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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to sketch some emerging patterns of relationships growing out of the mutual desire of state departments of education, school districts, and research and development agencies to bring improvement and innovation to the schools. Two unpublished reports were used in preparing this paper. The first describes Research for Better Schools's relationships with nine different state agencies during 1971-73 and documents what states had done in the way of bringing research and development innovations to the schools. The second report summarizes the results of a questionnaire mailed to 116 state education administrators from 36 states during the latter part of 1973. In order to provide a base on which these emerging patterns can be examined, four types of findings have been selected: (1) some general characteristics of state departments of education, (2) some specific directions that states seem to be taking, (3) some ways in which states directly support innovation in schools, and (4) some state agency experiences with research and development agencies. Three patterns of interagency relationships are presented in order to describe linkage models that have been built to provide possible features of future relationships. (Author/IRT)

LINKAGE MODELS FOR DISSEMINATION AND DIFFUSION

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INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 1966, Research for Better Schools (RBS) has been concerned with support systems needed to help school districts adopt, implement and, ultimately, diffuse classroom improvements. Today all levels of the educational superstructure in some way share this broad concern.

There are two kinds of criteria continually employed by the more vocal to flagellate the educational profession. The first is the cry for producing significant student outcomes. Why, critics ask, do educational programs consistently produce the dreaded N.S.D.? While our work at RBS has provided some tentative answers to this question, they are not the focus of this paper. Instead it will dwell on a second failing of our profession -- the failure of educational innovations to achieve widespread usage.

It is our belief that education must meet both criteria if it is to be viewed once again as a profession capable of leadership and initiative; that is, we must not only develop better ways of meeting student needs but must also engineer effective methods for getting these developments into schools. When the Congress recently cut NIE's funding request, it was implying that both criteria would have to be met before increased levels of funding would be forthcoming.

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Research methodology and research discipline suggest that theory should precede the data gathering and generalization processes. On the other hand, it can be argued that careful, unobtrusive study of present practices will sometimes allow definition of the terrain under investigation. There is a middle ground between theoretical application and empiricism, one which J. Myron Atkin recommends* as a potential strategy for future research. Atkin calls this middle ground "practice-oriented inquiry." We call it "educational engineering." The approach assumes that existing theory is fragmented or insufficiently validated (and thus not theory at all). It assumes further that present practice is incapable of meeting its own needs; consequently, unobtrusive/empirical study of practice is not likely to yield much of value. As a consequence, an investigator may find it reasonable to go to the practitioner, armed with some clear notions about better practice, and hope that together they can eke out and synthesize what it takes to improve present practice. This is the approach we have taken.

In 1971, RBS initiated three activities to enhance its understanding of how classroom R&D innovations are implemented and utilized by schools. These activities were:

1. Formation of a Network of School Districts, in which participating districts adopted and implemented classroom innovations developed by RBS. This function was staffed

*J. Myron Atkin, "Practice-Oriented Inquiry: A Third Approach to Research in Education," Educational Researcher, July, 1973, pp. 3-4.

by a team of RBS "field consultants" who provided assistance to the schools in the adoption-implementation process.

2. Initiation of a continuing study of the circumstances under which state departments of education supported R&D innovations. This function was staffed by a team of RBS representatives who worked with state level administrators to create relationships that would support the diffusion of innovations.

3. Development of training materials to help school district administrators articulate their own strategies for planned change. A staff of experienced developers and an inventory of teacher training materials (specific to each classroom innovation) already existed but were changed in focus to relate administrative training to classroom innovation.

In 1972, these activities were organized under the Administering for Change Program (ACP) of RBS. ACP's mission is to focus, coordinate, and integrate its resources on the problems of bringing specific classroom changes to the schools. In this paper the authors examine some of what was learned from working with the states over a three year period.

METHODOLOGY

Two unpublished RBS reports were used in preparing this paper. The first report describes RBS' relationships with nine different state agencies from 1971-73. The purpose of this report was to document what states had done in the way of bringing R&D innovations to their schools, with primary attention to RBS' innovations. A blend of narrative and case study, each account is based in part on anecdotal records main-

tained by RBS representatives during 1971-73 and in part on detailed interviews conducted by them in 1973.

The second report summarizes the results of a questionnaire mailed to 116 state education administrators from 36 states during the latter part of 1973. Sixty-four respondents returned completed questionnaires, with at least one respondent from each of the 36 states. The typical respondent had been with his or her organization from three to ten years; had worked in state curriculum, planning, or Federal program divisions; and belonged to second or third line management.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Our objective from this point forward is to sketch some emerging patterns of relationships among state departments of education, school districts and R&D agencies growing out of their mutual desire to bring improvement and innovation to the schools.

In order to provide a base upon which these emerging patterns can be examined, we have selected four types of findings: (1) some general characteristics of state departments of education, (2) some specific directions that states seem to be taking, (3) some ways in which states directly support innovations in schools, and (4) some state agency experiences with R&D agencies.

Some general characteristics

Analysis of nearly three years of anecdotal records and intensive

personal interviews revealed certain commonalities among state educational agencies.

1. State education agencies are highly dependent on state legislatures as a source of initiative for change.

2. They are subject to frequent reorganization for the purpose of clarifying existing functions or adding new functions. This situation has been exacerbated by the influx of Federal funds, especially ESEA.

3. They do not have clearly defined roles to guide their relationships with school districts.

4. Chief State School Officers tend to be isolated somewhat from day-to-day operations of their agencies.

5. Largely because of the transience of Chief State School Officers, there is an accumulation of decision-making power at middle management levels.

Some specific directions

Analysis of the nine-state report suggests some specific functional interests and activities of the states with regard to the dissemination and diffusion of innovations.

1. There is considerable emphasis on defining and implementing various concepts of accountability. This has frequently been in response to legislative mandate, although, to be fair such mandates often result from the persistent efforts of the state agency staff who work with key legislators.

2. The state agencies attach, at the present time, considerable priority to the areas of early childhood education, special education, career education, and various kinds of training.

3. State agencies are providing more in the way of direct services to the school districts. In some states this is being fostered through intermediate agencies established by legislation and in others through continued funding of former ESEA Title III centers. Title V ESEA has enabled many state agencies to upgrade existing or create new divisions of planning and/or program development. While the apparent intent of Title V was to strengthen the internal management of state agencies, Title V funds have been used essentially to create add-on departments which, in many instances, have initiated activities directly supportive of innovation in schools.

4. State agencies are interested in quality demonstration of new products and practices but seem unwilling to act as advocates for specific innovations. They are, however, willing to advocate specific process, e.g., open classroom, individualized instruction.

5. ESEA Title III is now administered by some state agencies so as to promote curriculum development at the school level, and dissemination and diffusion of these developments.

Some direct support for innovation

Tabulated results from the questionnaires completed by state agency administrators revealed the following patterns of response:

1. Forty-nine respondents (76%) indicated that their agency staff is currently used to develop classroom products for schools.

2. When these same individuals were asked to specify the nature of the products developed, they responded as follows:

   -- student learning materials - 36

   -- teacher training materials - 43

   -- principal training materials - 17

   -- central office training materials - 14

3. When these same respondents were asked why these products were developed, they answered:

   -- state mandate - 19

   -- internal agency initiative - 38

   -- school district requests - 32

   -- availability of Federal funds - 28

   -- availability of special state funds - 14

4. Thirty-two respondents indicated that their agencies regularly review innovations produced by R&D agencies for potential use in schools in the state. Twenty-eight of these same individuals indicated that the results of these reviews are disseminated to schools.

5. When these same individuals were asked about the dissemination methods used, they responded as follows:

   -- conferences and presentations - 46

   -- state agency field staff - 40

   -- newsletters and bulletins - 40

   -- ERIC - 34

   -- brochures on specific products - 31

   -- funding through ESEA, NDEA or other Federal grant programs - 27

   -- state lists of approved materials - 17

   -- special state funding - 16

6. Fifty-one respondents indicated that their agencies help schools to identify a range of available innovations.

7. Forty-nine respondents indicated that their agencies help schools to select appropriate innovations.

8. Fifty-one respondents indicated that their state agencies help school districts implement new programs.

9. When asked whether state staff provided training for school district personnel, 38 indicated that training was provided for central office administrators, 45 indicated that training was provided for teachers.

10. Twenty-nine respondents indicated that their agencies had a unit responsible for coordinating the introduction of classroom products developed by the staff of the state agency into schools.

11. Twenty-nine respondents indicated that their agencies coordinate evaluation activities that assess the usefulness of innovations being implemented in state schools.

Some R&D linkage findings

1. Fifty-one respondents indicated that R&D agencies initiated contact with their agencies. Reasons for these contacts were varied but included: seeking information about the state or schools, seeking information about state needs, trying to get their R&D innovations used in the state, seeking funds, seeking use of R&D innovations within the state agency itself, and offering technical help to the state agency.

2. Fifty-four respondents indicated that their agencies initiated contact with R&D agencies. Principle reasons for these contacts included: expressing interest in the R&D agency's products, seeking help for school districts, discussing funding for a state initiative, and seeking technical advice or help for the state agency.

3. When asked how the state responded to an R&D agency's interest in introducing its R&D products into schools, 17 respondents recalled 22 positive state agency responses, one negative response, and 28 non-responses.

4. When asked whether R&D agencies introduced their products into the state without contacting the state agency, 41 respondents indicated that they did. When asked about state agency reaction, there were 27 positive responses reported, 9 negative and 7 no definite reaction.

5. Thirty-five respondents indicated that R&D agencies have introduced innovations into school districts in cooperation with the state agency. In all, 12 R&D agencies were named as participating in such joint efforts.

6. When asked if they considered the approach used in the questionnaire to be an appropriate way to explore the problem of introducing innovation into schools, 39 respondents indicated "yes" and 10 indicated "no".

Evolving patterns

While the term "model" has several connotations, it is used in this paper to describe a pattern of inter-agency relationships -- more specifically, those relationships between a state department, some schools and an R&D agency.

It is hoped that the information presented earlier in this paper will serve to clarify relationship patterns which now exist and others which will continue to emerge. The three patterns now to be presented are only examples selected from RBS' experiences. Sketching them should serve two purposes: (1) to describe linkage models which have been built, and (2) to profile possible features of future relationships.

Model A

-- Funding: Title III ESEA, school district funds.

-- Sites: Several schools within one school district.

-- Training: Workshops conducted by R&D agency.

-- Other assistance to schools: Monitoring implementation by R&D agency.

-- Evaluation: State agency.

-- Dissemination: State agency.

-- Diffusion: Key sites around state to demonstrate innovation to other educators.

Model B

-- Funding: State agency funds, school district funds.

-- Sites: One demonstration/training school in the state.

-- Training: Workshops conducted by principals using training materials developed by R&D agency. Principal trains teachers.

-- Other assistance to schools: Monitoring implementation by R&D agency.

-- Evaluation: State agency.

-- Dissemination: State agency.

-- Diffusion: State agency encourages other schools around state to adopt innovation.

Model C

-- Funding: ESEA Title III, school district funds.

-- Sites: One school already using R&D classroom product - asked to adapt it to a management system developed by another R&D agency.

-- Training: Special planning and consideration among R&D agency, state and school district about to modify and adapt the two innovations. Monitoring implementation by R&D agency.

-- Other assistance to school: Continued assistance by state agency staff and initial R&D agency staff.

-- Evaluation: State agency and school district.

-- Dissemination: State agency and special centers that were former Title III units.

-- Diffusion: Through special centers.

SUMMARY

State departments of education are in the process of reformulating initiatives and reshaping directions. Many states are now organized to provide services in support of their own developmental activities as well as those of the R&D agencies. Many other new kinds of relationships between the state agencies and the R&D agencies are emerging.

Three relationship models were described. Many other patterns could have been sketched and are possible. Even among the patterns described, elements of one model could be substituted for elements of another.

In the case of linkage models, practice-oriented inquiry would appear to offer a viable approach for research about dissemination and diffusion practice. Tools of such inquiry are crude at present, but the potential yield is promising. The identification of a series of feasible linkage models for dissemination and diffusion could provide important answers for educators concerned with getting improvements to the classroom users.