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ABSTRACT
              Educational change is too complex and important ever
to be delegated entirely to federal agencies and to federally-funded
R&D centers and regional laboratories. Alternative agencies can and
do play a part in the larger scheme of research, development,
dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of innovations in education.
One such agency is the school study-development council, a group of
local school systems working voluntarily in loose confederation for
the purpose of solving defined educational problems that exist in the
member schools. Their three most important activities are inservice
training, cooperative research, and the sharing of information.
Councils have had their greatest success in the dissemination of
educational innovations, in making the school client system aware of
and interested in new ideas, thus helping them through the first two
stages toward the actual adoption of innovations. (Author/WM)

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THE VIABILITY OF
THE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: A VOLUNTARY EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AGENCY

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6.05 ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND UTILIZATION STRATEGIES

(Symposium, SIG/Research Utilization)

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The Elusive Change Agency in Education

Finally it is revealed, the shifting sands of educational change are controlled by the direction of the wind from Washington, or so it might seem if you read the December issue of Education Researcher (4,11), the inhouse publication of the American Educational Research Association. In that issue the future of the R & D Centers and the Regional Labs is portrayed rather starkly and the burden of uncertainty for the future of research, development, dissemination, diffusion, and adoption is unceremoniously shifted to the lap of the National Institute for Education.

The assumption is that N.I.E will now control the winds of change, not only the direction, but the velocity, force, turbulence, humidity, etc., all with success of course. If we in education were naive in our previous assumption that federally-funded R & D Centers and Regional Labs could do the job, are we also naive in our expectations for N.I.E.?

Educationists, if they are guilty of anything, are probably most deceived by the "grand theory" or "master plan" syndrome, the pervasive, but inexplicable mind set that a single solution can always be found for a complex problem.

The thesis projected in this paper is that alternative agencies can and do play a part in the larger scheme of research, development, dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of innovations in education; and furthermore, that educational change is too complex and important to ever be delegated entirely to federal agencies.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This paper deals with a specific type of education agency, the school

study-development council. To better understand the nature of this unique

type of organization, it might help to discuss the generic family of which

it is a part, that is, the larger set of voluntary educational cooperatives.

In 1971, Dr. Larry W. Hughes and Dr. C.M. Achilles (8) completed the final

report of a USOE funded study relative to educational cooperatives. That

report, entitled Interpretative Study of Research and Development Relative

to Educational Cooperatives, stands as the most complete study of its kind

to date. The Hughes-Achilles study attempted a definition of an educational

cooperative or consortia. They, like others, found it difficult to define.

What they derived instead was a number of general statements about the

concept. They indicate that an educational cooperative is much like a

consumer's cooperative. That is, it is started by the client system rather

than mandated from above. They go on to state: (8:4-5)

> An educational cooperative is a joint effort of two or more
> educational organizations which has as its purpose change and
> innovation in education, and to enlarge the scope, quality and
> assessability of programs and services in education. An educa-
> tional cooperative is built upon an exchange system; it is a
> voluntary, mutually rewarding system. An educational cooperative
> allows each of its units to remain independent, is permissive in
> its operation, works toward comprehensive change, provides a cost-
> effectiveness ratio somewhat lower than an individual unit would
> have if it were working alone, and is primarily interested in
> developmental aspects of education and programs. In a voluntary
> educational cooperative, employees are not full-time members of
> a standard political unit. such as the local school unit. One
> goal of a cooperative is to provide clients access to certain
> features of quality education through the pooling and extending
> of resources. An educational cooperative is generally thought of

as a system within a defined region, containing a number
of contiguious (although not necessarily so) independent
school districts which develop and share educational
resources through the use of such things as communications
media, mobile facilities, joint research and development
activities, and computer and data processing technology.
The educational cooperative and multidistrict confederation
provides the conceptual and organizational framework for
local school systems to increase their capabilities to
produce quality education.... (It) provides structure for
the joint solution of interdistrict and interstate educa-
tional problems. It also promotes wide-spread dialogue
among professional educators and the wider intellectual
community. The educational cooperative is a confederation
of autonomous school systems whereby each retains local
control.... (and) is not merely a service center or service
unit. It is a process which integrates cooperating schools
as its components. It is not a consolidation of a few
school districts, but a creation of them.

Within this explanation of a cooperative lies the school study-develop-

ment council, which can best be defined as a group of local school systems

working together usually (but not necessarily) under the sponsorship of an

institution of higher education with the purpose of solving defined educa-

tional problems that exist in the member schools. It is typically a loose

confederation with totally voluntary membership. The first formal council

was formed in 1942 under the direction of Paul Mort, Teachers College,

Columbia University. Initially composed of twenty-eight school systems in

the metropolitan New York area, it was and is yet called The Metropolitan

School Study Council. Since 1942 the number of school/development councils

has grown to eighty-one. Fifty-one percent are a product of the decade of

the 60's and ten have been formed in the 70's. Some councils encompass large

georgraphical areas; others are quite small, for example, the Associated Public

School System includes public school systems across the entire nation, whereas

the Western New York School Study Council has members in one region of New

York state. The New England School Development Council has member schools

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in the six New England states. The Tri-State School Study Council has
member systems from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, whereas the
Public Schools for Cooperative Research Council includes only certain
schools in the eastern portion of Tennessee. School study councils also
vary in size. The largest regional study council, the New England School
Development Council, reports a membership of 249 public school systems.
The smallest, the Fox Valley School Study Council, reported thirteen
public school systems on its membership roster. More than one-half of the
school study/development councils serve a combination of school districts
with a student population in excess of 150,000 students. Less than fifteen
percent of the councils serve school districts making up a total student
population of less than 30,000.

The multicounty region is the most frequently reported service area.
Danenburg (3) stated that more than one-half of the councils in his study
reported several counties as the geographic area served. One-fourth of
the councils reported serving one state and a very small number of councils
(3.9%) reported serving several states. A few councils mentioned single
cities or suburban areas as their service district.

Distinguishing Characteristics of School Study/Development Councils
Organizational Structure

Councils are controlled in nearly all instances by governing boards
or executive committees. The typical staff of a council is composed of
an executive director, part-time consultants from a university, and other
assistants. In most instances the executive director is employed part-
time by the council and part-time by a sponsoring college or university.

Sponsoring Institutions

The typical council was initiated and sponsored by an institution of higher education. This relationship is one of mutual reward. Colleges and universities utilize the study development council as a vehicle for fulfilling a public service mission. And public school systems utilize the council as a linkage system to research and developmental activities.

Financial Resources

The principal source of income for councils has been through the assessed membership fees from member school districts and monies for incoming services from sponsoring institutions. Many councils also report state and federal sources of income.

Types of Populations Served

A mixed population area (urban-suburban-rural) is the typical setting for a council. More than one-third of all study councils fall into that classification as do the most "successful" ones, according to Babel's (1) study.

Activities of School Study/Development Councils

The three most important activities of study councils are inservice training, cooperative research and the sharing of information (3). In his study, Danenburg secured a listing of activities according to importance. Inservice education ranked first. Dissemination and developmental activity ranked second and third, respectively. Although councils generally are the sole sponsor of activities for member school districts, a unique strength of the councils has been their ability to cooperate in the co-sponsoring of many activities.

Even though the range of involvement of school/development councils includes research, development, dissemination and diffusion activities, recent studies indicate that the preponderance of activities lie within the dissemination realm. Dissemination activities are usually manifest in the form of programs that build awareness and/or inservice education programs that center on diffusing R & D packages. Councils disseminate ideas through meetings, workshops, published reports, conference proceedings, newsletters and journals. In Danenburg's study, councils perceived they were most effective in the areas of inservice education, dissemination and gathering information and least effective in research, diffusion and evaluation.

A Period of Uncertainty

Since the advent of state and federal aid to education, a number of people have prophesized the demise of study/development councils. Typical of these predictions was Brickell's early comment in Organizing New York State for Educational Change (2). In that 1961 publication, Brickell said:

> The councils seem to be one fragment of an answer to a large problem --- a fragment which tells much about what local school systems need from outside agencies, but a fragment which cannot meet the needs. In a statewide reorganization of the process of instructional change, it should be replaced with a more complete answer.

It is of interest to note that now, thirteen years later, most of the study councils that existed in New York state at the time of the Brickell statement continue to exist even though the public school systems in the state are being financially pressed into using the services of the regional BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) cooperatives.

It is of further interest to note that since Brickell made his statement (and after billions of dollars have been poured into states by the

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federal government) fifty-six new study-development councils have emerged on the national scene.

Why Do They Persist?

Ultimately, the question must be raised, "What factors can possibly account for the continued existence and proliferation of study/development councils?" Unfortunately, conclusive research does not exist to answer that question and thus we can only deduce from existing studies and the literature on change and change agencies, possible clues that might provide an explanation. The following deductions are speculative. By comparison and inference, an explanatory set of factors will be projected.

Everett Rogers, in <u>Diffusion of Innovations</u>, (9) synthesizes pertinent multi-disciplinary studies to derive the concept that the adoption of an innovation takes place in stages. He postulates that the potential adopter of a new idea must in some way proceed through each of those stages before adoption finally takes place. The stages proposed are: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and finally adoption. Both the Hughes-Achilles and the Danenburg studies suggest that councils have had their greatest sucess in making the school client system aware and interested in new ideas, thus helping them through the first two stages. Furthermore, they indicate that councils often provide a threat-free environment where new ideas can be evaluated and "tried out."

Rogers further generalizes that early adopters of innovations exhibit different kinds of communication behavior than late adopters. He indicates that the presence of impersonal sources, cosmopolitan sources, closer contacts, and more sources characterize earlier adopter's behavior. Studies of councils indicate these conditions are provided by the university personnel who are a part of the council consortium.

In a section on opinion leaders and the flow of ideas, Rogers promotes

the concept of the interaction effect and stresses the importance of personal

influence. Brickell spoke partially to this point when he said:

> The chief function of the councils has been to increase
> communication among member school systems by arranging meet-
> ings, publishing bulletins, organizing study committees of
> teachers and carrying out statistical studies. They have
> undoubtedly reduced the insularity of their members.

In many respects it appears that the university personnel in the council

structure play the same role as the Cooperative Extension Agent does between

the Experimental Station and the farm client system, although admittedly

that role has not been formalized to any great extent.

In a more recent book, Communication of Innovations, Rogers makes

another interesting and relevant point. In the section called, "Change

Agency versus Client Orientation," he suggests the following generalization

based on an analysis of research studies (10:237). "Generalization 7-2:

Change agent success is positively related to his client orientation, rather

than to change agency orientation." Although many education consortia

(change agencies) utilize input from the client system, few formal agencies

other than councils seem to exhibit the client system orientation implied

in the above generalization. Councils, by their nature, locate the power

for action within the client system. Although the change agent (executive

secretary) may come from either the client system or the university, the

governing boards are made up entirely of clients, hence client interests

are paramount. Often other change agencies (or agents) appear to have

little regard for the expressed needs of the client system, taking instead

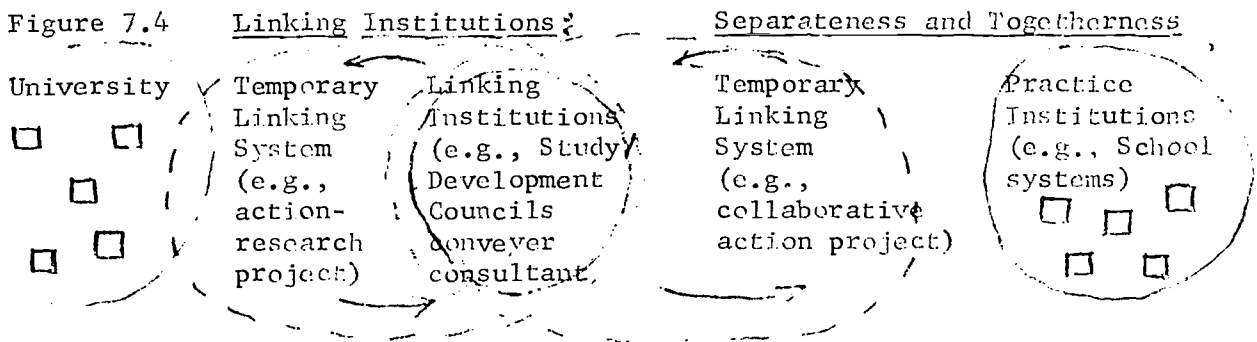a rather missionary or paternalistic attitude toward them.

Somewhat more recently, Havelock and his associates in Planning for

Innovation (7) derived a similar synthesis of research findings on the

dissemination and utilization of education innovations. Of particular
interest is their identification of seven factors which seem to account
for most dissemination and utilization phenomena. Utilizing their concept
of: linkage, structure, openness, capacity, reward, proximity and synergy,
one can construct a framework against which an educational organization
dedicated to promoting "change" could be examined.

According to Hughes and Achilles, councils, although they report a
wide range of programs, have been most successful in activities that lie
within the dissemination realm. To what extent do councils provide for
the factors enumerated above?

Linkage -- Linkage refers to the number, variety, and mutuality of
resource system-user system contacts, the degree of interrelatedness and
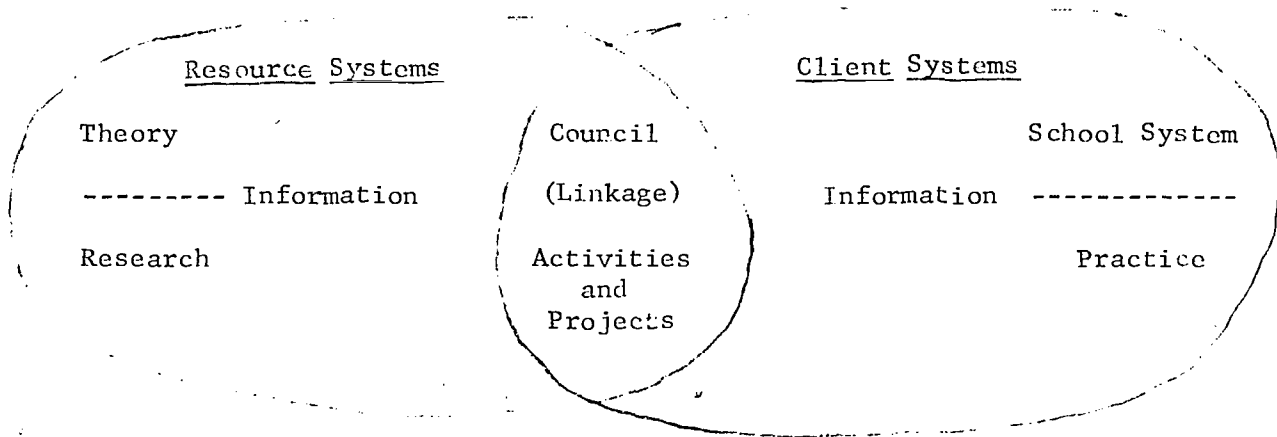the collaborative relationships.

Taken at face value the previously mentioned studies of councils indi-
cate that councils do exhibit behavior that serves the linkage function.
With little difficulty one can easily insert councils in Havelock's
Figure 7.4 on Pages 7-35 of Planning for Innovation. (7)

Figure 7.4   Linking Institutions: Separateness and Togetherness

University   Temporary   Linking   Temporary   Practice
             Linking   Institutions   Linking   Institutions
             System   (e.g., Study   System   (e.g., School
             (e.g.,   Development   (e.g.,   systems)
             action-   Councils   collaborative
             research   conveyer   action project)
             project)   consultant

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Structure -- Structure refers to the degree of systematic organization
and coordination that exists between the client and the resource system.
Unfortunately, in education there are few organizations or agencies that
can even remotely claim to perform this function. Even the Regional
Laboratories and Centers seem to fall short when measured on "systematic
organization and coordination."

An "if and then" proposition might be the only measure applicable for
any organization at the present time.

If universities are viewed as viable education resource systems,

Then university-sponsored councils have attempted to provide a syste-
matic organized structure for helping to process knowledge into practice
through planned activities and projects.

Resource Systems

Theory
--------- Information
Research

Council
(Linkage)
Activities
and
Projects

Client Systems

School System
Information ------------
Practice

(please bear in mind that councils do not claim to be the only educa-
tion consortium that attempts to provide structure between a resource system
and a client system, but they have been consciously making the attempt for
a longer sustained period of time than most).

Openness -- Openness refers to readiness to give and receive new information. For councils openness is illustrated by both the formal and informal services it provides for its client system. For the public schools it is characterized by the continued expectation they have that tneir membership will provide rewarding new ideas, products and ways of doing things. Garber (6) in his study, found that the "sharing of information" was listed first among council activities.

Capacity -- Capacity refers to the ability to retrieve and marshall diverse resources. In addition to the resources available to school districts through ..uncil/university connections, many councils maintain working relationships with State Departments of Education, Regional Education Laboratories, Research and Development Centers, industry, and federal government as well as other councils. They are also served by their own National School Development Council, Inc., a voluntary non-profit education association that serves as a connecting link to many other resources.

Reward -- Reward refers to the benefits derived by each member of a social system, through the interaction that takes place. That reward/reinforcement does take place in council activities is best attested to be school systems' willingness to invest in membership during the past thirty years. This record is even more remarkable when one considers that by and large the council relationships are devoid of monetary inducements.

Proximity -- Proximity refers to the closeness and ready access of resources and client systems to one another. Proximity refers not only to physical factors, but also to organizational linkage structures and to the perceived closeness and access that the system members feel.

Perhaps the size of councils, the similarity of their interests and their regional nature helps account for the proximity that exists; or it

may be the fact that so many activities take place out in the client system. A third possibility and one seldom present in other organizations, is the fact that councils have as their very reason for existing the solution of problems defined by the client system itself.

Synergy -- Like Havelock we have trouble with the concept of synergy because of the looseness of the fit of the term. However, quoting from his manuscript, (7:11-30):

> Successful utilization usually seems to require persistent leadership in the resource system. There must be some nuclear group pulling together diverse resources, structuring them and developing and executing strategies for their effective dissemination and utilization, and doing so on a continuing basis ---- the user can hardly ever be induced to adopt an innovation on the basis of one message from one source at one time. He almost always needs repeated inputs in a variety of media over an extended time from a variety of sources before he will become an adopter.

The studies of councils previously mentioned all take note of the variety of medium, messages and utilized channels that bear some relationship to the synergistic concept as stated above. Meetings, workshops, newsletters, journals, study groups, research reports, conference proceedings, project groups etc. are the traditional forte of the councils.

Havelock goes on to say, (7:11-31):

> The seven factors listed above seem to account for the bulk of D & U phenomena studied to date, but there are many other important variables, which perhaps deserve to be rated as 'factors' also. A few of these which come immediately to mind are 'FAMILIARITY,' 'PRIMACY,' 'STATUS' and 'VALUE LOADING.'

In terms of change agency organizations, perhaps none is more familiar to the school systems of this country than the councils. A thirty-year history of councils virtually assures the accuracy of that statement. Furthermore, the fact that many administrators have had actual contact with the organization at the university in which they received their training also serves to familiarize them with the concept.

If _primacy_ or "being first" does seem to have inordinate weight in human affairs as suggested, councils as opposed to more recent education organizations may have another built-in advantage.

Status -- as Havelock points out, may be a factor, but it seems also to be an ambivalent one. Just as "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" so perhaps is status. At the very least it seems to be situational.

Value -- Finally, in regard to value, Havelock states:

> Values are the basic stop-and-go signals for human behavior. They presumably lay down the patterns or limits within which people feel free to send and receive knowledge. This suggests that messages which clearly contradict pre-existing values will not get anywhere, and those which are appealing to them will get far. It also suggests that a perception of _shared_ values will bring resource and user systems together and the perceptions of disparate values will drive them apart. Even the medium may have some value loading (as when we reject new ideas because someone has tried to order to legislate their adoption.)

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing characteristics of councils is the common value system that they all appear to share. It is best summed up by Mort's original declaration of intent for councils that by "pooling and sharing" school districts and universities could best solve educational problems.

To the above we could add _credibility_ as a factor. Rogers (10:244) states, "credibility is the degree to which a communication source or channel is perceived as trustworthy and competent by the receiver." Again, although the data is deductive, a survey conducted by the National School Development Council, Inc. in 1969 indicated that thirty-three of eighty-one councils served a total of 1,207 school districts composed of 340,802 professional staff teaching 6,680,695 students. It is significant that each of these school districts demonstrates its continuing faith in councils each year by paying membership dues.

POST SCRIPT

Drucker (5:364) in The Age of Discontinuity, when discussing the

politics of knowledge states:

> Diversity, flexibility, and competition will become
> more important in respect to knowledge, the more knowledge
> becomes basic to society. This will also raise major
> political decisions on knowledge and will make it increas-
> ingly necessary to have alternatives of knowled~ policy.
>
> In the past, knowledge required little money. Today
> it requires more and more. In fact, it requires so much
> that only government can supply it. This immediately
> raises the question of government dictation and thought
> control. In the United States, government today supports
> about two-thirds of all research work. In the rest of
> the free world the proportion is not much less, though
> the total amounts are. And, of course, in the communist
> countries, government support~ all research. But can we
> expect government to pay the piper without calling the
> tune? And is government control of the acquisition of
> knowledge compatible with a free society? Is it even in
> the best interest of knowledge?

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EPILOGUE

I realize that for the typical "researcher" the inferences set forth
in the preceding section will not be viewed as "compelling evidence," nor
must they be. In an era where performance is the byword, the epilogue is
important. Today a number of councils around the country are engaged in
one of the most unique consortium experiences involving one of the most
complex educational innovations conceived to date. Local councils, their
national organization (NSDC), The General Learning Corporation (a private
education industry) and The Center for Advanced Study of Educational
Administration (CASEA) have embarked on a joint effort to research,
develop, disseminate, diffuse and install a version of P.P.B.S. in member
school districts. The innovation called SPECS (School, Planning, Evaluation,
Communication System) will provide yet another test of the viability of
councils. Lest the reader assume this consortium could be caught in the
same trap as the labs and centers, let me hasten to say such will not be
the case, for in the final analysis it will be the council's client system,
as always, that will accept or reject the innovation, not a panel of USOE
evaluators.

Paul Mort is well remembered for his contention that it is the adapt-
able school districts that are on the cutting edge; for thirty years that
has been the byword and forte of the councils and little evidence has
accumulated to prove the councils wrong.