	59
Introducing School Improvement Teams	59
The Work of Creating School Improvement Teams	61
Characteristics of Effective Teams	61
What’s Next?	63
Up-Front Work Needed to Develop Teams	63
Establishing Purposes and a Vision for the End Results	63
Setting Goals	64
Selection of Team Members	65
Ongoing Work Needed to Maintain the Work of Teams	67
Leading Teams Through Group Development Stages	67
Providing Support Structures for Teamwork	70
Assessing Teams and Their Work	73
Suggested Readings	76

5. The Work of the Principal in Planning for School Improvement	77
Introducing Planning for School Improvement	77
The Broad Base of Involvement Needed for Planning for School Improvement	78
Communication and School Improvement	79
Communication that Informs	80
Communication that Helps Planning	81
Communication that Asks	81
Communication that Evaluates	82
Getting Started	82
Consult the School Mission	83
Assemble the School Improvement Team	84
Assess the Current Situation of the School and Students to Target Gaps	85
Environmental Scanning	85
Gap Analysis	86
Analyse Data	89
Making Data User-Friendly	94
Data Overload	95
Develop Improvement Goals and Objectives to Narrow Gaps	95
Goals	95
Objectives	96
Linking Goals and Objectives	96
Develop Strategies to Meet Goals and Objectives	97
The Action Plan is the School Improvement Plan	99
Action Plans Bring Life to Goals, Objectives and Strategies	99
Pulling It All Together – A Case from the Field	100
Understanding the Context	100
Academic Support Programs and Personnel	101
The Faculty of Lindsey	101
The Reality of a School in Trouble	101
Scanning the Environment	101
Where to Start?	104
Teamwork – Time, Opportunity and Training Needed	104
Mission	106
Beliefs = Values Forms the Basis of the Mission	107
Committing the Beliefs of Faculty, Staff, Administration and Parents to Writing	107
Gap Analysis – The Current Reality versus the Desired State ...	108
Test Data Analysis and Discussion in and across Year Levels	108
An Overall Reform Strategy	109

Data-based Decision-Making and Planning for Change	112
Academic Goals – Something to Strive For	113
Ongoing Assessment	115
The Research Base Needed to Press Forward	115
Strategies to Implement the Research	116
Strategies to Increase Parental Involvement	117
Data Say It All	117
Suggested Readings	119
6. The Work of the Principal in Implementing and Monitoring School Improvement	121
Implementing School Improvement	121
Implementing School Improvement Plans	123
Implementing the Plan	124
Professional Development Needed for Successful Implementation	125
Characteristics of Effective Professional Development	126
Job-Embedded Learning	128
Peer Coaching	129
Differentiated and Developmental Supervisory Practices	129
Monitoring the School Improvement Plan	130
Documenting Results	131
Understanding Data – A Precursor to Reviewing Efforts and Modifying Goals, Objectives and Strategies	133
Data Analysis – A Case from the Field	134
Involving Teachers in Data Collection and Analysis	134
Requesting Help from Within and Beyond the School	136
Reviewing Efforts and Results of Achieving Goals	136
Providing Staff Development to Assist Teachers in Understanding the Results of Data	137
Assessing What Works	138
Sustaining the Momentum for School Improvement	144
Understanding Change	144
Facing Implementation Dips	146
Exploring What is Blocking Progress Toward Meeting Goals	148
Shining the Light	150
Suggested Readings	150
References	151

Thinking About School Improvement

In this Chapter ...

- ◆ Accountability
- ◆ School improvement broadly defined
- ◆ The work of the principal in school improvement
- ◆ Overview of the process of school improvement

Introducing School Improvement

What is the work of the principal in championing school improvement? This book attempts to address the myriad responses that could be given to answer this question by exploring school improvement and the work of the principal. The following list highlights the contents of each chapter.

- ◆ Chapter 1 creates the context for school improvement and outlines the role of the principal, as defined in the chapters that follow.
- ◆ Chapter 2 explains the principal's role in assessing and building a positive school culture and setting the climate for school improvement.
- ◆ Chapter 3 explores ways in which the principal can be supportive of and create conditions so that leaders can emerge in the educational setting.
- ◆ Chapter 4 outlines ways in which the principal can support team building and the work that teams need to tackle during school improvement.
- ◆ Chapter 5 leads the principal in the planning for school improvement.
- ◆ Chapter 6 identifies the principal's role in implementing and monitoring school improvement.

School improvement is not a new construct and principals, who are instructional leaders, have been and will continue to motivate teachers, students and others toward improvement. Effective principals will not be caught off guard by increased accountability, because these leaders approach school improvement as a constant and prevailing process. School improvement is at the forefront of the work of these principals, and these principals accept that they and their schools can work towards meeting high expectations. As the leaders, principals in schools that are improving must do the following:

- ◆ Focus their own and the efforts of others by asking tough questions.
- ◆ Track data to provide a basis of reality for the answers to these questions.
- ◆ Identify the needs of students through systematic and inclusive means.
- ◆ Develop strategies based on research to meet these needs.
- ◆ Prioritise the needs of students, teachers and others who are served by the school.
- ◆ Provide teachers with the support and assistance needed to meet the needs of their students.

School improvement is a multifaceted process that never really ends. The process of school improvement is a collaborative effort dependent on a culture and climate that support growth and learning for teachers and the organisation. It is not likely that there will be growth and development unless there is alignment of the needs of both the people and the organisation itself. Programs and initiatives that forward school improvement for schools labelled as “failing” are based on criteria such as standardised test results. Although these programs and initiatives might be noteworthy, they are outside the scope of this book and are, moreover, often implemented as quick fixes.

More than just a commitment to improvement is needed to accomplish school improvement that is lasting and reaches the level of the classroom teacher. Although it falls to the principal to organise, plan and accept final responsibility for school improvement, it takes teachers to mobilise a plan of improvement. Harris (2002) stresses “the school improvement research base highlights the centrality of teaching and learning in the pursuit of sustained school improvement” (p. 1). Harris suggests further that the centrality of teaching and learning is related to change, and that for successful school improvement to occur, both the people and the organisation must be able to change in ways that align with improvement.

School Improvement Broadly Defined

Unfortunately, there is not a neat and all-encompassing definition of school improvement. Seashore-Louis and colleagues (1999) assert that the term “school improvement” is ambiguous and problematic to define (p. 251). This is due to the uniqueness of the school setting and the students served within each building. Dimmock (2002) explains that “attention is currently turning to how schools might redesign themselves to best serve their students in full recognition that each school is a unique mix of students and contextual conditions” that affect school improvement efforts (p. 141).

Given the contextual nature of school and the myriad variables that influence school improvement efforts, leaders scan the environment, looking for markers that define the context of the school, the characteristics of the people whom the school serves, and those of the teachers and other school personnel who serve students. The information shown in Figure 1.1, examining for now the broad aspects of the school context and the characteristics of the people within the school community, can help the principal to scan the school environment. The principal will be guided through a more extensive scan and analysis in Chapter 2.

Figure 1.1. Scanning the Environment for Contextual Variables – School Context and Characteristics

<i>School Context</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
<p>School Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ city, suburban, rural <p>School Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ secondary school, primary, middle years <p>School Type</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ public, private, parochial, independent <p>School Demographics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ number of students, number of teachers <p>Unique and Emerging Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ before and after school programs, school holiday programs, evening programs for students and parents 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ socioeconomic status of students, students reading below year level, number of failures in key areas (maths, English, science), number of students receiving special assistance (special education, ESL) and involved in support programs <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ attrition rates, number of teachers with less than six years in the profession, number of teachers about ready to retire, education levels (beyond bachelor’s degree), staff development opportunities provided throughout the school year

Building Collaborative School Cultures

Building collaborative school cultures and positive school climates is dependent on several variables including, most notably, norms and workplace conditions. These conditions are interrelated, and together they form both the culture and climate of the school.

Norms

Norms are unwritten rules of behaviour that serve as a guide to the way people interact with one another (Chance & Chance, 2002). Saphier and King (1985) identify 12 norms of school culture, which, if strong, contribute to the instructional effectiveness of a school:

- ◆ *Collegiality*: People interact with one another. The members of the community are open and respectful to one another.
- ◆ *Experimentation*: Risk-taking is encouraged.
- ◆ *High expectations*: People have high expectations for themselves, for each other and for students.
- ◆ *Trust and confidence*: People trust one another.
- ◆ *Tangible support*: Resources – time, support – are present.
- ◆ *Reaching out to the knowledge bases*: Information is available.
- ◆ *Appreciation and recognition*: People feel important and respected and like they are part of the school. They feel that what they do is important and that colleagues, administrators and the larger community hold the work they accomplish in high esteem.
- ◆ *Caring, celebration and humour*: People thrive when they feel emotionally supported. Communities take the time to celebrate – the big and small accomplishments of each other and students.
- ◆ *Involvement in decision-making*: Decision-making spans the school environment and is not just a function of the administration.
- ◆ *Protection of what is important*: Principals and others identify what is important and then protect time and secure resources to support priorities.
- ◆ *Traditions*: Traditions shape the culture, and traditions are upheld as part of the community.
- ◆ *Honest, open communication*: People talk to one another; they share ideas openly without fear.

Figure 3.1. Assessment of Teacher Leadership

Beliefs about teacher leadership	<i>My belief about teacher leadership:</i>	<i>Teacher's beliefs about teacher leadership:</i>	<i>Intersections between my beliefs and the beliefs of teachers:</i>
History of teacher leadership	What opportunities have been afforded to teachers to emerge as teacher leaders?	Have there been organizational constraints to prevent teachers emerging as teacher leaders?	What needs to be accomplished to bury a negative history of teacher leadership?
Risks	What risks currently exist for teacher leaders?	For each risk ask if the risk is a positive or negative one?	What administrative support is needed for teachers to take risks?
Patterns of communication	Currently, how do teachers communicate with administrators?	How do administrators communicate with teachers?	What types of communication systems need to be developed to promote teacher leadership?
Training for teacher leadership	What types of training are in place for teachers who want to assume teacher leadership?	What types of training need to be developed?	What resources are needed to promote teacher leadership?
Teacher leaders	Who are the current teacher leaders?	What do these teacher leaders do to assert leadership?	Receptivity – do others respect these teacher leaders?
External support for teacher leadership	How does the central office support teacher leadership?	How does the community-at-large support teacher leadership?	How do I support teacher leadership?

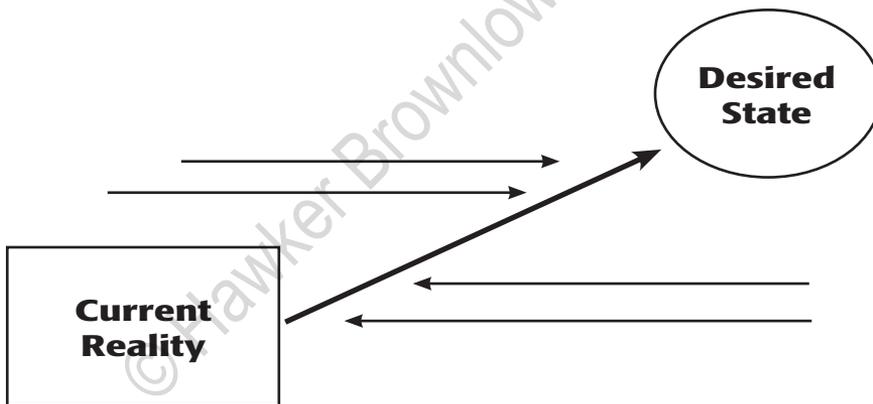
and the gap is the space between where the school is and where the school wants to be. By examining gaps, school improvement teams can plan (1) where the school needs to go – the school improvement process – and (2) how the school is going to get to the destination – the improvement product.

The gaps are areas that need attention, and each gap can serve as a point of departure for developing strategies to fill the gap by addressing and remediating the areas that need improvement. The needs assessment process, according to Corson (2000), begins by starting with the end in mind and by keeping two things at the forefront of the process:

1. The desired state should be written in a measurable form so that you know if you're getting closer.
2. The current reality should be data-driven rather than based on opinions.

Corson provides a way to traverse (Figure 5.3) the gap between the current reality and the desired state. Note that the space between the current reality and the described state is the gap.

Figure 5.3. The Gap Between Current Reality and Desired State



Source: Corson (2000). Desired State Chart. Used with permission.

Rouda and Kusy (1995) offer sound strategies for conducting a gap analysis. Although these strategies were developed within the context of business and industry for the purposes of identifying training needs (Figure 5.4), many insights can be gleaned from the work of Rouda and Kusy and related directly to planning and assessing school improvement.