Synthesis Paper

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The reason I wanted to take this course was to learn more about the exciting

initiatives that our current Liberal government was undertaking in BC. British Columbia

is facing a new type of reform, one that shifts the power from the central office more to

the schools. The handling of the budget, developing school goals, creating school

planning councils, initiating principal led teacher supervision, and the creation of a

'report a bad teacher' hotline are all part of this reform. Site based management has been

very successful in many parts of the country, especially Alberta. As such, the BC

government went as far as hiring Emery Dosdall, a pioneer in the site-based management

(SBM) in the Edmonton area. My experience thus far has with the process has not been a

good one. I find that the hidden agenda that our current Liberal government leads

undermines the SBM process. Their aggressive tactics in wiping out their union rival is

all so transparent. Their tactics of playing one faction against another (teachers versus

teacher, teachers versus parents, teachers versus administration) has a negative effect that

goes against the reason why site based management is set up in the first place. When you

have three parents and only one teacher sitting in school planning council, it shows a lack

of respect for those who actually work in the school. Moreover, when you create a

system where tattle tailing prevails over collegiality, it only creates a dysfunctional

organization that has everyone looking over his or her backs. This does not promote trust

nor create a school culture that improves the school.

What struck me most about site-based management was how the simplest thing of

deciding on a name and defining it triggers such emotions in people. Some prefer to call

it site based others call it shared based. Some people call it management others call it

decision making others even call it leadership. Some prefer to call those involved

stakeholders others call them shareholders. This illustrates that even words can trigger

power issue amongst people. Hence, our own reality tunnels. Our reality tunnel as

leaders is not merely a look into our sub-conscious to determine why and how we

respond to other people. It determines what we perceive as fear, which in turn will

eliminate it. When we better understand our own comfort levels, we begin to truly

understand how to work with other people. When emotional issues such as the finding a

suitable word arises we know not to get in a tizzy because we have learned that it does

little to promote the process or ourselves. Only when we truly understand ourselves will

our emotions not stand in the way of progress. This is not to say that the leader is the

most important person in SBM. However, as the CEO of a school, how a leader reacts to

certain situation can escalate or deescalate a situation. Spark (2003) notes:

> Leaders can influence what is discussed and how things are
> discussed. When leaders speak with honesty, clarity
> regarding assumptions and intentions, possibility, and
> accountability, they empower themselves and others in way
> that produce the results they desire. Such language adds
> purpose, joy, and energy not only to the work of leaders,
> but also to the lives of everyone whom they interact.

SBM is an exciting initiative. What a better idea to have the people that work at a

school to decide what works or doesn't work for them. Transferring the power from a

centralized location gives ownership to those involved and promotes pride in an

organization. Even with the best leadership, SBM requires a well thought out committee

structure where everyone knows his or her roles and responsibilities (David, 1996).

Forming different committees to look into issues that relate to each faction divides up the

work and makes it more relevant. Once these issues are discussed, it can then be tabled

or better yet decided on. Creating such committee structures expedites things. We have

all sat in meetings where unrelated issues have been brought up or that solutions were

ignored because other issues held them up. SBM should not be onerous otherwise

nobody would want to participate. SBM requires an enabling style of leadership that

invites this kind of behaviour (David, 1996). This is where leaders are leading, but not

really physically leading. They put trust in how SBM is implemented. This was an

important aspect that other students who have taken this course have told me. They

informed me of how the process might seem chaotic at first; however, they emphatically

denounced that this process is for the best. Without conflict, there would not be progress.

Reading the report from each of the schools was an eye opener, either these school teams

genuinely had the same viewpoints or they were just very polite. Other than the

communication problems that are a constant hindrance in online group work, both groups

seemed to plough through the process with little difficulty even with the time constraint.

Working in teams is a common theme in SBM and these two groups did it well even in

these challenging situations. In our MED journey, we have learned the intricacies of

working online. Online group work is a suitable environment to hone our leadership

skills. Not only does one need to be cooperative, making one's views known requires

assertive but delicate penmanship.

When all shareholders are focused in improving a school, it makes for an easier

journey. Even in a 4-week course, students who essentially had no previous knowledge

of SBM, created models that would work in a real school. However, what differentiates

these people from shareholders in school? Is it because they wanted to succeed, 'an A+

does pave a partial road to a doctorate program' or is it because they genuinely wanted to

be better than the status quo. SBM is not for the weak. It requires persistence and a

long-term commitment. Teachers, parents, community leader, business leaders, students,

administrators, and district administrators are all shareholders in this model. They

require consistent curricular guidance in how the SBM operates. Effective leaders who

implement SBM with success will find an increase the skills and satisfaction of all those

involved. "Such leaders also create school wide ownership of the improvement agenda

so that principal turnover or a change in council membership does not bring efforts to a

halt" (David, 1996). The greatest satisfaction yet is that if all the essential conditions that

are a part of SBM are there, it perpetuates 'effortless action'. Hoff (1993, p157) explains

this best: "When a stream comes to some stones in its path, it doesn't struggle to remove

them, or fight against them, or think about them. It just goes around them. And as it

does, it sings. Water responds to 'what's there' with effortless action."

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