Principal Training:

The Missing Link for Successful School Councils

Lorraine Devereaux
ldeverea@calvin.stemnet.nf.ca
Avalon East School District
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

Abstract

The findings reported in this article are the result of a two-phase research project. The first part of the study was conducted during the spring, 1995 in fifteen schools based in Canada and Europe. The next portion was a two-year case study conducted in a Canadian milieu concluding in spring, 1999. This study accentuates the fundamental shifts in power that are considered imperative for effective site-based management. It informs that a combination of theoretical and practical exposure to site-based management is an essential influence on its effectiveness. This was most strikingly apparent in the critical area of principals' leadership approach which requires direct, immediate and ongoing training.

Introduction

Throughout many areas of the world cries are being heard from society at large for change in the educational system. Literature has reiterated these calls as researchers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Schlechty, 1997) suggest that change is not only necessary but imminent. Escalating technological advances and increased educator accountability have prompted government officials, educators and researchers to look for new ways to enhance the quality of schooling. This means moving away from the traditional, hierarchical system of management found in schools today (Beck & Murphy, 1996; Duma, 1998; Fullan, 1997; Murphy, 1996).

Site-based management theory which advocates a shift from centralization to decentralization where decisions affecting the school are made at the local level has been emphasized as a viable educational reform (Clark & Clark, 1996; Decoux & Holdaway, 1999; Devereaux, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Henderson, 1994; O'Toole, 1995). It has reached international proportions as an improvement initiative (Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1994). In Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, there are legislated school councils and The Schools Act, 1997 mandates responsibility for school council establishment into the lap of every school principal of that province.

Deterrents to Site-based Management

The Steering Committee on School Council Implementation in Newfoundland and Labrador (1994) announced concern over power sharing. They maintained that, "adopting a collaborative approach to education would entail more than structural changes .... Resistance to sharing power is perhaps the greatest barrier to change" (pp. 7-8). The Royal Commission (1992) cautioned that, competent leadership is critical for any major restructuring to work, but it will need to be developed and nurtured, and steps will have to be taken to identify appropriate leadership models, skills and potential leaders (p. 211). The role of the school principal as primary emissary in the change process is broadly acknowledged (David, 1996; Fullan, 1997; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine, 1999; Trafford, 1997). Since there is consensus that the principal appears to be one of the most important factors in the success or demise of an alternative program, Collins (1995), Devereaux (1995, 1997a, 1997b) and Sheppard and Devereaux (1997) expressed fear that principals may not be adequately versed in consensus decision making for implementation of effective school councils.

Literature on site-based management suggests that a shift to a more contemporary transformational leadership approach is most appropriate (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kouzes & Posner; Geijsel, Sleeegers & Van den Berg,
Kouzes & Posner (1995) recognize a transformational leadership approach as that which is needed for change and identify challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart, as five exemplary leadership skills gathered from a sample in excess of 36,000 successful managers and their working teams.

Some believe that site-based management may not be the panacea to cure educational ailments (Boyd & Martinez, 1997; Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Gaziel, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1995). Murphy (1997) contends that, "many elements of the restructuring agenda (such as school based management) do not appear to be linked to student outcomes" (p. 54). Research emphasizes that, if other than structural change is to take place, professional development must be delivered to principals (Richardson, Blackbourn, Ruhl-Smith & Haynes, 1997; Morris, 1999; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995).

Fullan (1995) believes there are "some comparatively successful site-based management initiatives, but these are exceptions...they go beyond site-based management... they worked directly to become learning organizations" (p. 231). Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner (1994) define learning organizations as "great teams who over time, enhance their capacity to create what they truly desire to create" and who become immersed in "a deep learning cycle that results in the development not just of new capacities, but of fundamental shifts of mind, individually and collectively" (p. 18). An avalanche of research acclaims the learning organization as a credible school improvement concept (Fullan, 1998; Leithwood & Aitken, 1995; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1995; Sheppard & Brown, 1996, 1998, 1999). Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine (1999) believe that "professional learning communities can serve as a foundation for developing school-wide communities that maintain a focus on student learning, the fundamental purpose of schools" (p.157). However, Robertson, Wohlstetter & Mohrman (1995) contend that "unless decision makers effectively use their new power to introduce meaningful changes in school functioning, they are not likely to achieve improved educational quality" (p. 380). Others suggest that without provision of training, site-based management means little more than a superficial move from a regional to a localized power base (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1994).

**Goal Expectations and Study Design**

This research study was undertaken to identify the leadership approach that facilitates adoption of school councils. It was initiated to determine current school leadership approaches and power practices and to discover if leadership approach and power practices vary with school council involvement. It was also undertaken to ascertain if a relationship exists between school council formation, the learning organization, and heightened student achievement.

To obtain the required information the beginning phase of the study, utilizing different research approaches in two distinct environments, was conducted. First, a quantitative research investigation was undertaken with noninvolved school council members and with members who were involved in the implementation pilot project during the 1994-1995 school year in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. A survey type, nonexperimental investigation was conducted in thirteen schools, of which seven schools were involved in councils and six were not involved. The 207 participants responded to two questionnaires: The Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 1989) and The Relationships Between Principals and Members Of School Councils: An Attitude Scale (Chapman, 1982).

Next, a qualitative study involving two European schools was undertaken. This environment was chosen because the staff in one school studied had practiced site-based management for decades; while the other school is said to have one of the most advanced forms of site-based management, having complete control over how funds received directly from government were spent. Investigation of these schools spanned a one month period, two weeks of taped interview and observation time per school. The interview schedules utilized in Europe were grounded in questionnaires already applied in Canada. The investigator accessed school policy documents, attended school council and staff meetings, and shadowed the principals.

In the concluding stage, a two year (1997-1999) qualitative study was initiated in one school in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. This school was selected because it brought the researcher into one of the most current implementations of a legislated school council and its maintenance over an extended period of time. Also, the on-site principal had extensive training in school councils, had recently established a council at another school, and was trained in leadership approach. The researcher attempted to determine if this principal's professional and practical preparation brought a measure of success to the school council. As a participant observer, the researcher attended all school council, school improvement and staff meetings for the two-year duration. In addition to keeping a journal of events as they happened, a written record of the principal's comments was kept over time.
Due to the fact that one of the principals in the European part of the study was male and the other was female, and in order to protect participants' identities, precautionary measures were taken in reporting the data. Thus, one principal was assigned the male gender and was called Principal 1; the other was designated female and called Principal 2 (the gender may or may not be accurate). The Canadian principal, who was called Principal 3, and all other participants were referred to as female (the gender may or may not be correct).

European Qualitative Studies

Both European schools studied came from rural low socioeconomic backgrounds. Data collected from the European dimension of the study suggest that even though school-based management has been in operation there for decades, structural change does not guarantee that the traditional “top down” approach to leadership will automatically be eradicated with legislated school council involvement. Much to the contrary, under mandated site-based management, the leaders studied continued to practice a “power over” approach to leadership. In this case, the struggle for power comes to the forefront while the increased student learning goal hovers in the background. The European principals studied appeared to “talk the talk” of shared decision making, but were not so inclined to “walk the walk.”

Principal One

Principal One expressed the belief that leadership “should be enabling.” Contrary to this expressed belief, however, a council member of this school feels the principal has almost the full balance of power on council. She alleges, I feel restricted.... Even if we have something to say, we get knocked down.... We all have our little pigeon holes.... We just do what the principal tells us all the time.

There appears to be a constant power battle at this particular school between the principal and school council. Principal One relates an experience involving a school council member, contending, I have one area of difficulty here with one school council member who isn't recognizing the difference between governance and management ... They choose to say what should or can be done in order to facilitate whatever needs doing.... I find it irksome for the school council to be run through elementary ways of doing things.

A council member declares, Sometimes I think we're just a number. Decisions are made based on what information we are given by the principal.... The council has a wide range of different people and the principal seeks their advice. He doesn't really take it.

This principal also states that he considers it unacceptable when, parent representatives who get feedback from parents...instead of seeing me beforehand...bring it up to the council without any warning.

Contrary to this, a council member believes that, Perhaps she should be given a little more leeway, more contact with parents.... We are told things by parents and then we go to the principal and we don't go back to parents.

Principal One further adds that, “the agenda is the control mechanism at meeting of school council” and that, most initiatives in the school are top down.... The agenda is largely determined by me.” In reference to his school, he claims,

We don't have a hierarchical management structure. It's more flattened so that no teacher is managed by another teacher. They're managed by the vice principal and myself.... I am absolutely clear about it, that professionals should not be managed by other professionals on the same level.

This principal also maintains that the school council always approves proposals made by him stating, “We have that kind of relationship and that kind of accommodation.” He also adds, The school council members have recognized that I am prepared to take on the management role in the fullest extent.... It has never been challenged.... My council members seem to be happy with the way we operate.

A council member feels that this principal has “almost all the power.” She adds that the principal alone sets the agenda for council meetings and, "We follow it. We do not go off the agenda."

Another council member adds that,

There's only one person (the principal) that the management can be done by. He is the one with the qualifications.... We do (bow to the principal's expertise) .... but we know no different. We want what's best for our children.

The data provided suggest that council members at this school do not see themselves as valued and contributing members on school council. At this school, a council member's lack of confidence may have been a product of the amount of principal dominance she was being exposed to.
Principal Two

While discussing leadership, the principal of another school exclaims that, It's got to be democratic. Everyone has to have their ideas listened to, valued, discussed and perhaps adopted. I don't believe in dictatorship in leadership at all.
Yet, regarding the principal's influence on council, this same individual declares, I think most school councils, and I'm speaking for my own, they do listen to the principal. I mean 99.9% of the time the principal has her way.
It appears, however, that these council members do not recognize the principal as using expertise to influence them. One council member declares, I really don't think she does. She just has her say as anyone else involved in whatever situation it was we're talking about.
Principal Two adds that she is always prepared to use her expertise to influence decision making, stating, "Oh, we'll use it all the time." She also states that, the principal's influence on council can be quite strong.... The wise council member will listen to the principal. Normally the council listens to the principal. They know we know what we're talking about.
A council member supports this, saying, I think the principal would probably just approach the council and say her thoughts and I think the council would take note. It would be discussed, but I think they would probably take the principal's side, because we know her so well.
Principal Two declares that on her school council, control is exercised through agenda setting, "quite a bit," but adds that the agenda is set with input from both the principal and council chair. She contends that council members always accept the alternatives proposed by the principal, stating, "Yes, because normally it's been discussed ... but on the whole, yes they do."

A council member declares though that,

if it was something the principal really wanted and the council was against it, I really don't think that would go down too well with the principal. I think it would be very hard for her to accept something like that, but it's never arisen.

One council member contends that, "Now sometimes I feel that we sit there and things are debated, but at the end of the day, I don't feel like we've had a great input," while another council member states,

I think that in this school... we wouldn't say the principal knows best and leave it at that. It would still be a case of let's talk it out first, but more often than not it would be the way that the principal considers the right way of running the school.

A parent council member contends that, "every aspect of the school is discussed," yet she believes Principal Two would be prepared to use her influence on "anything that came up."

These data suggest that council members of this school feel the even though everyone contributes to discussion on issues, the principal holds so much credibility with this school council, due to her expertise and experience, that council members may allow their suggestions to be overruled by Principal Two.

Neither of these principals appeared to exhibit the collaborative, transformational approach to leadership that effective school councils require. They both used positional power. One principal used domination power over other council members, while the other used manipulation. Findings from the study of these two schools are supported by other research studies and suggest that structural change does not automatically result in leadership approaches that are compatible with the site-based management philosophy (Keedy & Finch, 1994; Robertson, Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1995).

Canadian Quantitative Study

Canadian research of noninvolvement and involvement in the initial stages was conducted in spring 1995. At that time funding for training was provided for Newfoundland and Labrador pilot school councils. The quantitative data collected from this section of the study suggested that other council members perceived that principals who were involved in the pilot project practiced a more transformational leadership approach than the selected noninvolved school principals displayed. When multiple regression analysis was applied to determine relationship between school council members' perception of the principals' leadership approaches and the schools' involvement in the school council pilot project, an R-square of 0.124 was obtained, that is 12% of variance in leadership approach was explained by school council involvement (DF=1, 190; F=26.88; P<.0005).
Although findings in the Canadian sections of the study appear to contradict those gathered from the European component, this may not be the situation. There were other factors existing for those school council pilot principals that may have influenced the study results in the Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada context. Principals who were chosen for this project volunteered to lead the study; hence they may have been more inclined toward shared leadership than others who did not volunteer. Additionally, during the implementation process, pilot principals received much support and significant training from a school council implementation team. Since this phase of the study was conducted, other councils in Newfoundland and Labrador have been given school council group training. However, no individualized professional development in this area has yet been delivered specifically to principals individually or as a group.

**Canadian Qualitative Study**

**Principal Three**

The Canadian principal in the 1997-1999 case study became principal of a school that had a rural, low socioeconomic background, and had neither a School Council nor School Improvement Team. She scheduled a Parent/Teacher night for mid-September, 1997 and gave an official presentation on school councils and all parents present were encouraged to become involved. At one point a lady came up to the podium, handed the principal a letter and asked if she'd read it to the parents before they departed that night.

The crowd appeared not to be open to forming a school council at this particular school. Their questioning was intense and required considerable knowledge of the principal. Since the principal had previously implemented a council, there was no board representative present. She was alone. She recounts her experience,

> In thirty years, I was the first outsider to take the Principal's position at this school. The previous administrators had been natives of the area. I knew no one, neither teachers, nor parents.

The parents were seated in the gymnasium in two groups with an open center aisle. The principal gave her talk, and at the finish noticed the unread letter. She explained to the crowd that a lady had given her a letter to read and although she didn't know what was on it, she had promised to read it.

The letter chastised the principal and told her to put the children back into their uniforms without delay (she had allowed them to wear jeans). The principal read the letter without faltering. When she reached the end, it was signed, "Sincerely - A Concerned Parent". This upset the principal and she expresses her opinion, "Although I am quite open to constructive criticism, the anonymity of the letter to me meant cowardice." So, she picked up the letter, walked down into the crowd, and raising the letter said, "If this is what you want, this is what you'll get. But, please, sign your name!" She did not know the consequences of her action, however, the crowd began to clap.

When the meeting concluded, many parents greeted the new principal. Among them was one lady who said, "I wrote the letter," to which the principal replied, "Did You?" and that ended it. The principal spoke to this lady in the same manner as she did to other parents. After the crowd dispersed, the principal went to the staff room, where all the teachers were waiting. As she walked through the door one teacher, who could be classed as a resister to change commented, "My dear, if you could handle that, you can handle anything!" When recalling this incident, the principal exclaims, "I had been forewarned that the parents in this school were very demanding, but I never expected anything like this."

From that day forward, the principal found that a minority of parents wanted the balance of power at the school, but they were not those who would volunteer their time as school council representatives. In the attitude scale on The Relationship Between Principals and Members of School Councils (Chapman, 1982) used in this study, many questions center around who in the school community conforms to whose agenda. Those who have the most influence or loudest voice, are said to be dominant and are believed to hold what's referred to as the balance of power.

The school council, collectively, had difficulty dealing with a power-related issue. Some of the parent population thought council meetings should be open to the public and that parents attending meetings should be free to address their concerns. The principal argued against this, stating that, "in doing this, council would provide an open forum, inviting individuals to come in with their own agenda and without restriction discuss teachers, children and parents." But she quickly added that,
I agree that meetings should be open, but parents and teachers must follow proper protocol and go through their elected council representatives with concerns. Then the chair decides what issues are put on the agenda.

The principal was relieved that council felt as she did on this issue, however this desire of some of the general parent population to become politically involved in the school continued throughout the two year investigative period. Some parents tended to exaggerate incidents that happened and they used any avenue available to them to air their criticism (newspaper, politicians, and school board) rather than first conversing with the school principal. Thus, the balance of power here laid not with the principal, the School Council, nor with the School Board, but instead lay with a small minority of parents who chose to bypass proper channels and publicize their personal agenda.

In reference to her school council and staff, this principal states,

I don't think I could find a better group to work with. We share our expertise. Our primary focus is invariably on increasing student achievement. As individuals and collectively, we seek information on new instructional materials and teaching strategies. We invest in curriculum resources that enhance our school programs.

However, there were times when even school council provided challenge. The principal narrates an incident that occurred during a two-day council training session. On the first day, the chair forwarded a letter to the principal stating that she had to resign from council. The principal placed the letter in her pocket and later that evening telephoned the chair. She told the chair that since she was an invaluable member on council and that she was not accepting her resignation. The next morning the chair arrived at the training session and joined her team. This incident went unmentioned until one day, near school year conclusion, when much progress had been made at the school, the principal said to the chair, "Aren't you glad I didn't accept that letter?" The chair smiled beautifully and said, "What letter?" These data suggest that this principal practiced a "power through" approach toward staff and school council. It appears that in this school, the leadership role for positive change could be held by either of the individuals involved. Robertson, Wohlstetter & Mohrman (1995) give credence to the importance of this approach to sharing power when introducing significant school administrative changes that improve educational quality.

An exception to shared decision making was made, however, in the area of the day-to-day running of the school. This is evident in the principal's comment,

At times of crisis, I reserve the right to make a decision independently. There are confidential matters that affect a principal's decision that should not be confided to any group.

When an extremely contentious issue arose, the principal, due to time restraints had to make an independent decision. Both council and staff supported this principal's decision and her right to make it. When commenting on what this principal thought brought a good working relationship to this school team, she quickly responded, "It's respect. They respect me, as I do them."

With the school council established, the principal, staff and council were determined to concentrate on increasing student achievement. A school improvement team was formed. To gain input from all stakeholders this team formulated parent, teacher, support staff, and student questionnaires. Standardized tests and survey results were tabulated, analyzed and recorded. Strengths and weaknesses were identified, displayed, and viewed by all participants. Armed with this knowledge, the team attended a two day workshop on school improvement. Some of the invited participants were skeptical about their role. The secretary wondered about the value of her presence, but she was assured by the principal that she was of great importance to the school. She soon learned that her input was as valuable as the next person's. At this session, school goals were established collaboratively and upon completion, everyone collectively shared a vision and a plan of action for increased student achievement at the school. The principal's journal revealed that the veteran consultant delivering this training complimented the group on their ability to work together, and declared that the cooperation he had witnessed was a rare find.

The school was beginning to transform itself into a learning organization. There was an invitation to stakeholders to concentrate on ways of enhancing teaching and learning through resource based learning, increased educational technology, and varied innovative teaching strategies. Resource based learning provides,

learning experiences (that) are designed using a variety of resources and locations, taking into consideration the different learning styles and needs of the students (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1991, 16).

Thus, a school community that working diligently in a concerted effort to increase student achievement was produced. The principal declares,
In the past two years, we have doubled our number of computers. The school council has purchased primary and elementary dictionary sets, curriculum resources for classroom teachers, and has supported educationally related field trips. The teachers have invited learned resource people to share their knowledge with our students, sought out draft copies of new teaching strategies and learning resources from the Department of Education and utilized the "best model" approach to writing. Because writing was a weak area, the writing rubric was introduced to students and parents, involving everyone in the teaching/learning process.

At every opportunity, the principal praised her staff to school board personnel and parents. On one occasion, as she thanked the teachers themselves for being such a wonderful staff, one teacher quite unexpectedly commented, "A staff is only as good as it's leader."

These data suggest that Principal Three appeared to practice the collaborative, transformational leadership approach toward school council and staff, as described by Kouzes and Posner (1995).

Parental involvement was encouraged and parents were welcomed into the school. Their help was acknowledged at a social celebration, which served to strengthen the bond between school and community. School progress was reported through annual progress reports which clearly described all aspects of school life. Messages from the director, board chair, principal, council chair, along with reports on programs offered, the school's special distinction and a detailed comparison of standardized test results at the school, district and provincial levels were provided. Good performance was complimented and strategies for improving weaknesses were given. Finally, school improvement efforts and plans for the upcoming year were outlined. Additionally, detailed bi-monthly newsletters were distributed. These provided information on improvement efforts, strategies for parents to help their children academically, teacher-made reports on classroom events, and a list of ways council supported the school's curriculum. This form of communication was utilized as a means to strengthen school community relations and to demonstrate accountability.

Results of standardized testing during this two year period showed a significant rise in student performance. The principal elaborated on this, exclaiming,

Our Math results went above the provincial average and soared more than 10% higher compared to the last time our students were tested. What a feeling of pride and joy we all felt in our work! 

Regarding the results of The Quality of School Life survey administered to the Grade 6 students in 1998, the principal declared that, when we analyze children's reaction to the comment, "School is a place where I like to be," we find that our students scored 14.1 % above the provincial average and 10.3 % higher than they did when last surveyed. It was the principal's contention that she strived to incorporate the learning organization concept in a site-based management setting. Whatever her level of success in this regard, it appears that her efforts contributed to improved student outcomes. Fullan (1995) supports the finding that success is found in site-based managed schools that work directly to become learning organizations, and Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine (1999) corroborate findings in this case study that professional learning communities form a foundation that focuses on student learning, the central purpose of schooling.

These data suggest that Principal Three was inclined toward shared leadership and power, and through increased resources and exposure to best teaching models, shared the vision of increasing student achievement with staff and school council and encouraged positive stakeholder input. However, it is noteworthy that Principal Three was also inclined to buffer her school from forces that would negatively impact effective school functioning and student progress.

Concerns Arising from the Study

A principal's current obligation to the school community and its stakeholders is colossal. However, the primary responsibility of the principal and school council continues to be increased student achievement. To attain merit, a link between council formation and heightened student achievement must be established. Principals need to look carefully at the success, or lack thereof, of their school improvement programs. Because we can't pass knowledge to others unless we have it ourselves, principals must be well informed regarding improvement programs and strategies. They must also have the ability to motivate council members, staff, and through them, school students toward improvement. The Learning Organization concept is a viable school improvement concept which has already been shown to contribute improvements in teaching, learning and student achievement (Sheppard, 1995).

Even though school councils had been established in Europe for decades, the two European principals studied in Phase One of this research project used a "power over" or dominant approach to council. It appears then that the
establishment of legislated school councils does not automatically guarantee their success. However, these results appear to be somewhat contradictory to the findings in Part Two of Phase One in the study. In this portion it was found that the Involved Principals in school councils displayed a more transformational approach to leadership than those surveyed Uninvolved Principals. It is quite possible though that this may be related to the fact that involved principals at that pilot stage of council implementation had received a considerable amount of training, or it could simply be that principals who volunteered to pilot the project in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada were more inclined toward shared leadership.

Results of Phase Two of the research project suggest that this principal practiced a more evenly balanced approach to power and leadership. According to the data, she practiced a “power through” approach to leadership with school council. However, these findings also suggest that although this principal appears to be open to sharing power with others, simultaneously she is mindful of maintaining personal power as well. This indicates that there may be need for a more even balance of power in today’s school community. The data also suggest that members of the school community who were prepared to lead in making positive change were encouraged. On the other hand, it suggests that if a person’s participation and involvement affects the school in a negative way, it should be discouraged. According to these data, today’s principal needs to be able to strike a more evenly balanced approach between collaborative, team work and consensus decision making and independent decision making.

All three case studied schools had similar rural, low socioeconomic backgrounds and had mandated site-based management. The European principals in Part One of the study appeared to be in a constant power grogging battle with staffs and school councils. The success enjoyed by the Canadian principal, her staff, school council and students in Phase Two of this study is supported by Richardson, Blackbourn, Ruhl-Smith & Haynes, 1997; Morris, 1999; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995, and suggests that if other than structural change is to take place, training must be provided to principals. Principal Three was trained in site-based management, leadership approach and power sharing before school council implementation.

With increased parental involvement, many uprisings have surfaced in the face of recent educational reform efforts in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. These have happened so frequently that one cannot help but wonder if the pendulum of parental involvement in the school system may not have swung just a tad too far the other way. It opens the door to a minority of highly vocalized parents having enormous amounts of power. As a result of this, today’s school principal, at the very least, needs to have not only the courage to admit mistakes, but must be open to criticism, and yet be unafraid to march to a different step, if the wrong tune is playing.

In addressing the problem of possible dissident parental empowerment, it should be recognized that parents must learn to follow proper protocol, using their elected school council representatives to report and advance their concerns. Council representatives, in turn, must ensure that these parental matters are addressed. If this procedure is not followed, then the idea of school councils becomes only an abstraction, and the members, one and all, become mere figureheads.

To avoid the possibility of this new management system not functioning as it was designed, with genuine involvement of stakeholders, principals with a more traditional mindset can and must be aided, through training, to readjust their thinking (Black, 1998; Devos, Van den Broeck & Vanderheyden, 1998; Murphy, 1994; Ricciardi, 1997).

This training would include:

- Knowledge of organizational structures, leadership approaches and types of power, with specific reference to the leadership and power sharing needs of successful site-based management.

- Group training in school improvement processes, and new and innovative programs and ideas, with specific focus on learning organizations. This training would be synchronized with national curriculum guides and would address the needs of today’s educational global marketplace.

- Knowledge and skills to act as facilitators, enabling others to act, developing parallel leadership with staff and school council members, and inspiring a shared vision.

- Modeling best practices, good communication skills, encouraging and praising staff and school council members’ accomplishments are also invaluable in any school organizational setting.

- Training in power sharing, consensus decision making, conflict resolution, consultative processes, information sharing and dissemination are also considered essential for effective school councils.

Finally, school principals should recognize that the collaborative approach to leadership required for effective school councils is not innate and can be learned (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).
References


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**Author Notes**

*Lorraine Devereaux* is an educator in the Avalon East School District, Newfoundland, Canada. She has held both teacher and principal positions in that district, and has served as a representative on the Principals' Advisory Council for The Avalon East School Board. She has offered her services as School Council Consultant in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. She holds a B.A.Ed. and an M.Ed. Degree in Educational Leadership from Memorial University of Newfoundland and she has recently been accepted into an Ed.D. Program at the University of Toronto. Lorraine can be reached by e-mail at ldeverea@calvin.stemnet.nf.ca