


For the Love of Learning

Volume IV: Making It Happen

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Introduction to Volume IV

The fate of school restructuring is in large part a function of how actively various political interests ... solve education and social problems, and the degree to which they are willing to orchestrate their actions around a common agenda that takes the conditions of teaching and learning seriously.

Richard Elmore, *Restructuring Schools*, 1990

Now that we have outlined our vision of a renewed education system, we must confront the challenge of making it happen - of moving from vision to reality.

In Chapters 13 and 14, we introduce and discuss our final two engines or levers of change - information technology and community education. These are strategies powerful enough to shift the status quo in schools, making significant improvements possible in student learning. They are, in our view, crucial to accomplishing reform.

Information technology can change the process of learning and allow students to move beyond dependence on their teachers. Along with many others in education, we are enthusiastic about the potential of information technology to make learning more relevant to young people, and to foster higher-order thinking. In Chapter 13, we outline the conditions necessary to integrate information technology into teaching and learning, we discuss student assessment and technology, and we propose the supports needed for effective use of technology in schools.

Chapter 14 introduces the crucial but often difficult strategy of strengthening the ties between schools and communities - a process that may involve building a new sense of community. We believe that unless some of the extraneous, non-academic burdens are removed from teachers, it will be increasingly difficult for them to do their jobs well. It is only through closer links (among educators and other service providers, both at the local and provincial levels), that schools will get the support they need to focus effectively on the academic needs of students.

Throughout the report, we have alluded to the special constitutional status of the Roman Catholic and francophone communities in Ontario, as well as aboriginal groups. In Chapter 15, we discuss how funding and governance structures must change to support the constitutional rights of these groups.

In Chapter 16, we extend the discussion to other communities. Representatives of particular religious, racial, and ethnic groups expressed some of the same concerns regarding funding, organization, curriculum, and student learning as do those communities discussed in Chapter 15. We make recommendations designed to overcome some of the problems faced by these communities and their young people.

How the education system should be organized has been a particularly contentious issue. Our recommendations in Chapter 17 are intended to strike a more appropriate balance among the various groups and institutions in the education system. Some readers may be surprised to find that we do not support some of the changes, such as drastic reductions in the number of school boards, proposed by various individuals and groups. Although we do not advocate radical changes in governance, we do make several recommendations that should result in significant improvements in the future.

The thorny issue of educational funding is dealt with in Chapter 18, with recommendations for a more equitable funding model for Ontario schools, minimizing current disparities. Funding must be equitable. We propose, as have several recent inquiries into educational finance, that for all school boards in Ontario, the main source of funding should be provincial rather than local. Boards would be allowed to raise only a small amount through local taxes.

Chapter 19 examines the important question of accountability who accounts to the public for what happens in schools. Two types of accountability are relevant: fiscal and program. We look briefly at each, and then discuss what additional measures should be taken to satisfy the public that the educational system is operating as it should. A publicly funded system must be publicly accountable.

Finally, we address the crucial challenge of implementation - how to transform ideals into reality. After reviewing some of the lessons learned about management and mismanagement of educational change, we suggest actions. Although we focus particularly on the provincial government and the Ministry of Education and Training, we offer suggestions for those at the heart of our education system - teachers, parents, and students. They all can and should participate in the process of reform. We are convinced that change is necessary and that it can be carried out successfully.

Throughout our report, this Commission has stressed that, above all, schools are for learning. The value of our recommendations should be judged accordingly - the criterion of success is student learning.

ISBN 0-7778-3577-0

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