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# TEACHER SELF-IMPROVEMENT: A PROMISING APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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Many schools introduced more systematic and effective teacher evaluation procedures as part of the "accountability" movement of the 1970's. The rationale for this trend was that more effective teacher evaluation would serve as an impetus for strengthening teacher performance and ultimately, the improvement of students' learning experiences. Although teachers recognize the current need for evaluation, many are becoming concerned about how information regarding their performance might be used in program retrenchment and reduction-in-force decisions. These teachers will become more hesitant to document areas which need strengthening when they believe such information could be used against them. They will use evaluation more to document their effectiveness than as a vehicle for professional development.

The professional development process which was a crucial aspect of teacher evaluation during the 70's must be handled differently during the 80's. Teacher self-improvement is a promising approach to explore as schools plan to meet the professional development needs of their staff. We begin such exploration in this article. In it, we focus on: 1) the basic concept of teacher self-improvement, 2) the relationship between teacher self-improvement and teacher evaluation, 3) the categories of information which can be examined during the self-improvement process, 4) some strategies for teacher self-assessment, 5) the process of planning a teacher self-improvement program, and 6) the role of self-improvement in facilitating school improvement.

### **What Is Teacher Self-Improvement?**

Teacher self-improvement is the continuous process of taking an honest and open look at one's performance, assessing one's strengths as well as areas where improvement is needed, and then developing a personal plan for initiating and evaluating changes in those areas where improvement is needed.

Self-improvement activities can be either short range or long range. A teacher, feeling that the class she/he just presented was not organized

well in terms of a logical flow of concepts, may devote more planning time to the proper sequencing of concepts before the next class. This is an example of short term self-improvement. An attempt to integrate some interactive experiences into the classroom might be an example of a long range self-improvement activity where progress would be assessed at periodic intervals.

In addition to being short range or long range, self-improvement activities can be planned individually or on an institutional basis. As an individual, a teacher could place high priority on self-improvement as it relates to the development of alternative strategies for remediation in the basic skill areas; or on an institutional basis, a group of the teachers in the school could place high priority on the need to develop alternative remediation strategies. Both approaches to teacher self-improvement are valid, provided the staff has a strong personal commitment to improvement in that area. Olivero (1976) comments that

The most powerful staff development, in my opinion, is a plan prescribed by the individual educator, a growth plan unique to personal needs. Institutional growth, obviously, can take place in the same manner, the differences between the two approaches being in the number of participants and in focus. For the latter alternative there is usually a catalytic change-team that both identifies school problems and implements constructive action; the people on the change team work together as a collegial unit (p. 197).

### **The Relationship Between Teacher Self-Improvement and Teacher Evaluation**

In terms of their goals, teacher self-improvement and teacher evaluation are similar since both have as their ultimate goal the improvement of some aspect of the educational process. From a role perspective, there are some basic differences between these approaches.

First, teacher self-improvement is more continuous than teacher evaluation. It is more often an ongoing activity, as compared to many teacher evaluation programs where only three to four evaluator-teacher conferences are held during the school year. Teacher self-improvement is also less formal than teacher evaluation since it does not require an evaluator-teacher conference where outcomes are documented in a report placed in the teacher's file. Through the self-improvement process, teachers have the opportunity to strengthen the educational program in a personal, growth-oriented manner where sources of threat or anxiety which could prevail during the formal teacher evaluation process are diminished.

Another difference between evaluation and self-improvement is that teacher evaluation is usually initiated externally while teacher self-improvement is self-initiated. In most evaluative settings, an administrator at some level is responsible for initiating the review and assessment of the teacher's performance. In the self-improvement process, the teacher is

personally responsible for initiating this review and assessment. Advocates of teacher self-improvement (Reeves, 1974; Bailey, 1977; Burch & Danley, 1978; Lewis, 1978) view this difference as extremely important in its effects on changes in teacher behavior. They concur that before meaningful change in teacher behavior can be brought about the teacher must want to change, that is, internalize the need to adopt a more effective pattern of behavior. The teacher self-improvement process is viewed as more effective in establishing this disposition than conventional approaches to teacher evaluation. Lewis (1978) comments that the major problem with "teacher evaluation procedures thus far is that the need for change has not been an interior one" (p. 688).

In summary, teacher evaluation and teacher self-improvement are both directed toward improving the educational process. Teacher self-improvement, however, is more continuous and effective in creating an internal need to improve one's teaching behavior than conventional approaches to teacher evaluation.

### **Categories of Information Relevant to the Self-Improvement Process**

Sergiovanni's (1977) discussion of the "Johari Window" provides a useful framework for categorizing the types of information which can be examined during the teacher self-improvement process. In using the "Johari Window," four categories of information about teacher behavior can be examined: 1) the open self, 2) the secret self, 3) the blind self, and 4) the undiscovered self.

The open self is that information about a teacher's behavior which is known to both the teacher and other professionals in the school environment, including the person primarily responsible for formally evaluating the teacher. The open self may be viewed as that category of information which the teacher is willing to share openly with others.

The secret self is that information about a teacher's behavior which is known to the teacher, but not to other professionals in the school environment. Usually, the teacher is careful not to divulge such information to the person responsible for his/her formal evaluation. For example, take the situation where a new science program has been introduced in the school. A teacher experiencing difficulty in using this program may view the sharing of such information as a sign of weakness. Thus, information about this aspect of the teacher's behavior would be relegated to the secret self category.

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether information about teacher behavior falls into the open self or the secret self categories. Most teachers have some areas where they are clearly either open or secret about their teaching behavior. Many teachers have other areas where information about their behavior could be classified into either the open or secret self categories depending on the person with whom they are interacting. Take the prior example of the teacher experiencing difficulty

in implementing a new science program. Such information might be classified into the secret self category when this teacher interacts with the principal. This same information could be placed into the open self category when the teacher meets with close colleagues to discuss implementation problems.

Another category of information which can be explored through the teacher self-improvement process is the blind self. The blind self is that information about a teacher's behavior which is known to others within the school environment, but not to the teacher. For example, a teacher may unknowingly reinforce certain sex role stereotypes during the course of instruction. Although the teacher is not aware of these behaviors, they would be recognized by students and/or other professional staff.

Any of these three categories of information, the open self, secret self, or blind self, can be explored when identifying potential areas of focus for the teacher self-improvement process. The major strength of the self-improvement process is that it can be directed toward the crucial secret and blind self categories which teachers are reluctant to address during the formal evaluation process. As a result of exploring these secret self and blind self areas, teachers can gain the insight and confidence to address these areas more openly in the future.

Exploration of self must be pursued carefully. Burch and Danley (1978) point out that people are somewhat selective in the image they create for themselves and are willing to project outwardly to others. Generally, those teacher behaviors falling into the open self category project a positive image of the staff member's performance. Those behaviors which reflect less positively on the teacher's performance fall into the secret and blind self categories. In opening up the secret and blind self categories through the self-improvement process, one must be careful to approach such improvement in a manner which enhances the positive self-image of the teacher. A support system must be established in which the teacher: 1) perceives himself or herself as capable of improving, 2) knows that the resources needed to facilitate improvement will be provided, and 3) recognizes that such improvement will be acknowledged by the leadership of the school. Such a positive atmosphere is essential to the success of the teacher self-improvement process.

To this point, not much has been said about the undiscovered self. The undiscovered self is that category of behavior unknown to both the teacher and others within the school environment. Until recently little attention has been devoted to the undiscovered self as it relates to teacher performance. Current writings in humanistic psychology are beginning to turn attention to this area. For example, Witherell and Erickson (1978) would view teacher self-improvement as adult development. Within this context they have applied Loevinger's (1976) theory of ego development to the analysis of teacher performance.

Loevinger has described the ego as a process, not a thing, that can be viewed as an abstraction. The ego can be viewed as the frame of reference one uses to construct and interpret one's world. It is a process, a structure, social in origin, functioning as a whole, and guided by purpose and meaning. The individual's striving to integrate and make sense of experience is the essential function of the ego. Ego development can be seen as an increase in complexity and differentiation in the conception of self within a social context (Witherell and Erickson, 1978, p. 231).

In their discussion of the five stages of ego development for normal adults, Witherell and Erickson comment that most teachers would be operating at either of the first two levels, conformist or conscientious-conformist.

Persons at the Conformist Stage tend to view themselves and others as conforming to socially approved codes or norms. Explanations of behavior and situations at this stage are conceptually simple and often stereotypic; there is little awareness of inner life or depth of feelings.

At the Conscientious-Conformist Level, two major characteristics occur: an increase in self-awareness and the capacity to imagine multiple possibilities in situations. In contrast to the conceptual simplicity of the previous state, persons at this level begin to allow for exceptions and contingencies in the generalizations they make, paving the way for understanding individual differences at the next stage (Witherell and Erickson, 1978, p. 231).

From these observations two points need to be emphasized. First, the ego development stage at which a teacher is operating does affect one's approach to the self-improvement process. Staff members operating at the conformist level would perceive effective teaching as a more clearly definable and conceptually simple set of behaviors than staff members at the conscientious-conformist stage. As a result, teachers at the conformist stage would tend to pursue self-improvement activities of a more limited scope than staff operating at the conscientious-conformist level. Secondly, self-improvement is more than fulfilling the expectations of self at a particular ego development stage. Through the self-improvement process it is important for a teacher to become aware of her or his present ego development stage as well as to acquire insights into strategies which could be pursued to progress to a higher stage. Ego development has been used as the primary example in this discussion of the exploration of the undiscovered self. However, there are other areas which could be examined in this regard such as cognitive style or moral development.

In summary, teacher self-improvement is a professional growth experience in which staff have the opportunity to explore their secret and blind selves, and even possibly their undiscovered selves. Through such exploration, areas are identified in which improvement or further development is

needed. Then such improvements are initiated and continuously evaluated in a self-directed manner. Subsequent sections focus on these aspects of the self-improvement process.

### **Strategies for Teacher Self-Assessment**

Teacher self-assessment is the first step in the teacher self-improvement process. It consists of taking an open and honest look at one's performance and then identifying strengths as well as areas where improvement is needed. Some teachers simply sit down for a few hours to reflect on their past efforts and to generate some crucial areas in which their performance could be strengthened. Other teachers prefer to take a more structured approach to the self-assessment process through the use of observation instruments or checklists. It is important to keep in mind that self-assessment is valid to the extent that the teacher is willing to take an open and honest look at his/her behavior. If the teachers does not make this commitment, no strategy can insure an accurate self-assessment.

Some of the more popular and effective teacher self-assessment techniques are:

1. Individual Assessments
  - a. Personal reflection
  - b. Analysis of classroom tapes
  - c. Self-assessment checklists
2. Feedback Assessments
  - a. Student
  - b. Peer teacher and supervisory staff
3. Interactive Assessments
  - a. Clinical supervision
  - b. Microteaching

When distinguishing among these three basic assessment categories, it is important to note that individual assessments are based on the teacher's own personal look at his/her performance. In applying feedback assessment techniques, teachers begin to seek information from others concerning their behavior. These others could be students, other teachers, supervisors and possibly parents. Finally, during the interactive assessment process, the teacher not only seeks input from others, but also involves these others in the analysis of his/her performance. As one moves from individual to interactive assessment techniques, one progresses from a more inward to a more outward analysis of teacher performance. Further information concerning the self-assessment techniques within each category follows.

#### **Individual Assessments**

Personal reflection is the most widely used approach to teacher self-assessment. Since performance is related to how we perceive our own competencies and abilities, it is important for teachers to continually

reflect upon what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it is proceeding. This can be done after a class, at the end of the day, or at the end of a semester. As the teacher reflects upon his or her performance, strengths are identified as well as areas needing improvement. Improvement areas may focus on the need to modify class procedures, instructional materials, student assignments, or other aspects of the educational process. Personal reflection is valid to the extent that the teacher has an adequate grasp of the concepts affecting the teaching-learning process. When the teacher does not have a sufficient grasp of these concepts, the personal reflection process should be supplemented with the analysis of classroom tapes or self-assessment checklist approaches.

Teachers can gain meaningful insights about their performance through the analysis of classroom tapes. *Mirrors for Behavior III* (Simon and Boyer, 1974) is a helpful resource for teachers using classroom tapes in the assessment of their performance. It contains a collection of observation instruments designed to measure varied aspects of classroom behavior. One problem in using *Mirrors for Behavior III* is that teachers sometimes feel deluged by the broad range of potential observation techniques presented. This problem can be minimized through the development of an abridged version of *Mirrors for Behavior III* consistent with the needs of and resources available to local school staffs. For example, such an abridged guide has been developed by Sirois (1976) for use in the West Hartford (CT) Public Schools. This guide provides teachers with information about observation techniques which can be used to analyze teacher behavior as it relates to cognitive development, social interaction, communication, classroom organization and management, affective development, psychomotor development, behavior management, and diagnostic teaching.

The literature (Bushman, 1974; Krajewski, 1976; Bailey, 1977; Sharkan and Tremba, 1978) clearly supports the view that teachers are capable of using observation tools to code their own behavior and to make accurate interpretations of these data in order to appraise their teaching. Classroom tapes document both verbal and non-verbal classroom interaction. The effectiveness of such techniques can be enhanced when applied within the context of an objective observation and analysis system. For example, the Brophy and Good (1974) observation system has been developed to examine the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance. This approach enables the teacher to assess the types of cognitive and affective behaviors used when dealing with different students as well as the impact of these behaviors on student performance. Analysis of classroom tapes using the Brophy and Good system enables teachers to develop a better understanding of their classroom behavior and how their behavior can be modified to improve student performance.

Checklists are also useful in the self-assessment of a teacher's performance. These checklists contain descriptors of various dimensions of the educational process as well as a scale for rating one's performance



in terms of each descriptor. Usually checklists follow one of two formats. Some are simply the teacher's job description put in a format where staff members can rate their performance in light of each of their specific responsibilities. Other checklists take a more focused approach and address in detail a more specific aspect of teacher performance such as classroom instruction or curriculum design.

The point to keep in mind from this brief review of individual strategies for teacher self-assessment is that varied approaches do exist. It is important that teachers explore and consider these approaches to get as complete an assessment of their performance as resources permit. For some teachers, self-assessment may be based heavily on personal reflection. For other teachers, this assessment may draw upon personal reflection, the analysis of classroom tapes, and self-assessment checklists. In all cases, the self-assessment process should yield information describing the teacher's strengths as well as areas where meaningful improvements are needed.

Personal bias can be a problem when using individual assessment strategies. A teacher who does not possess an adequate knowledge of the factors affecting the teaching-learning process might use individual assessment techniques to reinforce less than positive classroom practices rather than as a vehicle for improvement. One way to minimize this problem is to conduct in-service sessions which orient teachers to the critical dimensions of effective instruction as well as to low inference assessment techniques for use in monitoring their classroom performance. Another approach to reducing personal bias is for supervisory personnel to encourage the teacher to pursue feedback and interactive assessment strategies. Through these approaches, others would be providing information which could break down some of the biases the teacher has about his/her performance.

### **Feedback Assessments**

As staff begin to reach out for input from others during the self-assessment process, students, peer teachers, and supervisors can be a valuable source of information. Students can provide this feedback through: 1) informal discussions of their educational experiences, 2) responses to surveys, and 3) participation in the analysis of classroom tapes. When teachers solicit student feedback it is important that their questions be directed at specific aspects of the instructional process or at specific instructional outcomes. General questions addressing teacher personality issues should be avoided. For example, items such as "Do you like your teacher?" provide little constructive feedback unless the reasons for student responses are tied to specific aspects of the instructional process. *Diagnosing Classroom Learning Environments* (Fox, Luszki and Schmuck, 1966) as well as *Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning* (Simpson and Seidman, 1962) provide teachers with some excellent techniques for gathering student feedback.

Also, peer teachers and supervisory staff can provide crucial feedback during the self-assessment process. Many of the problems experienced by teachers are not unique. Often discussions with more experienced or knowledgeable staff can provide teachers with valuable perspectives in areas of difficulty. When seeking advice, it is important for teachers to turn to peers or supervisory staff who have the ability and willingness to help. Not much can be accomplished without such supportive relationships.

In seeking input from peer teachers and supervisors, teachers can focus on general or specific educational issues. In regard to general issues, a teacher could consult a peer on how disciplinary matters are dealt with in his/her classroom or on how reading is taught to bilingual students. Regarding more specific classroom interaction issues, a peer teacher or supervisor could be asked to observe a teacher's class and to complete an observation checklist. Workshops, regularly planned team meetings, and materials exchange programs are some additional ways a teacher can receive feedback from other professionals during the self-assessment process. Such activities need not be confined to the staff in a particular school. Teachers and supervisors from other schools within the system, or even neighboring school systems, could participate in these activities in a reciprocal manner.

These are just some of the ways in which peer teachers and supervisors can assume a role in the self-assessment process. Numerous patterns of teachers working together to improve the educational process are possible depending on how a school and its staff are organized.

### **Interactive Assessments**

Interactive assessment techniques go beyond feedback approaches in that teachers seek information from others and also involve them in the analysis of their performance. The interactive self-assessment process often takes place within the context of a specific supervisory system. For example, interactive self-assessment is evident in the practices of clinical supervision and microteaching.

Using Krajewski's (1976) approach to clinical supervision, the teacher seeks the assistance of a supervisor when a need arises. Then the teacher and supervisor work together in planning a lesson or series of lessons directed at that need. During this planning, objectives are stated, instructional strategies are designed, and the types of information to be collected during observations are identified. The teacher then proceeds with the lesson(s), information is collected, and a conference is held to discuss the teacher's performance. It is during this conference that interactive self-assessment takes place. Here the teacher, supervisor, and others who have participated in the process share and analyze information about the teacher's performance. Through this conference the teacher recognizes those strengths which need to be maintained as well as those areas in which further improvement is needed. Krajewski notes that this interaction

between the teacher and supervisor facilitates a better understanding of the teaching-learning process and helps the teacher improve classroom analysis skills.

Microteaching (Sharkan and Tremba, 1978) provides teachers with the opportunity to systematically study and practice specific teaching behaviors. It consists of a teach-critique-replan-reteach-critique cycle of a condensed or simplified teaching situation. The four phases of microteaching are: 1) the teacher studies a specific teaching skill which affects the teaching-learning process and develops a lesson, 2) the teacher applies this skill with a small group of three to seven students in a five to ten minute lesson which is taped, 3) the teacher meets with students, peer teachers, or supervisory staff to review the classroom tape and analyze performance, and 4) the teacher uses the information from this feedback session to replan and reteach the lesson in an improved manner to a new group of students. In microteaching the interactive self-assessment process would encompass steps three and four. Here the teacher involves others in the analysis of her/his performance and uses this information to identify areas which need to be strengthened when teaching the lesson in the future.

Clinical supervision and microteaching are ways in which teachers can interact with students, peer teachers, and supervisory staff in the self-assessment process. These interactive assessment techniques tend to be more meaningful in situations in which the teacher has a good understanding of the concepts affecting the teaching-learning process, has had experience in using individual and feedback assessment techniques, and perceives the school environment as supportive of the instructional improvement process.

Table 1 summarizes teacher self-assessment strategies by listing and describing the self-improvement techniques discussed in this section. Also, the categories of information about teacher behavior which can be derived from using each technique are indicated.

### **Planning the Teacher Self-Improvement Program**

As a result of conducting a self-assessment, a teacher identifies some strengths as well as areas in which improvement is needed. The next issue at hand is to prioritize those areas needing improvement and to select the top priority areas where self-improvement will be initiated. There are no easy procedures for identifying these top priority areas. The final decision is based on personal judgment, possibly supplemented with advice from peer teachers and supervisory staff. Some crucial factors to consider when setting priorities for a teacher self-improvement program are:

1. The time required to initiate the change,
2. Personnel, material, and financial resources needed to initiate the change,
3. The impact of the change on teacher behavior,

Table 1. Basic Strategies for Teacher Self-Assessment: Possible Techniques, Their Description, and Types of Information Provided

Basic Strategies	Possible Techniques	Description of the Techniques	Types of Information Provided
Individual Assessments	Personal Reflection Analysis of Classroom Tapes Self-Assessment Checklists	The teacher openly and honestly considers his/her own performance and generates ideas. The teacher records, observes, and interprets verbal and nonverbal classroom interactions. The teacher describes and rates various teaching responsibilities and/or specific aspects of classroom instruction.	Open and Secret Self  Open and Secret Self  Open and Secret Self
Feedback Assessments	Student  Peer Teacher and Supervisory Staff	The teacher obtains specific information from students about the instructional process through informal discussions, surveys, and analysis of tapes. The teacher obtains information from peers and supervisors about general or specific concepts and processes through discussions, classroom observations, workshops, and exchange programs.	Open and Blind Self  Open and Blind Self
Interactive Assessments	Clinical Supervision  Microteaching	The teacher requests supervisory resistance in order to cooperatively share, plan, and analyze a lesson or series of lessons. The teacher analyzes a condensed or simplified lesson with students, peers, and/or supervisory staff in order to improve a subsequent lesson.	Open, Secret, Blind and possibly, Undiscovered Self  Open, Secret, Blind and possibly Undiscovered Self

4. The impact of the change on student behavior,
5. The impact of the change on the achievement of crucial school objectives.

Once priority areas for improvement have been identified, the teacher should spend some time in planning personal/professional development activities for strengthening these areas. Since the focus here is on self-improvement, it is not appropriate to identify a formal planning approach for all staff to follow. Teachers can select the planning approach most consistent with their personal orientation to the self-improvement process. Generally, however, more systematic approaches make it easier to monitor and personally evaluate the impact of professional development activities on one's teaching.

Once professional development activities have been initiated in priority areas, the teacher is responsible for monitoring the impact and outcomes of these activities. Given the emphasis on self-improvement, there is no need to prepare formal evaluation reports for individual teachers. Instead, findings regarding the impact of the self-improvement activities could be shared informally with other teachers, supervisors, and administrators.

In organizing to facilitate the process of teacher self-improvement, it is important for schools to begin to introduce the professional growth center concept (Hart, 1974). In schools where resources are very limited, the professional growth center might begin as a professional library where teachers can obtain readings relevant to their improvement needs. As further resources are available, the role of the professional growth center could be expanded to include some limited inservice training activities. When additional resources are made available, this inservice function could be expanded.

Experience has shown that financial support for the professional growth center concepts tends to increase incrementally when: 1) administrators and teachers are committed to the concept, and 2) its impact on school programs is documented and disseminated. Documenting and disseminating information about the impact of professional growth activities on school program quality differs from the traditional evaluation process in that the program, not the individual teacher, is the focus of attention. For example, the reading staff of a large urban school system met monthly to assess their performance and to plan what they could do to improve reading instruction in their schools. The proceedings of these meetings were documented and compiled into a final report describing the activities pursued by the department and their impact on the quality of the reading program. This report was submitted to the system-wide staff development committee along with the reading department's proposed professional development plan for the next school year. Various readings in *Staff Development: Staff Liberation* (Beegle and Edelfelt, 1977) provide insights crucial to the effective implementation of the professional growth center concept.

### Role of Self-Improvement in Facilitating School Improvement

Some readers may view our approach to teacher self-improvement as idealistic; teachers assessing their strengths and weaknesses, teachers planning strategies for significant instructional improvement, teachers working cooperatively to assess the impact of their improvement efforts. Where does this happen? When were these two authors last in a school? Don't they know that supervisors and administrators need "to ride roughshod" on their staff to bring about meaningful school improvement?

This reaction to our approach to teacher self-improvement is not uncommon. Skeptics of our approach share a belief system consistent with more traditional approaches to supervision. We advocate a more current human resources approach to supervision (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1979) well grounded in the literature on effective management practices (Argyris, 1957; Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960). This view contends that schools exist for two purposes: 1) to foster student learning, and 2) to develop the professional potential of teachers. If this professional potential is to be maximized, teachers must be involved actively in assessing the quality of school programs and in planning professional development activities directed toward improving these programs. Supervision and staff development are not something done to teachers, but rather processes in which staff are involved integrally. Our advice to those holding a more traditional view of supervision is "You can lead a horse to water, but cannot make him drink." The challenge in exerting modern supervisory leadership is to structure the setting so teachers can identify the problems confronting the educational program and accept responsibility for alleviating these problems. Teacher self-improvement is one approach for responding to this challenge. It can be implemented effectively in healthy school organizations (Miles, 1965) employing modern school management practices (Owens, 1981; Sergiovanni and Carver, 1980).

Some might argue that self-improvement leads to school improvement since the whole is the sum of its parts. As individual teachers grow in their self-selected directions, so too does the school's capacity for fostering student learning. This can also happen when teachers, supervisors, and administrators work together initially to identify and agree on critical program improvement areas. To the extent that teachers focus their self-improvement activities toward a common goal, school improvement will be evident. For example, in an urban elementary school, compensatory reading instruction was identified as a critical improvement area. Through consultation with system reading specialists, it was decided that instruction could be improved by developing high interest reinforcement exercises. Such exercises would be clustered according to themes consistent with the spirit of the seasons or holidays. To maximize student interest, non-print as well as print exercises would be developed. Given these parameters, a group of classroom reading teachers planned their self-improvement strategies. Then these teachers met with their principal and reading

specialists to review and discuss their self-improvement strategies in light of the initial goal of improving compensatory reading instruction. As a result of this meeting, classroom teachers finalized their self-improvement plans and proceeded to implement them. During the school year classroom teachers met with their principal and reading specialists periodically to review their progress and to discuss its tentative impact on students. At the end of the year a report was prepared documenting the efforts made to improve compensatory reading instruction as well as the impact of these efforts on student achievement. It is important to note that the strategies employed in this example of using teacher self-improvement to facilitate school improvement are consistent with approaches advocated in the current effective schools literature.

Using self-improvement to facilitate school improvement as in the example just presented is a major change in settings where staff are not accustomed to working cooperatively. Initially, all staff may not be willing to work in groups. Those teachers who do will need support and encouragement from supervisory and administrative personnel. Teachers working individually can be encouraged, but not coerced to work in groups. The combination of seeing that work groups are making an impact on the improvement of school programs and the feeling of being "left out" tends to motivate teachers to join an existing or newly formed group addressing a problem area of interest.

In addition to fostering an atmosphere of cooperation, supervisory and administrative personnel must provide direction to the school improvement process. An effective way to provide this direction is through the systematic evaluation of school programs. Program outcomes can be discussed with staff in light of school system expectations and priorities as school improvement areas are being identified. Through appropriate supervisory and administrative leadership, program improvement areas can be selected which are meaningful to building level staff and consistent with the priorities of the school system.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In reflecting upon our comments about teacher self-improvement, one may ask – "What's new about this process of teacher self-improvement? Isn't this what any good teacher does as a matter of routine?" Depending upon the teacher and the resources available, the answer could be – "Yes!" But this does not mean that the process of teacher self-improvement does not need to be addressed more systematically within our schools. We must keep in mind that we have a range of quality in our teaching staff. One cannot assume that because good teachers engage in the self-improvement process that all teachers do so. As we strive to strengthen the overall quality of education in our schools, it is important to orient all staff to the need as well as to the procedures for teacher self-improvement.

Such an orientation can be conducted in a variety of ways. For example, the Bristol (CT) Public Schools pursued this process by first developing a

"Guide to Strategies for Teacher Self-Improvement" (Iwanicki, 1979). This "Guide" was used to train building principals in techniques for introducing the concept of teacher self-improvement to their staffs. Then an inservice day was set aside for principals to orient their staffs to the teacher self-improvement process.

Orienting staff to the self-improvement process is only the first step. As teachers become engaged in it, attention and leadership from the supervisory staff is essential. It is important for them to encourage teachers to use increasingly more refined self-assessment techniques which provide more sensitive feedback about the intricacies of the teaching-learning process. As staff members become more sophisticated in the self-assessment process, they will begin to identify more relevant areas for self-improvement. As staff move in this direction, they will begin to better meet their professional development needs, to respond more directly to school improvement needs, and to improve the quality of education in the 80's.

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