

Obstacles to Change

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction3
Chapter 2 Literature Review9
Chapter 3 Methodology14
Chapter 4 Findings17
Chapter 5 Conclusions/Recommendations 20
References22

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Purpose of this study is to identify and overcome obstacles to change with regard to student and staff behaviors as they relate to school climate. Obstacles to change from both the Deer Park and Northport-East Northport districts will be identified and analyzed. In addition, steps to overcome the obstacles, based on theorists and coupled with our findings, will be outlined.

Background

John F. Kennedy Intermediate School

John F. Kennedy Intermediate School in Deer Park suffers from a case of repetitive change syndrome. The past six years have decimated the school climate due to annual changes in school leadership, which has in turn translated into numerous changes in curriculum, discipline standards and general expectations for staff and students. Change related chaos has become the status quo, and it permeates the culture of the school impacting the staff, students and community.

Effect will always follow a cause, and one of the effects in this case is a rise in

inappropriate school behaviors on the part of the students. This can be traced to the initial change in school leadership. The new principal was directed by the Board of Education and new superintendent to make John F. Kennedy more “student friendly”. It is important to note that Kennedy is an intermediate school which houses between 1,000 to nearly 1,200 third through fifth graders in any given year. The students enter from one of two primary buildings that are smaller and more intimate. At one point, Kennedy was a middle school and it still retains much of that feel. It is not particularly elementary with its lockers lining the hallways and numerous corridors. Consequently, discipline had been clear, strict and swiftly delivered by teachers and administration to maintain the building and its large student population. The first sweeping change by the new administration was to remove the “non- student friendly discipline policies”. Unfortunately, new policies were not clarified and the code of conduct was not always followed. Discipline was thrust entirely upon the staff with little or no administrative back up.

Thus began the change related chaos. As each year following saw changes in the leadership team, with little or no continuity from the year before, the teachers relied less and less on discipline guidance from administration. Student behaviors that were strictly dealt with in the past have been handled only superficially at best. The staff has changed from outraged to frustrated to lackadaisical. Many have closed their doors and minds. The staff suffers from low morale and negativity. This has created factions among the grades. There is little participation in school events and lack of respect for others, including students.

Student behavior has deteriorated as well. There has been an increase in insubordination, bullying, and disrespect for adults, peers, and property. Teachers are dealing with a myriad of problems, many of which could be solved with an improved school climate that highlights personal responsibility and respect for others. Both students and building staff would benefit from clear -cut expectations, precise vocabulary and increased social and emotional awareness of themselves and others.

The need for a positive, lasting change in behaviors for students and teachers is clear. The newest in the series of administrative teams has recognized this need and the Shared Decision Making Committee has been attempting to put a program into place to address this. Resistance to yet another change or perceived addition to the curriculum has been high. It has been viewed as the latest in the series of here today, gone tomorrow programs. While John F. Kennedy Intermediate School has the requirement for changes in behavior, there are numerous obstacles in the way that must be dealt with before the necessary changes can take place.

Northport Middle School

Northport Middle School is located on the north shore of Long Island. The enrollment of grades 6, 7 and 8 is currently 872 students. With one principal, one assistant principal, and 130 staff members, it is the mission to provide students with an inter-disciplinary and hands-on approach to learning. Curiosity, creativity and a love of learning are encouraged and promoted. Academic and personal growth are considered equally important.

With the increasing use of the internet, text messaging, and growing media attraction, middle school students often lose focus of respect for oneself, respect for others and the respect for their community. Anti-bullying and anti-bullying behavior messages are spread throughout the building during the school year. Outside agencies visit the building to perform assemblies focusing on character education and tolerance. Staff members communicate within their teams to discuss student behavior and students' abilities to handle conflict and conflict resolution. Staff members trained in peer mediation work with students throughout the year in an effort to create more positive and effective peer relations. These efforts are not enough to sustain a zero tolerance for bullying.

Staff members at Northport Middle school believe that the building morale and lack of respect among students and staff needs to be addressed. Students do not see adults as authority figures. They are insubordinate and find nothing wrong with not complying with school rules and district policies. Parents will often side with their child in a disciplinary situation and find fault in the staff member or other student involved. Students use hurtful language in their everyday conversations. They leave trash in the hallways, classrooms and cafeterias. They believe someone else will clean up after them. Staff members don't address the put-downs and "trash talk" that they overhear in the hallways, cafeterias, and classrooms. Students and staff need to feel safe and respected in order to learn. Northport Middle School is looking to the staff, students and the entire Northport community to bring respect, tolerance and kindness to the forefront

again. Arriving in a building each day, hallways filled with impressionable adolescents, the learning environment most conducive to academic excellence is crucial to establish and sustain.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities between John F. Kennedy Intermediate School and Northport Middle School can be found when comparing the background information. Both schools have identified a need for change in the areas of student behaviors, staff morale and dealing with large building layouts.

Student behavior, in particular, is similar in that there is a lack of respect for authority and property. Students engage in bullying, physical and verbal altercations and use inappropriate language. In addition, students have a limited sense of accountability of their actions and are oblivious to the feelings of their peers.

Differences between the two schools being examined are largely due to the grade levels represented in each building. The bullying in Northport Middle School often occurs silently with looks looks or gestures. There is a larger prevalence of bystanders. The students are more likely to employ technology as part of the bullying process. This includes text messaging and e-mails. The other major difference between John F. Kennedy and Northport schools is administrative stability. Northport Middle School has an administrative team with a history of 5 years, while John F.Kennedy Intermediate School suffers from an annual case of repetitive change syndrome.

Research Question

What are the obstacles to change in the Northport-East Northport Middle School and John F. Kennedy Intermediate School in Deer Park with regard to student and staff behaviors related to school climate?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

For the purpose of this study, a review of the literature concerning obstacles to change, implementing change, and sustaining change efforts will be presented. This review includes the works of Trubowitz, Hargreaves and Fink, Stone and Fullan .

Trubowitz (2000) believes that problems are an inherent part of school change and should be recognized and considered. This will not remove the problems, but an awareness of the obstacles may help to sustain participation during the difficult process. He points to several factors that create challenges to planned change initiatives: loss of leadership support, a history of continual changes, varying commitment levels, ignoring difficulties, union contracts, pressure for immediate results, unforeseen events and collaboration problems.

According to Trubowitz (2000), top leadership's involvement is critical since "such administrative behavior allows project participants to believe what they are doing will make a difference " (p.167). Although it is inevitable that leadership will change, it is important that institutional memories are maintained in order to preserve the positive elements of the initiative. Many of the problems that Trubowitz(2000) notes are related to staff participation and belief in the planned change. Schools with histories of too many change implementations are faced with lack of staff apathy as they wait for this change to be over and the next to begin. A similar issue is

varying commitment levels of those affected by the change. While some educators are inclined to try new methods, teachers, by nature, like stability. This does not bode well for planned change. Change agents must be cognizant of this fact as they plan. In addition, problems can arise when dealing with collaborative efforts. Participants often are not experienced or prepared for the change process. In order for a collaboration to yield success the group must be trained to develop group process skills, understand roles and behavior and learn to listen to other viewpoints.

Finally, Trubowitz(2000) explains that the rush for immediate results in planned change fails to recognize that school reform takes time and is not quick fix strategy. The failure of change agents to acknowledge difficulties as they arise during the change process leads to what he refers to as "doomed to success". While positive results are hoped for by the participants, failures can occur and they must provide learning and guidance for the initiative to move forward.

When educational leaders plan for change, they must make sure that it can be sustained. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) write about seven principles of sustainability in educational change and leadership: depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness, conservation.

Sustainability , as defined by Hargreaves & Fink, is "basically concerned with developing and preserving what matters, spreads and lasts in ways that create positive connections and development among people and do no harm to others in the present or the future"(p.17). Along with sustainability, the authors point to the importance of organizational memory. Educational leaders should not discard the past when planning for the present. The loss of organizational

memory prevents useful knowledge, expertise and original purpose from being passed on. This can affect effectiveness over time.

In conjunction with loss of organizational memory, one of the problems that Hargreaves & Fink(2006) warn against is repetitive change syndrome. Two components of this are initiative overload and change- related chaos. Overload occurs when more change initiatives are implemented than the organization can reasonably handle. Change-related chaos refers to a constant state of upheaval due to the amount of changes and the frequency of their occurrence. This results in a confusion about which change is being implemented and why leading to the loss of organizational memory. Repetitive change syndrome has a negative effect on planned change as staff can become resistant and cynical towards any initiatives being implemented.

Stone (2002) explains problems, goals and solutions in the market model are thought to be linear. A problem is pinpointed, goals are identified and solutions are found. This pattern is repeated with the next problem. This can be used when planning for change. However, Stone warns that one person's solutions can be another person's problem. In the case of planned change, the problems, goals and solutions could actually become obstacles.

Stone(2002) uses the metaphor of the "living organism" as an obstacle to change. She asserts that by that viewing a group or community is an organism is to claim that it must be natural and viewed as a whole. Any attempts at change go against the way things are supposed to

be. According to Stone, " the normative leap in the organism metaphor is usually a prescription to leave things alone, and it is often used by those who want to resist change"(p.149,2002).

Organisms have a life of their own and change upsets the natural balance.

In addition, she writes about the free rider problem. In this case, everyone reaps the benefits of the change initiative whether they work for it or not, providing little or no incentive to participate. This means that groups can only mobilize when they are able to satisfy individual wants or needs. However, Stone(2002) feels that this view of the market model is not realistic. In fact, collective interests, influenced by those we know and the laws of passion can motivate people to participate in change efforts.

Fullan (1993) points out that change cannot be mandated. It only occurs with the motivation and commitment of those involved. Change agents must take unplanned factors into account and bear in mind that change is a journey. It is important to continue to problem solve as the implementation of change initiatives are implemented. The initial visions of leaders have to be shaped and refined by all stakeholders in order to become a shared vision which is essential for success.

Popkewitz, et al (2009) depicts the idea of IGE (Individually Guided Instruction). When viewing the school culture, IGE looks at knowledge, work and authority. It answers the following questions: What does it mean to know? What does it mean to work? What is the nature of authority? By looking at critical incidents, one can categorize them according to three different

descriptions of culture: Technical, Illusory, and Constructivist. While a technical school culture would include textbooks, lectures, memorization and a top-down approach and the illusory model would have skill and drill, busy work, discipline and a top down approach, the constructivist model would include team teaching, interdisciplinary lessons, and a lot of doing with the team approach.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify and overcome obstacles to change with regard to student and staff behaviors as they relate to school climate. Using the information presented in the literature review, and the matrices below (See Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3), obstacles to change from both the Deer Park and Northport-East Northport districts will be identified and analyzed. In addition, steps to overcome the obstacles, based on the theorists and coupled with our findings, will be outlined.

The Popkewitz matrix will show where both targeted schools are and where they would like to be after making the necessary change efforts.

Popkewitz Matrix

Critical Incident	Significance	Culture	Criteria for Change

Figure 3.1

The rationale for using the Stone matrix is that schools operate under the notion of goals, problems and solutions. This matrix allows us to categorize these ideas using the using the present information with the non-distributed column and then re-distribute the more successful

solutions within the constructivist notion.

Stone's Redistribution of Resources

	Non-Distributed	Re-Distributed
Problems		
Goals		
Solutions		

Figure 3.2

We will use the Schein matrix to organize and take a closer look at what is currently occurring in each school. This matrix will allow us to see the physical attributes and artifacts, create the basic assumptions and determine the current values and beliefs.

Schein Matrix

Artifacts	
Basic Assumptions	
Values/Beliefs	

Figure 3.3

Setting

To better understand the information presented in the literature review and how it relates to our problem, it is necessary to understand the key schools: John F. Kennedy Intermediate School and Northport Middle School. Both schools are located in Suffolk County on Long Island. JFK consists of grade 3-5 with approximately thirteen to fifteen classes on each grade level of a diverse population. There are approximately one thousand students enrolled who are supervised by one principal and one assistant principal. JFK employs 105 staff members of which 75 are teachers. The building, once home to a middle school, has two cafeterias, two art rooms, three music rooms, two computer labs and the lockers are located in the hallways.

Northport Middle School houses approximately eight hundred eighty students, grades 6-8. Ten percent of the population consists of students with special needs. NMS is the home of the districts diverse special education programs, 6:1:2, 6:1:4, 12:1:1. There are over 130 staff members of which ten percent are traveling or part-time employees. Administration consists of one principal and one assistant principal. The building is considered a "California School" with hallways that were once covered walkways and lockers outdoors. The building, once home to the district's high school, consists of two cafeterias, three art rooms, four music rooms and three computer labs and lockers spread throughout the hallways.

Both schools are experiencing turmoil and unsettlement within the framework they are currently operating under.

Chapter 4

Findings

Statement of the Problem

The data presented in this case study seeks to provide clarity to the problems faced by two Long Island school districts in Suffolk County. It will identify and define the obstacles each district faces and the efforts taken to overcome them.

Summary of Responses to Research Questions

Within the Deer Park and Northport-East Northport Schools there are several obstacles to change. While some obstacles are shared by the two districts, some are unique to each individual district. As noted below in Figure 4.1, several critical incidents are defined. These incidents and their significance, paint a clear picture that both schools are acting within a technical and illusory culture.

Popkewitz, et al Matrix

Critical Incident	Significance	Culture	Criteria for Change
Bullying	Social Skills Deficit Discipline Problems Not a safe Learning environment	Technical/ Illusory	
Disrespectful to adults & peers Insubordinate Biased Words, Profanity	Social Skills Deficit Discipline Problems Not a safe Learning environment	Technical/ Illusory	

Not accountable or responsible	Social Skills Deficit Discipline Problems Not a safe Learning environment	Technical/ Illusory	
Physical/Verbal Altercations	Social Skills Deficit Discipline Problems Not a safe Learning environment	Technical/ Illusory	
Disrespectful of property & Learning environment	Social Skills Deficit Discipline Problems Not a safe Learning environment	Technical/ Illusory	

Figure 4.1

While both districts are faced with similar problems, they have utilized and implemented various strategies, programs and resources made available to them. Seen in Figure 4.2, are the problems, goals and solutions as described by Deborah Stone.

Stone's Redistribution of Resources

	Non-Distributed (Present Situation)	Re-Distributed (Constructivist Community Building)
Problems	Lack of Respect No Accountability Bullying Physical and Verbal Altercations Low Staff Morale	
Goals	Decrease disciplinary situations Improve staff morale	
Solutions	Character Ed Programs Outside Agency Assemblies Limited/Inconsistent Staff Development	

Figure 4.2

Deer Park and the Northport-East Northport schools are faced with many physical challenges. Schein's matrix (see Figure 4.3) presents the physical and tangible artifacts while outlining the the Basic Assumptions, Values, and Beliefs. Anyone who visits either school would see that the layout of both buildings lends itself to the problems of disconnect among staff and difficulties in supervising students efficiently throughout the buildings to demonstrate an adult presence.

Schein Matrix

Artifacts	Signs/Posters depicting respect and anti-bullying messages Garbage left in hallways, cafeteria and school grounds Lack of adult presence in hallways during "passing time" Graffiti on school lockers and property Schools' physical layout (a maze, spread out, disconnected)
Basic Assumptions	Respect is part of the schools' mission and focus. Lack of respect for learning environment/school property, too many students...needed to build additions, portables, etc.
Values/Beliefs	Lack of Home-School Connection Students believe other will pick up after them Staff needs to be more collaborative, collegial, supportive, closer-knit

Figure 4.3

Chapter 5

Conclusions/Recommendations

After reviewing the literature and the findings, there are several conclusions that can be drawn in references to obstacles to change in Northport-East Northport Middle School and John F. Kennedy Intermediate School in Deer Park. Based on the literature, it is important to involve all the stakeholders in any change plan and build on small successes to motivate more involvement. This will reduce the problem of "free riders" as noted by Stone(2002).

Utilizing the Schein matrix allows us to take a closer look at the current artifacts, basic assumptions and values that can be seen in both schools. Taking notice of the physical attributes in both buildings, one can see the current obstacles they are facing. In an effort to overcome the obstacles, both schools will need to modify their current practices to create a more consistent approach to discipline, increase efforts to improve staff morale and work towards enhancing the overall affect of the each building.

After analyzing the Popkewitz and Stone matrices and synthesizing the data presented in both schools, a recommendation can be made to create a more constructivist culture in both buildings. By establishing a more hands-on approach, focusing on the aesthetics, and cultivating a team teaching, interdisciplinary learning environment, JFK Intermediate School and Northport Middle School can begin to overcome the obstacles to change that stand in their way.

Administration would need to adopt an approach that would include all of the stakeholders and make meaning together for the best interest of students and staff.

Due to the history of the administration team at Northport-East Northport, a recommendation unique to John F. Kennedy is to create a consistent administrative team.

Repetitive change syndrome is a major obstacle to an change initiatives in the school. In order to lessen and eventually overcome this obstacle requires a sustained leadership team that remains for several years and begins to create an organizational memory.

A final recommendation for both schools would be to sustain and work on change plans through the difficult periods that are destined to occur as noted by both Fullan and Trubowitz. It is important to remember that change is a journey that takes commitment and needs to be amended and revisited periodically in order to ensure its success.

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