

# Restructuring and Renewal: Capturing the Power of Democracy

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*Allen and Glickman begin Part 2 of this section of the Handbook by examining restructuring and renewal as strategies of educational change. They draw on their own experience of establishing and working with The League of Professional Schools in order to do so. Schools belonging to this league commit to "a belief in the powers of democracy to guide school restructuring in order to bring about on-going school renewal that focussed on students." Changing the governance of the school to more shared, democratic forms is regarded as one fundamental way of enacting this belief.*

*Allen and Glickman describe The League of Professional Schools and provide research evidence on its processes and effects as a form of school restructuring. Developing trust, creating understanding through action-research, and building a vision together characterize some of the core aspects of League school activities. Allen and Glickman flush out what these things mean in practice, and analyze the obstacles and difficulties that schools encountered and sometimes overcome when they tried to convert them into reality.*

Successful school change efforts recognize that simply changing the organization or structure of schools isn't sufficient to bring about meaningful change. The hearts and minds of the people in schools ultimately dictate what happens in classrooms, not changes in policies or procedures.

Sarason (1995) places teachers at the center of school change when he points out that if teachers are not provided stimulating conditions that nurture their growth and learning, they will not be able to create rich learning environments for their students. Peterson, McCarthy, & Elmore (1996) in studying efforts that go beyond tinkering and result in changes in classrooms, conclude that before instruction is affected, teachers' must become a part of a community of learners that shares a common vision of what could be for students and is continuously seeking to develop new skills and understandings to bring that vision to life. Gitlin, Bringhurst, Burns, Cooley, Myers, Price, Russell, & Tiess (1992), relate the experiences of one of the authors, a 6th grade teacher, "The empowerment for which I so longed in my profession and my life was within me. That is not to say there

were and are no structural barriers, but as I addressed the self-imposed restrictions, the other barriers were more clearly defined and understood" (p. 93). Finally, Fullan (1992) simply states "[that] teacher development and school development are very intimately related" (p. 24).

If building the capacity of the people in schools is central to schoolwide change, then the question becomes, How does a school go about such a task? Simply put, the answer is to govern according to the foundational aspects of public education and democracy. As Jefferson wrote:

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their decision.

(Wagoner, 1989, p. 1)

Democracy is predicated on philosophical and psychological assumptions about humans; specifically, that every individual as an active, curious learner who – given information, materials, and directions – will be able to utilize learning in meaningful ways: to see connections, to discover applications, and to participate with others (Dewey, 1916; Glickman, in press; Snauwaert, 1993).

High performance on the part of both students and teachers is found in schools that use their organizational structures of shared governance, site-based decision making, and action research to infuse democracy throughout their normal, routine activities – including staffing, scheduling, curriculum, student placement, assessment, discipline, staff development, and involvement with parents and community (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Aiken, 1942).

## THE LEAGUE OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

The mission statement of the League of Professional Schools reflects a belief in the power of democracy to guide school restructuring in order to bring about on-going school renewal that is focused on students: "To Promote the school as a learning community that is democratic, professional, and student-oriented." Bringing this mission statement to life has profound implications for how schools deliver instruction; how schools are governed; how leadership is defined; what roles students and teachers assume in classrooms, the school, and the larger community; and what role district personnel, parents, and community members play in the life of the school.

What have we learned about what happens when schools move from following hierarchical decision-making procedures to following democratic procedures where the governance concerning teaching and learning is shared and informed by each school's own research efforts? What are the characteristics of this type of schoolwide change that can be identified, studied, and understood in such a way as to be helpful to other schools wanting to make similar changes?

Since the mid 1980's, staff of the University of Georgia's Program for School