The Role of Communication in Providing Leadership for School Restructuring

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Abstract

Educational reform now focuses largely on school restructuring. In this context, both transformational leadership and cultural change paradigms have become critical issues for school administrators. The argument is made that both concepts are inextricably linked to communication. Consequently, leadership for change requires both an adequate knowledge base pertaining to leadership and organizational theory and knowledge and skill in the area of communication theory. A research agenda for studying communication in schools and the inclusion of communication theory in the preparation of school administrators are recommended.

During the early 1980s, school reform was characterized by a seemingly endless list of intensification mandates, such as longer school years, longer school days, and increased graduation requirements. These initiatives, advanced by elected officials and powerful business executives, were predicated on the notion that higher levels of productivity could be achieved by doing more of the same within the existing structure of schooling. This strategy allowed local boards and administrators to "coast on tradition" (Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1992, p. ix). In essence, these local officials merely had to implement and regulate ideas developed elsewhere. But the accession of school restructuring changed this condition. In the context of decentralization, principals and superintendents are being asked to both lead and manage school and district improvement (Murphy & Hallinger, 1987). As a result, their role expectations are becoming more developmental than reactive, a condition that accentuates the symbolic and political frames of their behavior (Bolman & Deal, 1994).

The purpose of this article is to present the argument that the fundamental means for providing leadership for school restructuring, transformational leadership and cultural change, are attenuated when administrators neither understand nor appreciate communication as a core element in their practice. Further, the contention is made that this deficiency exists for most administrators because communication theory has received insufficient attention in both professional preparation and school-based research.

Critical Elements of School Restructuring

If meaningful school restructuring is to occur, the task must be addressed at two levels: a realignment of the school; the need to reshape traditional power relationships between public education and its clientele (Elmore, 1990; Conley, 1993). Both assignments require transformational behaviors and cultural change paradigms. *Transformational* leadership seeks to influence behavior by appealing to "higher ideals and moral values such as liberty, justice, equality,

peace, and humanitarianism" (Yukl, 1989, p. 210). Components include a common goal commitment (both the leader and followers desire the same goal), the pursuit of higher levels of morality (emphasis on moral values to govern behavior), and a reliance on higher-order needs (the leader focuses on more advanced human needs when considering motivations) (Burns, 1978). In essence, transformational leaders seek to empower teachers and other employees so that collectively members of the organization can eradicate existing unjust, inequitable, or ineffective conditions in their cultures (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993). This conceptualization of leadership, however, has not been dominant in either business (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) or education (Yukl, 1989).

Cultural change paradigms are predicated on the assumption that organizational modifications are resisted either because an institution's culture is negatively disposed toward change or because a specific initiative is incongruous with the dominant values and beliefs held by those who operate the school. This approach to school reform can be defined as a revision of common understandings, occurring first at the deepest level of basic assumptions and ultimately at the level of overt behaviors. It is a process that relies on transformational leadership styles to reshape the form and content of an institution's symbolic field (Mohan, 1993). In schools, administrators are expected to initiate the process by reading the existing culture to determine how fundamental beliefs result in positive or negative practices (Deal & Peterson, 1990). Following this diagnostic stage, the leader promotes open and democratic discussions allowing members of the culture to determine the extent to which modifications are necessary. These discussions become a forum for allowing members of the school family to find common ground for a vision and a plan of action (Prestine & Bowen, 1993).

Since the early 1980s, the targets of educational reformers have shifted from students to educators to schools. This is evidenced by the fact that iterations of restructuring, such as site-based management, now enjoy center stage. *Structure* refers to the formal ordering of roles in terms of authority, job descriptions, and work assignments; also included are the ar-

rangements of networks that affect formal and informal interactions (Toth & Trujillo, 1987). Restructuring thus implies the reshaping of these elements. In the case of public schools, advocacy for the process emanates from the conclusion that centralization has encouraged "lock-step" programs that are insensitive and unresponsive to a changing world. As a result, reform policy is now heavily influenced by decentralization theory (the closer the process of governance is to those affected, the more responsive it is to real needs and wants). The intent of decentralization is to make schools less dependent on a hierarchy of authority and more inclined toward collegiality and shared authority.

Because schools are complex social systems in which behavior is influenced by a network of interactions among individuals, among formal and informal groups, and between an organization and its external environment (Kowalski, 1995b), effective decisions about education are usually not made unilaterally. Rather they evolve from political actions, typically ending in compromise. Accordingly, those who have studied organizational change (e.g., Bracey, 1994; Murphy, 1991; Schein, 1996) often conclude that restructuring requires change agents who view schools from a social systems perspective, i.e., leaders who see schools and districts as complex systems composed of interrelated parts that interact to varying degrees. With this perspective, one is less prone to suggest a single cause for the imperfections of public education and less inclined to believe that meaningful improvement can be produced by simply tinkering with select institutional elements. Philip Schlechty (1997) wrote, "Systemic thinking requires us to accept that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (p. 134). As social systems, public schools are shaped by both formal structure and culture, by both internal (within the school) and external (community) political transactions. Therefore, structural change not supported by cultural change eventually gets overwhelmed by the existing culture (Schlechty, 1997).

Among those pointing out the importance of culture to systemic change is the noted psychologist, Seymour Sarason (1996). After studying failed reform efforts over the past four or five decades, he determined that the "system" of public education was allergic to change; any effort to alter one part of a school was quickly obstructed by system wide barriers. He concluded that the source of this intractability was a pervasive culture erected on a set of assumptions shared by virtually all educators. He went on to note that this culture evolved over time through a series of political compromises between schools and society. According to Sarason, it is this macropolitical relationship that makes it impossible for us to understand what goes on in schools "only by riveting on what goes on in schools" (p. 2).

Also studying the effects of local political pressures on school district design, Jane Hannaway (1993) found that even in districts with similar institutional environments and technologies, differences could be observed in organizational design and procedures for decision making. In summarizing her research, she concluded, "The results suggest that the assumption implicitly made by many educational reformers that schools are free to choose their organizational structure is, at least to some significant degree, overdrawn. External political pressure at the local level appears to constrain managerial arrangements" (p. 160). In essence, she discovered that educational philosophy and organizational design are endogenous to local districts (Hannaway, 1992). Such findings suggest that neither structure nor culture are manufactured entirely by school boards, administrators, and teachers. Rather they are produced by innumerable internal and external interactions. By focusing on the school as a social system, we begin to comprehend the essential nature of communication in both transformational leadership and cultural change models. Language and its use provide the keys to understanding why things are the way they are, within the school and between the school and its external communities. In this respect, reshaping formal structure and institutional culture necessitates an appreciation of how schools are affected by their communities and in turn affect them (Sarason, 1996).

Unfortunately, little research has been done on the specific characteristics of culture that hinder or enhance change (Burgess, 1996). Most researchers have been preoccupied with finding relationships among phenomena, and their inquiries have relied largely on positivist approaches. Such efforts have not provided a sufficient picture of reality. In order to study behavior in a social systems context, for example determining the ways in which micro and macropolitical interest groups influence ideology and policy, researchers need to use holistic paradigms (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). This alternative requires an understanding of mixed methodologies and a comprehension of the relationship between culture and communication.

The Relationship Between Culture and Communication

The relationship between culture and communication may be more expediently studied when both variables are explained. Edgar Schein (1992) identified culture as a multilevel construct consisting of *basic assumptions*, *espoused values*, and *artifacts*. The basic assumptions make up the deepest and most mental layer; here we find the tacit beliefs educators hold about themselves, their relationships with other people in the school, and the purposes of the school. Espoused values are distinguished by strategies, goals, and standards representing preferred behaviors for coping with daily job requirements. Artifacts are symbolic manifestations of the basic assumptions; examples include language, myths, rituals, and ceremonies. Artifacts and espoused values exist on or near the surface, and thus, constitute the more visible and identifiable dimensions of culture (Short & Greer, 1997). By comparison, basic assumptions are highly subjective and pose the greatest challenge to change agents,

because identification typically requires extensive observations and analysis (Rousseau, 1990).

School cultures are often described quantitatively on the basis of strength, i.e., along a continuum ranging from *weak* to *strong*. Weak cultures are fragmented and difficult to discern because few teachers and administrators accept common assumptions about professional responsibility, student discipline, and the like. Strong cultures are characterized by a high percentage of employees holding the same assumptions. In most organizations, including schools, "there are often different and competing value systems that create a mosaic of organizational realities rather than a uniform corporate culture" (Morgan, 1986, p. 127). This is one reason why an accurate description of a school's culture is difficult to capture. While the term *strong cultures* has been linked to effective schools (e.g., Levine & Lezotte, 1995), strength does not indicate the quality of shared values and beliefs. This attribute is more commonly described along a continuum from *positive* to *negative*, reflecting the degree to which dominant assumptions are congruous with the professional knowledge base, encourage adaptations, and contribute to positive outcomes. Some writers (e.g., Mohan, 1993) refer to cultures as being *stable* and *unstable*. The former are characterized by clarity of purpose and vision, tendencies to view tradition with moderation, and leaders who accentuate the positive and encourage collective action; the latter are characterized by disagreement in core values and purposes, high uncertainty among subcultures, the protection of tradition to avoid change, and low morale.

In organizational research, the ability to be innovative is considered a positive attribute (Burgess, 1996).

Communication commonly has been described as a loop involving a source, a receiver, and a channel. This limited perspective stems from the classical theory of communication that was articulated by Harold Lasswell (1948): "A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions: Who..Says What..In Which Channel..To Whom..With What Effects?" (p. 37). This theory divides the communication process into a series of discrete parts that include a source, a message, a channel, a receiver, and feedback (Pepper, 1994). This elementary view was widely accepted because it was easily understood and readily assimilated in bureaucratic-like organizations, i.e., the functions of transmitting information and issuing commands were congruous with accepted managerial responsibilities in hierarchies (Taylor, 1993). One of the limitations of the classical theory of communication relates to the conveyance and maintenance of organizational culture. When communication is treated merely as interaction, words are judged to be containers of thought and feelings. In truth, meaning is not embedded in the content of words but rather the product of a "complex communicative process that includes words, intentions, contexts, histories, and attitudes" (Pepper, 1994, p. 9).

Discussions of communication appearing in management literature have been influenced substantially by classical theories of communication and organizations; that is to say, they usually focused on the study of undesirable by-

Table 1

Common Communication Problems Associated with Organizational Structure and Individuals

Factor	Perceived Effect
Organizational-Based Problems	
Size of organization	The larger the organization, the more difficult it is to maintain effective communication.
Reliance on a formal channel	Attempts are made to restrict communication to a formal channel known as the "chain of command."
Hierarchy of authority	Because most power and authority is vested in a small number of people, these individuals experience information overload (a condition that reduces their effectiveness).
Information Filtering	Because information passes through a prescribed channel, it gets filtered at each stage of transmission.
Closed climate	The school or school district discourages interactions with the community because such exchanges are seen as conflict-producing.
Personal Problems	
Poor listening skills	Administrators are unable or unwilling to receive information.
Poor encoding/decoding skills	Inability to structure messages appropriately; inability to comprehend verbal and non-verbal messages.
Lack of credibility or trust	Messages are not accepted as being accurate; motives of administrators are questioned.
Elitism	Administrators isolate themselves, electing to communicate with a select number of powerful individuals.

products of bureaucratic structure in the context of discrete steps in information exchanges. For example, excessive levels of hierarchy were often deemed to produce undesirable communication outcomes, such as illegitimate bypassing and reliance on informal channels (e.g., Culbert & McDonough, 1985). Table 1 provides other examples of organizational and personal communicative problems of this type. While these problems are neither invalid nor unimportant, they constitute a restricted and insufficient perspective of organizational communication. As such, they diminish the importance of communication, reinforce erroneous conclusions about the connections between communication and culture, and encourage modernistic approaches to studying communicative behaviors. Many researchers, for example, have categorized organizational climate and culture as causal variables while classifying communicative behavior as an intervening variable. A proclivity to treat the relationship between culture and communication in this manner has been verified by a macroanalysis of communication research conducted across all types of organizations; this review found that modernistic approaches have been far more prevalent than either naturalistic or critical modes of inquiry (Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, & Meyers, 1991). As John Dewey (1938) long ago observed,

> The way in which the problem is conceived decides what specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected and which are rejected; it is the criterion for relevance and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures. (p. 138)

In this vein, a presumed cause-and-effect relationship between culture and communication has limited our understanding of how cultures are formed and how they can be transformed.

More recently, enlightened communication scholars have provided a broader perspective of organizational behavior, one that views the relationship between culture and communication as reciprocal. Charles Conrad (1994), for example, wrote, "Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management. Cultures do not exist separately from people communicating with one another" (p. 27). Stephen Axley (1996) described the bond between culture and communication this way: "Communication gives rise to organizational culture, which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture" (p. 153). This association implies that communication cannot be understood sufficiently by reducing it to a loop of linear steps or by focusing research exclusively on the transmissions between senders and receivers (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Instead, investigators should treat communication as a process through which organizational members express their collective inclination to coordinate beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. Put more simply, it is course of action that people in a school or district use to give meaning to their organizational lives by sharing perceptions of reality. A negotiated order evolves from both internal and external interactions among individuals and groups, and this interplay occurs in the informal as well as formal organization. When viewed from this social system standpoint, communication is a process that shapes, transmits, and reinforces a socially-constructed culture (i.e., a set of shared dimensions that form the assumptions, values, and artifacts of a particular organization) (Mohan, 1993).

Within the framework of a cultural change model, problem solving requires administrators to identify how individuals perceive reality so this information can be used to erect mutual understandings about a school's purposes and practices. This objective is unlikely, however, in situations where administrators employ communication practices, either consciously or unconsciously, that restrict the debate of values, discourage conflict, and limit access to information (Deetz, 1992). Regrettably, managers in many organizations continue to treat information as power, and they restrict access to it as a means of protecting personal power (Burgess, 1996). Superintendents and principals who fall into this category are incapable of actualizing the primary function of transformational leadership—shaping and developing new norms in the school (Carlson, 1996).

The reciprocal relationship between culture and communication is especially noteworthy with respect to the symbolic frame of administration. When an administrator appropriately recognizes that organization does not precede communication and becomes subsequently supported by it, he or she is more inclined to view organization as an effect of communication (Taylor, 1993). This changes our thinking about critical leadership attributes. For example, credibility and trust (essential characteristics of leaders who assume the role of change agent) are not produced by structure or programs; instead, they spring from human interactions. Unless leaders accurately evaluate the effects of communication on underlying assumptions, and unless they properly dissect the language of a school, they probably cannot determine the extent to which culture facilitates or obstructs change. Language within an organization is the primary vehicle through which audiences develop a sense of order; the study of language focuses on how an institution and its various publics collectively define and participate in organizational reality (Toth & Trujillo, 1987).

A Call for Action

To provide capable leadership for school restructuring, administrators must accurately assess the existing culture and gain an understanding of how and why it was established and sustained (Deal & Peterson, 1990). The nexus between culture and language suggest that these tasks are not achievable for administrators who lack an understanding of communication theory. Therefore, two specific actions are recommended. First, research on culture and communication in school settings should become a high priority among scholars in educational administration. Tradi-

tional approaches that examine only select aspects of the communication process, aspects such as direction (e.g., top-down) and channels (formal and informal), fail to show how value orientations cut across organizational contexts and shape the organization's culture (Mohan, 1993). Second, communication theory should be an integral part of professional preparation in school administration. This argument was valid long before school restructuring became a popular issue, because administrative work has always centered around interpersonal relationships. The pursuit of culture change has simply made the need to study communication theory more obvious.

As already suggested, dominant perspectives of communication in schools have been influenced by classical theory which portrays the ideal school as tightly coupled, rational, well-defined, orderly, and logical (Owens, 1995). In this utopian organization, communication is transparent. That is, it is assumed that the "intentions of the message sender can be directly coded into explicit message language or manifest content" (Taylor, 1993, p. 251). This presupposes the existence of a coding-decoding procedure allowing the sender and receiver to exchange the accurate and complete meaning of a message through words. Based on this supposition, a failure to communicate can be blamed on one of the following problems: (a) the coding procedure was not properly used; (b) the sender did not properly construct the message; (c) the receiver was inattentive; (d) there was interference in transmission (e.g., the memorandum got lost). Both the supposition and simplistic framework it engenders disregard the significance of context in information exchanges (Taylor, 1993).

Over time, we have discovered that our schools are not the ideal organizations proposed by classical theory. Rather, they are loosely-coupled and composed of multiple subcultures in which ambiguity and behavioral inconsistencies are pervasive. Behavior in them is frequently unpredictable and bewildering. As Robert Owens noted, "there is often an obvious disjunction between publicly espoused values and what we do in schools" (p. 10). When we merely classify artifacts or identify espoused values, we usually capture a limited, and frequently inaccurate picture of culture. Worse yet, some administrators are inclined to ignore the perceptions, feelings, and emotions of other members of the school family in assessing culture. Instead they approach change as if their own eyes and ears were sufficient to determine need and direction (Sharpe, 1996).

To reach the deepest levels of culture, and thus to determine how communication influences behavior in schools, we must rely on multidimensional, multilevel analyses (Mohan, 1993). Such investigations should explore value orientations and contextual variables, especially with respect to explaining how these variables contribute to differences in school cultures (i.e., differences between strong and weak, positive and negative, and stable and unstable cultures). This form of research requires interpretive paradigms permitting us to observe, measure, and classify organizations from a

communication perspective (Taylor, 1993). Interpretivists view reality as a subjective process; their goal is not to determine the status of the organization, rather they seek to understand and explain why a school is the way it is. The approach focuses on the study of meaning, or put another way, how people make sense of their world through communication (Wert-Gray et al., 1991). Schein (1992), for instance, advocates studying culture through the eyes of its participants by engaging them in discussion centering around five primary themes:

- *Relationship with the environment* (What is the primary mission of the school? Whom do we serve? What is our relationship with the community?)

- *Reality, truth, and the basis for decisions* (How do members of the organization determine if something is true or valid? What basic assumptions define reality?)

- *Nature of human nature* (Are students inclined to do good things? Are some students predestined to fail? Are most parents cooperative?)

- *Nature of human activity* (What assumptions are implicit in the problem-solving techniques used in the school? Should teachers make decisions alone or collectively? Should teachers participate in administrative decisions?)

- *Nature of human relationships* (What are the assumptions about power and authority? What social relationships are acceptable?)

Accurate descriptions of behavior in each of these categories are more probable when the researcher has the ability to interpret verbal and nonverbal messages accurately.

The study of communication and culture also can occur in other ways. For example, the researcher may concentrate on the effects of modern technologies. The infusion of new electronic devices, such as FAX machines, e-mail, computers, the Internet, and distance learning has created potentialities that are both positive (e.g., increased communication) and negative (e.g., dehumanized communication). Their acceptance and use in schools also is influenced by culture. For example, teachers often exhibit an unwillingness to change instructional methods even when new technologies permit them to do so. In another vein, communication-centered research can be used to explore moral and ethical issues. For instance, restructuring prompts leaders to induce a reconsideration of long-standing assumptions and values or to consider redistributions of power and authority. A range of possible research topics is shown in the typology contained in Table 2.

A dearth of research on communication in schools may partially explain why this topic has received relatively little attention in administrator preparation programs. But neglect also appears to be the product of indifference. Thirty years ago at a national conference sponsored by Project Public Information and Stanford University, a group of scholars in school administration and communication theory

Table 2

A Typology for Communication Research in Schools

Focus	Potential Areas of Inquiry
Institutional Culture	• Effects of communication on shaping culture • Relationship between communication and culture (strength, quality) • Communication among subcultures in schools • Use of communication in socialization, enculturation • Development of language within a school culture
Ethical/Moral Concerns	• Leader influence on vision, goals, or ideas • Inducing cognitive redefinitions, value orientations • Leader communicative behaviors and gender issues • Leader communicative behaviors and the expression/use of power • Communication in multicultural contexts
Organizational Change	• Communicating the necessity and means for change • Communication in "high support" and "high resistance" schools • Communication in periods of instability, crisis • Relationship between change strategies and communicative behavior • Case studies of successful and unsuccessful change ventures
Networks	• Formal and informal networks • Open and closed networks • Network preferences in effective and ineffective schools
Conflict Resolution	• Communication as a source of conflict • Inter- and intragroup communication • Communicative behaviors and conflict resolution

Media of Communication	• Written versus oral communication
	• Electronic networks
	  - effects on communicative behaviors
	  - effects on accessing and using information
	  - effects on group decision making

School Productivity	• Communication and administrator effectiveness • Communication and employee effectiveness • Communication and student effectiveness • Communication and community satisfaction
Leadership	• Communication knowledge base and skills among school leaders • Leadership styles and communicative behaviors • Language as a symbolic dimension of leadership

joined forces to discuss the study of communication. Recently, the *Journal of Educational Relations* published a monograph of that conference. A case for requiring administrators to study communication was developed and tied to perceived deficiencies in practice. One speaker offered this list of reasons why educators communicate poorly: (a) they have a false impression of their ability to communicate; (b) they are not accustomed to competing for the public's attention; (c) they operate in relative obscurity and are unprepared for the public's interest and scrutiny; (d) they minimize the value of outside opinions; (e) they have little communication experience and almost no meaningful communication training (Christian, 1997). While some of the recommendations presented at that conference have been addressed adequately by the National School Public Relations Association, one that has gone unheeded pertains to integrating communication theory into the preparation of school administrators (Holliday, 1997). A lack of action in this area is especially disconcerting in light of mounting evidence that the work of school administrators is permeated by interpersonal relationships and the use of information. Such evidence can be found in reviews of change literature (e.g., Fullan, 1991; Hord, 1992), studies of interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers (e.g., Bredeson, 1987; Reitzug, 1989; Martin & Willower, 1981; Willower & Kmetz, 1982), and studies of the work lives of superintendents (e.g., Blumberg, 1985; Kowalski, 1995a).

Table 3

Possible Themes for the Study of Communication in Administrator Preparation

Theme	Examples of Content
Communication Theory Organizational Behavior	How language and communication build and sustain culture; and how communication is used to negotiate order; the role of communication in organizational change.
Community Relations	Two-way communication channels; encouraging interaction with the community environment; public relations; building community support.
Communication and School Outcomes	Effects on employee performance; communication as a form of motivation; effects on student outcomes.
The Symbolic Frame of Leader Behavior	Communication and organizational symbolism; language as form of symbolic expression; modeling desired changes.
Modern Technologies	Potential benefits of modern technologies; potential problems related to using modern technologies for communication; effective control of modern technologies.
Moral/Ethical Dimensions	Communication as an expression of power; inducing cognitive and value changes; empowerment and shared governance.
Interpersonal Relations	Dimensions of communication; conflict resolution; open communication.

Communication is commonly addressed in courses on school-community relations and public relations; some newer textbooks on organizational behavior in schools also provide limited material on the subject (e.g., Hanson, 1966). In most instances, however, organizational communication receives only superficial treatment. Rarely is the subject examined thoroughly in relation to culture and the politics of school reform. If adequate coverage is to be provided, at least seven themes need to be addressed; they are outlined in Table 3. The scope of these themes suggests that at least one separate course on communication and interpersonal relationships should be required in professional preparation.

Concluding Comments

When the United States moved from an agrarian to a manufacturing society at the start of the twentieth century, public education was reshaped from a system of largely one-room country schoolhouses to modern organizations displaying many facets of bureaucracy and scientific management. The more recent transition to an information society, however, has not yet produced a parallel realignment despite intense criticism and sustained calls for educators to do so. Consequently, formal structures and cultures crafted nearly 100 years ago remain operative in a majority of our public schools.

On the surface, the idea of reinventing schools from the center is appealing because it is congruous with democratic governance, decentralization theory, and professionalism (Carlson, 1996). But the goal also remains highly ambiguous. Neither the means nor the ends for restructuring are certain (Leithwood, 1994). Nevertheless, three critical facts shape the reform mission: (a) the school has become the primary target for reform; (b) administrators are expected

to provide the leadership necessary for institutional renewal; (c) decentralization theory has been adopted as the conceptual guide for change. As Kenneth Leithwood (1994) accurately concluded, these circumstances require commitment rather than control strategies. What educators believe and value is deeply situated in their institutional cultures, and it is when we start to think about the capacity for change within a cultural context that communication emerges as a critical variable. Discussing the process of building a capacity for change, Philip Schlechty (1997) offered a list of inhibiting factors that pertain to communication: a lack of communication within schools, between schools, and between schools and society; public misperceptions about educational purposes and practices; ignoring the opinions of teachers who seek to do things differently; minimal teacher input regarding student expectations; the lack of a centralized system for disseminating accurate information at all levels of the decision-making process; and, inadequate opportunities and procedures for teachers to share innovative ideas.

If behaviors in schools were random rather than the product of fundamental assumptions cutting across institutional experiences, cultural transformations could more easily be achieved by simply replacing personnel or juggling organizational charts (Robbins, 1996). But this clearly is not the case. Even in schools where there is a positive disposition toward change, educators are likely to be incapacitated by their lack of knowledge. Seymour Sarason (1996) pessimistically concluded that educators were incapable of renewing their own institutions because they were ignorant of organizational culture and the change process; and he chastised teachers and administrators for rarely reading professional journals and books that could enlighten them on these topics. In his book, *Leading Minds*, Howard Gardner (1995)

provides another critical element. He agrees with the contention that leaders must possess the technical knowledge associated with change, but he goes on to point out that such knowledge is of limited value if leaders do not have the communication skills necessary to build support for their ideas.

In the past an indifference toward studying communication was less debilitating because an imposed structure, supported by a culture that viewed schools as agencies of stability, resulted in role expectations that were largely managerial. Today, conditions are clearly different. Policymakers are asking educators to venture into unfamiliar and risky territory. More precisely, they are asking administrators to assume responsibilities for which, at best, they have been marginally prepared. Those of us who educate practitioners have a moral and professional responsibility to address this problem. At the very least, we should focus our research on issues of practice that relate to cultural transformations, and we should provide our students with a comprehensive understanding of communication.

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