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UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL CHANGE TO FACILITATE PREVENTION: A STUDY OF CHANGE IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to describe the benefits of employing grounded theory in facilitating primary prevention in schools. In order to do this, we review the main tenets of grounded theory, illustrate how its methodology works, and offer a research example of its application to the study of school change. The research example describes an investigation of the dynamics of change within a high school as perceived by members of the school's community. The information gathered from interview/focus group participants was combined with the work of a school-based committee and the relevant literature to generate a grounded theory of successful school change. The theory integrates a number of factors under three superordinate categories of school change: (a) community ownership, (b) attention to human factors, and (c) proper implementation.

The main purpose of this paper is to describe the benefits of employing a grounded theory approach to primary prevention in schools. In order to do this, we review the main tenets of grounded theory, illustrate how its methodology works, and offer a research example of its application to the study of school change. Although there are numerous school-based preventive interventions reported in the literature, only very few adopt a grounded theory approach (for a rare exception see Fine & Vanderslice, 1992). We discuss here not only the applicability of such an approach to educational settings, but also its viability as a useful approach to prevention in other human and organizational contexts.

GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory refers to a body of knowledge that is inductively derived from observations of human and social phenomena. This approach seeks to create postulates that explain the unique and specific circumstances of the setting or phenomenon studied. From an epistemological point of view, this orientation claims that every social context has a distinctive set of dynamics operating within it. Therefore, in order to minimize the colouring of the phenomenon studied, it is necessary to understand it in its own terms (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin,

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1990). This requires that researchers immerse themselves in the setting before they advance analytical propositions concerning its climate, power relations, or other dynamics making up the culture of the place (Patton, 1990). But if the researcher wishes to acquire a sense of what it is like to be in the setting, observations and a prolonged engagement with the place will have to be supplemented with the voices of the people who participate in it. Depending on the setting, they can be workers, students, teachers, or any other stakeholder who can serve as an informant (for a more in-depth look at this method of investigation refer to the literature on citizen participation, e.g., Beresford & Croft, 1993). The multiple perspectives of stakeholders variously placed in the organization enrich the researcher's perception of the uniqueness of the setting. These methods enable the researcher to comprehend a setting on its own terms.

Grounded theory is particularly useful in understanding and changing groups and organizations; its methodology allows the researcher to grasp both the culture of the setting and the social forces that shape it (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Patton, 1990). Grounded knowledge of an institution, like a school, can be put to use to generate desired changes, changes that will take into consideration the unique set of circumstances affecting the school environment. In our view, this orientation is particularly well suited to the promotion of system-centred preventive interventions because, unlike person-centred methods, the primary target of change is not the individual but a certain aspect of the social ecology (Cowen, 1986). We explore next how this might be done.

THE NEED FOR GROUNDED THEORY IN PRIMARY PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

In this section we discuss the need for a grounded theory approach to primary prevention. In our view, primary prevention is defined as proactive, system-centred interventions that involve the active participation of all members of identified populations in an effort to both reduce deficits and enhance strengths (Commission on the Prevention of Mental-Emotional Disabilities, 1987; Pransky, 1991). However, a lot of what passes for primary prevention is actually secondary prevention (e.g., programs focusing on high-risk groups such as children of divorced parents), not primary prevention. Furthermore, many preventive interventions are prefabricated, researcher/consultant driven, and they do not generate stakeholder ownership, hence they tend to be short-lived (Weissberg & Elias, 1993). Our intention is to use grounded theory in understanding school change, more specifically, changes to reduce stress and promote mental health within the school community. In order to conduct a successful, effective intervention to reduce stress and promote health, a grounded theory approach necessitates coming up with a strategy that meets the specific needs of the school and the people within that setting. To do this one must first investigate the culture of change in the particular school. In the literature, researchers have alluded to specific factors that have limited or promoted previous efforts to make changes in schools.[1] For example, seasoned scholars and consultants (Altman, 1993; Cherniss, 1991; Cherniss, Trickett, D'Antonio, & Tracy, 1982; Cullen, 1993; Curl, 1993; Felner, Jason, Moritsugu, & Farber, 1983; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Linney, 1989; O'Neill & Trickett, 1982; Sarason, 1982, 1990; Weissberg & Elias, 1993) agree

that any attempt at intervention within a school or other institution must be accompanied by, or better still, preceded by an examination and understanding of the ecology and culture of the setting. According to Cherniss et al. (1982),

> effective action requires intensive study of the setting. Specifically, a consultant who wants to catalyze organizational change must first examine the organization's structure, power distributions, norms, and traditions. Premature action—action initiated before one understands the social milieu—is unlikely to accomplish its goals (p. 140).

Similarly, both Sarason (1982, 1990) and O'Neill and Trickett (1982) associate the failure of research and reform with consultants' indifference or neglect for the culture of their research environments.

Numerous authors (Apter, 1973; Ayers et al., 1993; Cherniss et al., 1982; Comer, 1980; Commins, 1986; Cullen, 1993; DeCharmes, 1973; Dimock, 1992; Felner, Phillips, DuBois, & Lease, 1991; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Holtzman, 1992; Kline & Snow, 1993; Linney, 1989; Sarason, 1982; Weinstein et al., 1991; Weissberg & Elias, 1993) have discussed the role of collaboration in the intervention process. When stakeholders are given opportunities to share their ideas, give input, and contribute to the development of a new program/change, they have invested some of themselves in the process. Therefore, they may be more committed to implementing and participating in the program/change, and making sure that it works. Conversely, when stakeholder input is not requested, rather a program/change is *laid on*, the very people for whom the intervention is intended may exhibit indifference or antagonism, or they may attempt to sabotage the program/change.

The presence or absence of administrative support for interventions is often cited as a contributing factor in the success or failure of a new program/change (Alpert, 1982; Berkowitz, 1973; Cherniss, 1991; Cherniss et al., 1982; Commins, 1986; Curl, 1993; Dimock, 1992; Elias & Weissberg, 1990; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Kobalski, 1990). Clearly, administrators have a lot of influence over what does and does not happen at their schools. Just as students take their cues from teachers, teaching and support staff members take their cues from administrators. If there does not appear to be "support from the top," then other stakeholder groups will be less likely to support and/or participate in new programs/changes.

Our final example from the literature pertains to the time frame of interventions. According to many authors (Alpert, 1982; Battistich, Elias, & Branden-Muller, 1992; Brand et al., 1993; Comer, 1980; Cullen, 1993; Felner, Mulhall, Brand, & Sartain, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Holtzman, 1992; Sarason, 1982; Trickett, 1991; Weissberg & Elias, 1993), when the school community adopts a long-term view of problems and understands that change often comes about slowly, stakeholders are more likely to take the necessary time and energy to develop programs that will respond to both their needs and their environments, as opposed to accepting pre-fabricated, "quick-fix" solutions that promise to correct problems now. We concur with Weissberg and Elias (1993) in that

> many interventions that achieve initial success fail to sustain their positive impact over time. . . . Given this reality, educators and researchers must collaborate to identify organizational practices and systems-level policies or

> structures that enable successful programs to endure with continued positive effects. . . . The successful institutionalization of a school-based program requires that school staff and community members continuously adapt and improve the intervention to mesh with the evolving ecology, norms, and priorities of the setting in which it is implemented (p. 182).

In our modest attempt to face the challenge presented by Weissberg and Elias, our research expands on the facilitative and limiting factors of school change using a grounded theory perspective.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

During the 1990-91 school year Jill Somerville, a student from Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Psychology program, conducted a multi-method needs and resources assessment (see Somerville, 1991) to determine the need for a suicide prevention program at Galt Collegiate Institute (GCI), a high school in southwestern Ontario. A primary outcome of this needs assessment was a "reframing" of the issues. Whereas the initial plan was to acquire external funding for a student-centred suicide education and awareness program, the recommendations flowing from the needs assessment suggested: (a) shifting the focus away from an emphasis on suicide to an examination of key risk and protective factors related to suicide; (b) developing a primary prevention model that would seek to decrease risk factors, youth stress and hassles, and to increase protective factors, social support and coping skills; and (c) examining ways in which the school could implement a program with its existing resources. Based on the reconceptualization of the problem, the authors, along with a guidance counsellor at GCI, agreed to design a primary prevention program through a committee with representatives from all the constituencies of the GCI population.

The STEP committee (stands for *s*tudents, *t*eachers, *e*xtras—internal and external consultants—and *p*arents) works to stimulate change in the school and improve the well-being of the school community. During the initial STEP meetings the committee members engaged in a nominal group process to generate ideas to improve school well-being. Over 40 possible interventions were suggested. The committee then reached consensus that developing a school-wide peer mentoring program would be their primary agenda. Support for proceeding with this network-building initiative was evidenced in the literature on resilience (e.g., Cowen & Work, 1988; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Nuechterlein, & Weintraub, 1990) and social support (e.g., Gottlieb, 1981, 1987). Social support by way of peer mentorship is a potential way of improving mental health (Carr, 1988; Maton & Matlock, 1991). Before attempting to design the specific mentoring program the committee agreed it would be important to examine how change occurs at the school in order to inform and guide the development of a successful peer mentorship program (Nelson, Prilleltensky, Chris, Somerville, & Peirson, 1992).

RESEARCH PROCESS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the research were twofold. Our first objective was to generate a grounded theory for understanding change in secondary schools, GCI in particular. Our second goal was to apply the resulting theory to action, more specifically, to

developing recommendations for proceeding with the peer mentoring program. Together, both understanding (grounded theory) and action (recommendations) have been derived from an interpretation of the three main sources of information tapped in this investigation, namely, the literature, the STEP committee, and the interview/focus group participants.

As one reviewer pointed out, "classical grounded theory approach" is a recursive process that involves "gathering data, developing theory, then testing that theory against new data subsequently gathered." At the point of writing this paper the development of the mentorship program is in the first stages of the grounded theory approach, that is, theory generation. Implementing the program, the next phase of the cycle, is set for fall, 1994. During the pilot phase an evaluation will be conducted to test the theory and the effectiveness of the program. The findings of the pilot evaluation will bring to light information for improving the program and, if necessary for revising the theory, thus bringing the recursive process full circle. For the purposes of this paper, however, we have chosen to focus primarily on the process of initial theory generation. Hence, the main research questions we explored are as follows:

(1) What factors facilitate(d)/limit(ed) structural changes of GCI (changes in general, and more specifically with regard to social support)?

(2) What factors might facilitate/limit the implementation of a school-wide peer mentoring program for students at GCI?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of 31 stakeholders took part in five focus groups and one in-person interview. The number of participants in each of the discussion groups was as follows: four parents (three women, one man), four teaching and support staff (all women), 16 students (nine women, seven men) who were divided into two groups, and six members of the STEP committee (three women, three men). The single in-person interview was conducted with a male administrator.

Materials

The primary instrument we used to facilitate discussion during the one in-person interview and the five focus groups was an interview guide containing the following six questions: What facilitates general change within the school? What limits general change within the school? What facilitates social support efforts within the school? What limits social support efforts within the school? What would facilitate a mentorship program? What would limit a mentorship program? The in-person interview guide contained an additional question: What are some of the factors that should be incorporated within a peer mentoring program for it to secure administrative support? In accordance with the grounded theory approach, all the questions were open-ended and very general to allow participants to respond without colouring their perspectives of how change occurs at GCI.

Procedure

Prior to conducting the focus groups and the in-person interview, participants were given information about the project and asked to sign a consent form. Parental consent was required for a number of the student participants. The focus groups were facilitated by the first author with assistance from the second author and three students in a graduate community psychology program (two women, one man). The in-person interview was conducted by the first author. During each session participants were asked to recall and describe distinctive factors that they believe were instrumental in either facilitating or limiting the successful development and/or implementation of programs and changes at GCI. Social support initiatives were defined as efforts to make members of the GCI community feel a sense of belonging; as opportunities for people to take part in school life; and as means of helping students, staff, and parents in need. "Mentorship" was described as an informal "buddy" system that would provide the structure needed to give students the support they need from their peers, be that a simple "hello" in the hallways, someone to eat lunch with, or some advice from an older student on how to make the transition from semester to semester. Participants were also given an opportunity to comment on the content and process of the focus groups/interview and to review session transcripts to ensure their comments had been recorded accurately, completely, and fairly. Finally, feedback packages were delivered to all but two participants who had indicated they did not wish to receive this information. A feedback session was also offered to participants.

ANALYSIS

In general, the procedures we used to analyze the information gathered from participants are congruent with the qualitative methods advanced by Patton (1986), Kirby and McKenna (1989), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). To consolidate the 165 pages of data gathered during the interview and focus groups, we read through the transcripts and identified categories. A back-and-forth system was used to check the reliability of the analysis. After the first author reviewed the data and identified categories, the results were shared with the second author. Modifications were made as necessary. In total, 29 categories emerged, each housing a diametric pair of factors, that is, one factor typically considered to facilitate change and the other to limit change. To better conceptualize such considerable amounts of data we devised a colour-coded qualitative comparative analysis. Basically, each factor was assigned a different colour. This allowed us to summarize on a single piece of paper all the facilitative and limiting factors verbalized by the participants.

With all the data concentrated on a single piece of paper, it was easy to determine which categories and/or factors were identified most often, which groups identified more factors, which groups differed and/or concurred on their perceptions of change, and it was easy to begin visualizing how change occurs at GCI. Nonetheless, it was apparent that 29 category pairs were too many to deal with, so we further combined these categories into three major themes that related to designing, implementing, and evaluating effective, successful programs and change in schools, GCI in particular. We then integrated this information with the literature

and information from the STEP committee to build a grounded theory for successful change in secondary schools.

FINDINGS

While each of the stakeholder groups provided valuable insights, all 29 categories were mentioned by at least three of the groups (see Table 1). It appears that the different groups within the GCI community tend to agree on what works and does not work at the school. For example, collaboration, communication, availability of resources, and need for program/change are some of the categories that appeared across all six stakeholder groups. This consistency between groups was demonstrated by the repetition of colours in the qualitative comparative analysis. In order to illustrate what some of the different categories mean we will provide some of the examples given by participants.

First, participants sometimes discussed the impact of internal or external pressure for change on the success of various programs within the school. In general, change was viewed as more successful when it was internally driven, that is, when members of the immediate school community pressed for change. A notable example of successful change-from-within at GCI is the annual Grade 9 Barbecue. Each year before the fall semester begins, the Parent Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the school, hosts a barbecue for all incoming grade nine students. This well-received event gives new students an opportunity to get to know their school and their teachers, as well as to renew and discover friendships in a fun, informal atmosphere. According to a participant in the STEP committee focus group, " a lot of [the parent involvement in Grade 9 orientation] has to do with the [fact that] parents felt what they [thought] was needed, was listened to, and acted upon, and they became involved in it . . . like they owned it."

On the flipside, legislated, or externally driven change that does not conform to the needs and/or wants of the school community may be implemented but probably will not flourish or be considered successful. An example of this type of situation surfaces with the current destreaming directive. The contention regarding this latest educational reform can be detected in one teaching/support staff person's comment:

> I think things are just moving too fast and it's too frustrating. . . . They [the Ministry] don't ask anybody their opinion. Like we said, "okay, we'll let it [destreaming] go into effect, and then maybe the next year do it," . . . Well, it's going to be done this September whether you're ready or not.

Second, every group interviewed in this study identified the importance of collaboration. The programs/changes participants considered most successful were the ones that responded to their concerns and incorporated their recommendations. For example, as a STEP committee participant explained,

> Something that really helped the change to semesters [at GCI] was that a lot of staff had input into that decision. There were a lot of discussion groups and staff were able to go out to other schools and . . . bring back information. . . . They felt it was their decision, it wasn't something laid on.

One can appreciate the resentment groups felt when their thoughts and opinions were not sought in the face of significant school change. The indignation of one

TABLE 1

Category Pairs Derived from Interview/Focus Groups

Facilitative/ Limiting Factors	Parents	Teaching/ Support Staff	Student Group 1	Student Group 2	Admin.	STEP Com-mittee	Total
Patience/quick-fix	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
Built-in/add-on	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Positive/negative stakeholder response	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Collaboration/laid-on	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Ecological perspective/ isolated projects	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Suitable/unsuitable roles	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Consensus of agenda/ conflicting agendas	✓	✓	✓			✓	4
Coordination/ lack of coordination	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Good/poor communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Proper/improper training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Good/poor timing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Continuity/ lack of continuity	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
Committed/uncom-mitted stakeholders	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5
Sensitive/insensitive to process		✓			✓	✓	3
Pilot programs/no pilot programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Evaluation/lack of evaluation	✓				✓	✓	3
Recognition/no re-cognition for effort		✓	✓			✓	3
Peer support/lack of peer support		✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Sufficient/insufficient resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Voluntary/mandatory participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Good/poor matching (mentorship)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Trust/mistrust	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
Internal/external impetus for change		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Tailored/prefabricated programs/changes	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Identified/unidentified need	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Reasonable/unreasonable time commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
Open/closed mind	✓				✓	✓	3
Paraprofessionals/ experts only	✓		✓	✓			3
Understand/ignore culture of setting	✓	✓				✓	3

teaching/support staff person is clear in the following statement: "I think . . . a lot of members of the staff feel that we're the front lines and we're not stupid, and so we should have had input into this whole destreaming question. We should have been asked for our suggestions."

Third, the fundamental importance of proper communication was repeatedly conveyed in all the sessions conducted with GCI stakeholders. The discussions about communication centred around a number of issues, including: language, clarity, interpreters, advertising/promotion, and channels through which information is shared. Regarding the language issue, there seemed to be consensus among the groups that information about a program/change must be presented at a level that can be understood by all members of the school community. Furthermore, as all interview/focus group participants (except the parents) mentioned, the expressions used in connection with a program/change must be "in." In other words, expressions cannot be out-dated, stigmatizing, complex, etc. When we asked students about the mentorship program they immediately informed us that the term "mentor" was "too sophisticated," and our alternate suggestion ("buddy") was, according to one student, "hurting," meaning she/he did not like this term either.

Another communication issue pertains to the channels through which information about programs/changes is shared. Many of the respondents thought general assemblies, parents' nights, and the GCI newsletter were appropriate and reliable means of conveying information. Although students emphatically opposed the new computerized "phoner" that calls home to report that a student was absent or to relate general information about school events (e.g., report card distribution dates), the parents we spoke with thought it was "an excellent idea" and "a good way for the school to let parents know that their children are not in class." Inasmuch as respondents were interested in receiving information, they were also eager to give on-going feedback about programs/changes. As one STEP committee participant put it, "there has to be a place to voice concerns."

Our final example illustrates the "ecological perspective" category. Participants shared numerous accounts of how altering one dynamic of the school's culture influenced other aspects of the community. For instance, several years ago GCI switched from a continuing pre-9:00 a.m. homeroom (i.e., the same students were together before classes from grade 9 through grade 12) and colourhouses (i.e., the student body was divided into four groups each represented by a colour) to second-period class homeroom (which varies in student composition from semester to semester) and the elimination of colourhouses. While this change was made for valid reasons and has had a positive influence (e.g., more students attending homeroom), several stakeholder groups suggested that the change has also had negative impacts. First, teaching/support staff participants reported that the change in homerooms has produced a reduction in school spirit and intraschool healthy competition. One staff person said that once the colourhouse system was eliminated school spirit "went downhill." Second, members of the teaching/support staff and STEP committee focus groups agree that doing away with colourhouses resulted in the suspension of supportive relationships between teacher-mentors and their students and among colourhouse peers. Third, according to students in group #1, since homeroom has been moved to second period, the school day has become unorganized (e.g., the first part of the school day is over before announcements are

made about the day's events). Finally, scattered counselling and administrative caseloads were described by a STEP committee participant as a negative ripple effect of the elimination of colourhouses. Prior to the change, counsellors and administrators were assigned to specific colourhouses; after the change they were assigned to a certain part of the alphabet. Consequently, whereas counsellors and administrators used to be able to see their kids in a group, now their caseloads are spread throughout the building and their students do not come together as a group.

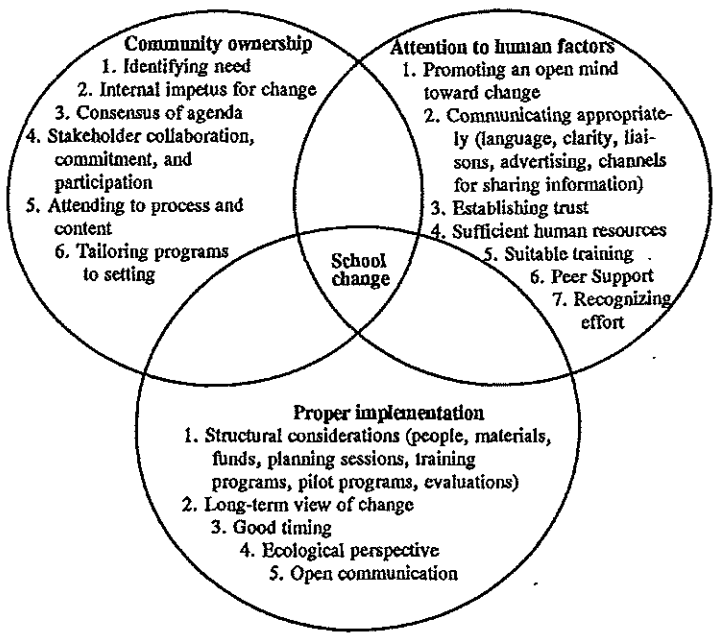
DISCUSSION

Overview of the Grounded Theory

Based on the information gathered from stakeholders at GCI, the relevant literature, and our experiences as consultants at GCI, we have been able to induce three principal components of successful school change. The three components are: community ownership, attention to human factors, and proper implementation. Figure 1 orients the reader to the overall theory.[2] For successful school change to take place, the three circles must be connected, thus creating an impetus for change that could not be obtained unless all elements of the theory operated in a synergis-

FIGURE 1

Overview of Grounded Theory of Successful School Change



tic fashion. In other words, community ownership, attention to human factors, and proper implementation must all be present in order to produce the desired changes. The grounded theory presented herein would be incomplete without the interlocking effect of the three sets of considerations. As one reviewer noted, the structure of the grounded theory could easily be extended to other settings, with possible modifications to the specific content of each circle.

Community ownership. For programs and change to be considered successful, community members must come to see them as *their* changes (Ayers et al., 1993; Battistich et al., 1992; Commins, 1986; Dimock, 1992; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Sarason, 1992). However, for stakeholders to take ownership and believe a program/change is theirs, they must be able to recognize in it some of themselves: their needs, their beliefs, their ideas. Generating community ownership is a fundamental process in any attempt to successfully introduce a new program or make a change. An essential part of this process involves recognizing that ownership, like change, develops over time as people establish trust, share their visions, plan for change, set programs in motion, and work together to solve problems. In general, it seems that when stakeholders (a) identify a need, (b) deem a new program relevant to their setting, and (c) have a sense of control over it, then the chances for success of a new initiative are enhanced.

Attention to human factors. The success of a program or change depends heavily on the individual and collective response of participants. In short, stakeholders can "make or break" a new program/change. Hence, an important part of the change process involves "wooing" the community; attending to stakeholders' needs to help them feel comfortable with the program/change. Difficulties emerge because many of the elements of this theory component are easily overlooked or taken for granted. For instance, it is important to ensure that the purpose, roles, expectations, and benefits of a program/change are clarified for all stakeholders in the school community, not just those groups directly affected. Moreover, staff and volunteers should feel supported and appreciated for their efforts in launching new initiatives. Program players should be "nurtured" to ensure that their investment does not go unnoticed in the setting. It is also crucial to ensure that sufficient workers and time are allocated to the program. Special initiatives that operate on "after-hours" basis or rely too much on volunteer time do not have a good prognosis (Weissberg & Elias, 1993). Similarly, staff in charge of the program should feel free to express their doubts and need for more training and consultation with either peers or external sources. In general, a climate of trust should characterize both the relationships among members of the program team and between the team and the various school constituencies. This element cannot be attained without concurrently fostering a sense of ownership in the entire school community.

Proper implementation. Related, and yet distinct from attention to human factors are implementation issues. People in charge of the program should be properly trained and feel supported by administrators and peers. But this is not enough. A number of technical and substantive considerations must be taken into account when launching a primary prevention program.

Numerous structural considerations must be taken into account to create and maintain new programs and changes. In addition to obvious resources such as per-

sonnel, planning meetings, and training sessions, it is very important to conduct a pilot project and build in an evaluation of both the pilot and the actual prevention program. Otherwise, there is no systematic way to ascertain whether the program is working, and what changes need to be made to make it more successful. We believe that many school projects are launched with neither a pilot test nor proper evaluation (Weissberg & Elias, 1993).

Several additional considerations must be addressed to ensure smooth running of programs/changes. A long-term view of change is imperative if people are to persevere in their attempts at improving the school ecology or network of social support. School personnel can get very frustrated if they expect immediate results. Changing school routines and habits that have been ingrained in the system for decades takes time. Nothing less than a long-term view of problems and needed transformations will do. Being sensitive to the ripple effects generated by the planned intervention or by other programs scheduled for implementation is crucial. As an example, participants discussed the negative effects of changing homeroom routines. The element of open communication among and within all stakeholder groups has been recognized in one form or another in the three components of the theory of school change. Unless everyone is clear on what goals are being pursued and how these may be accomplished, the level of endorsement for a new initiative will be rather low. This speaks to the importance of proper lobbying with all prospective beneficiaries of a program.

The theory we present reveals the complex nautre of change in secondary schools. Clearly, there is no one factor and no one theory component that is responsible for the success or failure of a program/change; rather, there are a multitude of interdependent variables affecting change. Consultants and stakeholders alike should strive, in practice not just in theory, to increase those factors that support creation, implementation, and evaluation of programs/changes and reduce or buffer those factors believed to operate against effective programs/changes.

How the Grounded Theory Compares to the Literature

It is important to note that not all the factors derived from the literature were mentioned during the in-person interview and focus group sessions, for example, ample/no planning time (Comer, 1980; Cullen, 1993; Dimock, 1992; Holtzman, 1992; Rossi & Freeman, 1985) and recognizing/not recognizing the limits of the setting (Altman, 1993; Comer, 1980; Sarason, 1990; Trickett, 1991). While grounded theory models are typically derived from setting input rather than previous research, the theory presented herein incorporates information from the literature that did not arise during interviews/focus groups with GCI stakeholders. The decision to include material from the literature was made because we believe this information is important. Stakeholders could have discussed these additional factors, but for reasons such as time-limited focus groups, participants did not bring these issues forward.

Interestingly, participants raised seven issues we could not readily see in the literature. The first issue pertains to *the level of responsiveness of the community*, broadly defined to include students, parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff. If the various stakeholder groups are not inclined to proceed with the new

program, efforts would have to be directed at persuading the constituencies of the various potential benefits of the program. Of course there is always the possibility that the program could be harmful, in which case the consultant must listen carefully to the members of the setting and reconsider the intervention.

The second issue identified by our participants has to do with *role expectations*. Both paid and volunteer personnel of the new program should feel competent and capable of running or coordinating the intervention. If this is not the case, either more training or another person will be necessary. Participants also spoke of the importance of having sufficient *time during school hours* to devote to the program. Teachers overburdened with many extra-curricular activities would not make good coordinators. Administrators would have to make allowances for staff involved in the program. If they are not specifically paid for this position, their regular extra-curricular duties would have to be reduced.

The advantage of *good timing* for the new intervention and of *continuity of the people coordinating the program* were also valuable insights contributed by our participants that we did not recognize in the literature. For instance, it would be detrimental to launch a major new program at the same time that the school is mandated to initiate another significant change, such as destreaming of classes in high schools. Having to cope with two competing changes will decrease the energies directed at, and the effectiveness of, the primary prevention intervention. Participants also emphasized the need for *peer support* for people involved in the program, a crucial ingredient of successful change already described above. Finally, our sample favoured *volunteer participation* in the program. In the beginning stages of the program at least, participation in it should be voluntary, so as not to create the impression that this is an imposition to which people object. The rationale is that with time students will see the benefits of the program and would like to participate in it without feeling stigmatized or coerced. These seven facilitative factors of successful school change were some of the salient contributions of our participants to the literature on school change.

Weissberg and Elias (1993) provide a useful framework for the creation and implementation of school programs for enhancing social competence and health behaviours. The framework consists of conceptualization, design, implementation, and institutionalization considerations. Our research supports their implementation recommendation that schools "allocate sufficient time and resources for proficient staff training, program planning, ongoing supervision, on-site coaching, and program monitoring to ensure high-quality implementation" (Weissberg & Elias, 1993, p. 182).

Action

As stated earlier, one of our primary goals was to derive a series of recommendations from the grounded theory that would provide a strategy for proceeding with a mentorship program. A comprehensive set of recommendations was generated and presented in a practice-oriented manner, that is, in terms of a time-ordered action plan (see Peirson, 1993). This "blueprint for action" covers the following six phases: design, planning, three phases of implementation which incorporate evaluation components, and revision. Anticipating the launch of a pilot peer mentoring program in fall 1994, the 1993-94 STEP committee elected to use

its time to formulate the program's design. At the time of writing this paper the committee members were in the process of reviewing, discussing, and acting upon the grounded theory and blueprint for action, thus initiating the next stage in developing a successful preventive intervention for students at GCI. The writers, along with a guidance counsellor involved in the committee since its inception, remain actively involved, thus upholding the principle of continuity.

CONCLUSION

This paper tried to illustrate the benefits associated with employing a grounded theory approach for the promotion of primary prevention programs. We see the contributions of this research in two main areas. First, in the general area of community mental health, and second, in the specific area of primary prevention through school change. With regard to the first area, this approach captures the need to create programs that are sensitive to the unique circumstances of a setting. Grounded theory is particularly suitable to a community mental health approach because in the process of data gathering, community participation and a sense of ownership are simultaneously created. Although our research focused on prevention through school change, this approach can be equally applied to other settings where prevention is sought. By looking at the specific constellation of factors affecting a social environment, the chances of success of a program are significantly increased.

With respect to the research on school change, the study served to integrate a disparate literature on factors affecting school change with the data gathered from participants. The organization of facilitating/limiting change factors into a three-component theory represents an innovation that may help other action-researchers to better plan school interventions. The superordinate categories of community ownership, attention to human factors, and proper implementation can guide school prevention programs since their inception. That is, the three-factor theory can function both as a map for a major intervention, and as an inventory of mini-interventions needed to institute the main primary prevention program. This theory is now being put to the test in our promotion of a mentorship program in the school where the research was conducted. As our experience in the setting increases, we hope to be able to refine the theory and learn more about the dynamic process of implementing primary prevention programs in schools.

We are encouraged by the progress made in introducing a mentorship program at GCI. Approval has already been given for a teacher to devote half of her time to coordinating the program. Details are currently being worked out to put the pilot version of the program in place with a Grade 9 class and a Grade 11 class in fall 1994. Continuing the recursive cycle of grounded theory, an evaluation plan is being developed to help improve the program and refine the theory for the following year; hence the completion of the first cycle in the life of the grounded theory.

NOTES

1. For a more thorough review of factors that limit and promote change in schools, see Peirson (1993).
2. For a more thorough presentation of the theory components see Peirson (1993).

RÉSUMÉ

Le but principal de cet article est de rendre compte des avantages d'utiliser la théorie ancrée (*grounded theory*) pour étudier les facteurs facilitant la prévention primaire dans les écoles. Pour ce faire, nous évaluons les principaux éléments de la théorie ancrée, illustrons comment fonctionne cette méthodologie et en présentons une application dans l'étude du changement à l'école. L'exemple de recherche choisi est une étude sur la dynamique de changement produit dans une école secondaire, tel que perçu par les membres de la communauté scolaire. L'information recueillie par des entrevues et des groupes centrés (*focus group*), les résultats du travail d'un comité d'école, et une revue de la littérature pertinente permettent de générer une «théorie ancrée» du changement scolaire réussi. La théorie repose sur un certain nombre de facteurs regroupés sous trois catégories centrales relatives au changement scolaire: (a) l'appropriation communautaire, (b) le respect des facteurs humains, et (c) un processus d'implantation adéquat.

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