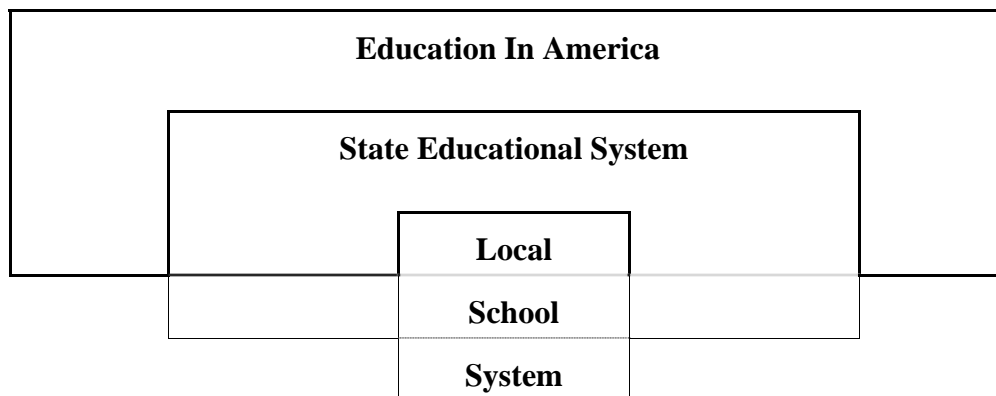


*A master can tell you what he expects of you.
A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.
- Patricia Neal*

Section E: School Improvement

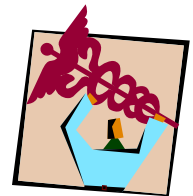
This chapter is designed to challenge your thinking. As a new teacher, quite often the main focus is one of survival. That means learning many things, such as how to manage a classroom, how to teach, and how to think as a teacher thinks.

Once you begin to understand your role as a “teacher” you may also begin to see yourself as an “educator”, with responsibilities beyond the classroom. You become a part of many larger systems - your school system, state educational system, and education in America.



On a regular basis, you will read professional literature, attend related workshops, and be directed by your administration to implement certain instructional practices. You will likely be asked to enroll in licensure classes at a university, attend the Teacher Academy, or develop a portfolio.

Why all the fuss, when you're barely able to survive? Why are you being asked to learn more than you really need to know?



On the surface, the answer is always “To improve test scores.” ***But the real reason is to improve instruction - and improvement requires "change."***

As a "new" educator - you may be at an advantage!!

After all, if you've never done something before, everything is new to you! The advantage is, new teachers don't seem to resist educational reform as much as experienced teachers. New teachers don't look at how it's always been done, but rather at how they are learning it should be.

For example, one new teacher started in a school in their first year of block (four 90-minute periods per day) schedule. The teachers who had been there for years were going crazy with the new schedule, but the new teacher was not bothered by the block schedule. "I don't know what all the fuss was about, of course, I've never done it (90-minute class periods) any other way!"

A Brief History of Educational Reform

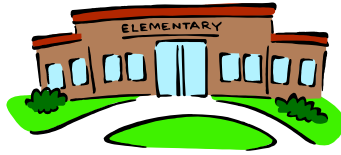
Large scale educational reform started in the 1960's. Open classrooms gave way to individualized instruction, "modern math" and large-scale national curriculum efforts. Ten years later however, implementation studies were done to measure how well these new curriculum efforts had worked. For the most part - they hadn't.

What followed was a decade of success and failure. The effective schools movement started in the late 1970's and showed some promise for introducing single innovations, but it was, perhaps, too little too late. In 1983, society had had enough. *A Nation at Risk* was released, and suggested a solution that involved large-scale government action. (Fullen 2)

Since that time, there doesn't seem to be wide-spread agreement as to whom should be managing schools. Some want top-down regulation, others argue in favor of school-based management. Some want control in the hands of the classroom teacher, others want to hold the principal accountable. And just to make things really interesting, there is increasing interest in controlling education from the elected government and business & industry.

In North Carolina, teachers should be aware of the reform initiatives that are directed by the State Board of Education, and administered through the Department of Public Instruction. In addition, teachers should be very knowledgeable of local reform issues and school-based initiatives.

WHY?



1. There is no single right answer, but rather, many different strategies for improving education.
2. School systems often select one or more strategies for improving education.
3. Since the teacher is employed by the school system, it is usually the correct and proper thing to do to support the strategies for improvement selected by the school.

Where is education today?

Reform ——— EDUCATION TODAY ——— Fundamental Conservatism

Education today caught in a tug-of-war between reform efforts and a system that prefers to maintain the status quo.

According to Michael Fullen, the solution is for educators to develop a mindset that makes education a learning system - with the resulting change a way of life. (4)

"Scratch a Good Teacher and You Will Find a Moral Purpose" (10)

Why do you want to be a teacher?

For the Health Occupations Teacher, this often means to improve the preparation of today's students so that they have informed choices about their future, succeed in their health care programs, and make a positive contribution to health care in America.

**"I want
to make
a difference."**

How? Good teachers accept responsibility for:

- A Personal Vision for Societal Improvement ...*societal improvement* is really what education is about." (14)
- Inquiry - Continual learning to bring about personal improvement
- Personal Mastery and Competence
- Collaboration

Fullen argues that change combined with moral purpose not only allows us to get things done, it helps us to get the "right things" done. (18)

Is it Complicated? *Very!* Once the teacher makes the decision to improve education through change, he or she must understand that "education" involves many different factors. The Health Occupations teacher must consider:

- State Curriculum and Evaluation
- National Health Care Skill Standards
- School Policies
- Parents, Principals, and Peers (other teachers)
- Federal Laws (Exceptional Children, Nurse Aide Registry)
- Local Health Care Community
- School-To-Work Connections (HOSA)

As the list goes on, it becomes clear that educational change is a very complex topic. Appreciation of that complexity can help the Health Occupations Education teacher decide how to proceed in becoming a change agent. In an attempt to work with the natural complexity of educational change, Fullen presents the following eight lessons:

The Eight Basic Lessons of the New Paradigm of Change (21)

- Lesson One: You Can't Mandate What Matters
(The more complex the change the less you can force it)
- Lesson Two: Change is Journey not a Blueprint
(Change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse)
- Lesson Three: Problems are Our Friends
(Problems are inevitable and you can't learn without them)
- Lesson Four: Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later
(Premature visions and planning blind)
- Lesson Five: Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power
(There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and groupthink)
- Lesson Six: Neither Centralization Nor Decentralization Works
(Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary.)
- Lesson Seven: Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical For Success
(The best organizations learn externally as well as internally)
- Lesson Eight: Every Person is a Change Agent
(Change is too important to leave to the experts, personal mind set and mastery is the ultimate protection)

Lesson 1: You Can't Mandate What Matters

Educational policymakers are responsible for making decisions about curriculum and courses, but not about what really matters to cause change - skills, creative thinking, and committed action. (22) North Carolina schools have implemented the State Board of Education's ABC Plan. This mandate involves a focus on the basics (reading, writing and math), school-based accountability, and local control.

Will it work? *Based on Fullen's first lesson, it will only work if teachers and school systems develop an in-depth understanding of the ABC's, and if they develop the skills to implement the ABC's and a commitment to make it work. (23)*

Lesson 2: Change is a Journey, Not a Blueprint

Continue to consider the ABC's of Education - North Carolina's statewide effort at improving education. If change were a blueprint, the State Board could tell schools what to do, how to do it, and assure that it was done. The result would equal improved education.

But change doesn't work that way. There are many factors that influence education IN ADDITION to a specific innovation. Change agents don't really know exactly what will happen and how it will happen until the innovation is in progress. If the ABC's of Education reform effort is truly a journey, then we should expect to see regular reports of progress - and revisions of the plan as a result.

Lesson 3: Problems are Our Friends

Consider this health care analogy. . .what do you do if someone has persistent headaches? Continue to give an analgesic of choice on a regular basis, OR, try to get at what is causing the headache? Trying to get at the cause can be expensive, time consuming, and somewhat elusive. Still, most medical professionals would search relentlessly to find the cause, because a headache may be a symptom of a deeper problem. Once the real problem is diagnosed, it can be most effectively treated.

Now, consider education. Problems are indications that something may be wrong. Careful analysis of the problem and active problem solving can lead to systemic improvement.

Ignoring the problem prevents us from really learning about a situation. As Fullen puts it:

Success in school change efforts is much more likely when problems are treated as natural, expected phenomena, and are looked for. Only by tracking problems can we understand what has to be done next in order to get what we want. (26)

Lesson 4: Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later

Fullen says that merging personal and shared vision takes time, and it only comes with reflective experiences and the interaction of organizational members and leaders. (28)

It would seem then that if Fullen were directing the ABC's, he would insist that all players be given the opportunity to shape the development of the ABC's and to feel ownership of the process. Such ownership would come when participants were fully engaged in the process of solving problems related to the ABC's, and developing a shared vision.

Lesson 5: Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power

Health care professionals call it homeostasis. The need for balance.

For Fullen, the balance of control in effecting change comes from both the group and individual. The individual alone works in isolation, and isolation is not conducive to change. Without change, there is no improvement.

On the other hand, groups can create a situation that Fullen calls groupthink. Groups are vulnerable to faddism (35). They can create boundaries that are too tight and that maintain the *status quo*. While isolation is bad - group dominance is worse. The solution is to value both the individual and the group - and the process that results when both extremes work together.

Lesson 6: Neither Centralization Nor Decentralization Works

Centralization errs on the side of overcontrol, decentralization errs towards chaos. (37)

If the above statement is true, then the best way for the ABC's to work will be with an effective balance of support from the state level mixed with strong local control. Fullen describes the ideal as "a two-way relationship of pressure, support, and continuous negotiation." (38)

Lesson 7: Connection With the Wider Environment is Critical

In Health Occupations Education, connection with health care community is vital to the success of the program. The health care community takes an active role in serving on the local Health Occupations Advisory Committee, providing clinical internship and mentorship sites, providing employment opportunities, and helping with HOSA. Because Health Occupations teachers are health care professionals themselves, utilizing other health care professionals as instructional partners seems to be a natural process.

What Fullen had in mind with the wider environment includes local and state policies, and the issues

of the day that effect society. The teacher must not ignore those factors, but rather work with them to provide an optimal educational environment. (39)

Lesson 8: Every Person is a Change Agent

The responsibility for improving education belongs to each and every teacher and administrator who accepts their position in a school system. As has already been shown, no one person can do it alone. Administrators can't do it alone, central policy makers can't do it alone, and even groups can't do it alone. It will take a balance of many forces and the moral obligation of the individual to shake up the *status quo* and bring about deep improvements in education.

What is a Learning Organization?

Traditional schools could be described as "teaching organizations" since they usually focus on the content information that is taught by the teacher. How well does such an organization serve its students? According to Michael Fullen, not very well. (42) Schools should be learning organizations, but many factors block the progress of schools toward becoming learning organizations.

Consider the following environmental factors:

- 1/3 of preschool children are destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions and lack of adult protection and nurturance.
- 23% of children (birth to age 5) live in poverty
- 80% of America's one million prisoners are high school dropouts

While schools alone can't solve these problems, they should see themselves as part of the solution. (43)

In *The Unschooled Mind* (1991), Gardner says schools must develop "education for understanding." In other words, students should be able to think, problem-solve, apply knowledge, and develop habits of continuous learning. (43)

If such a concept makes perfect sense to you - it should. Vocational Educational has embraced the concept of education for understanding and real world application for years. Where did such a concept come from? It comes from the workplace, and for Health Occupations Education, from the health care community.

At this point, a little reassurance is in order. Most new Health Occupations Education teachers have never been in a high school classroom, and don't feel that they really know how to teach. It should be clear by now however, that there is more to teaching than "teaching."

The new Health Occupations teacher, as a health care professional, brings special qualities and strengths to the table that can be of value in the educational arena. You have the ability to do more than "teach" – you can "inspire."

As a health care professional, you are a successful role model. You succeeded in a health care profession, and now you can inspire the young men and women enrolled in your program to succeed as well. *The inspiration comes from your focus on "the students" first – and helping them become the best they can be.*



Let's talk about the Real World

We've already looked at many of the "whys?" for education, and the need for educators to prepare students to have a place in the real world. Fullen cites many examples of the need for students to develop a sense of community and the ability to work with others - because those skills are essential in the real world. As Fullen puts it "Effective learning mirrors effective living." (45)

As a teacher of Career & Technical Education you must be sensitive to reform issues related to "real world" learning. You will be bombarded with such concepts as:

- National Skills Standards
- SCANS
- Work-based learning
- Soft skills
- Employability Skills

According to the Conference Board of Canada (1992) employers need people who can:

- 1) Communicate, think and continue to learn throughout their lives;
- 2) Demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, responsibility and adaptability; and
- 3) Work with others. (45)

All those concepts fit together to like puzzle pieces. The effective teacher puts the pieces together to make - "education!"

Fullen identifies three purposes for education:

- 1) Creating and assessing learning
- 2) Building alliances and partnerships beyond the school
- 3) Helping students become continuous learners and effective collaborators (46)

Please note that this is a shared vision for STUDENTS and for TEACHERS. It would be wrong to assume that students should develop characteristics that their teachers have not.

Consider these modern goals for education:

- Having a sense of purpose
- Habits of and skills of inquiry
- Ability to work with others
- Ability to deal with change

These are the skills students need to succeed in the real world, and the same skills the teacher needs to help them do it. (46)

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind)* is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. President George W. Bush describes this law as the "cornerstone of my administration." Clearly, our children are our future, and, as President Bush has expressed, "Too many of our neediest children are being left behind."

With passage of *No Child Left Behind*, Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*--the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. In amending *ESEA*, the new law represents a sweeping overhaul of federal efforts to support elementary and secondary education in the United States. It is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility.

For additional information on No Child Left Behind Legislation, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.nclb.gov/next/index.html>

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb/>

The ABCs Accountability Model

The ABCs is a comprehensive plan to reorganize public schools in North Carolina around three goals of strong accountability, an emphasis on the basics and high educational standards, and on providing schools and school districts with as much local control over their work as possible. The ABCs also requires the State Board of Education to offer/assign State Assistance Teams to schools designated low-performing.

The ABCs Plus is North Carolina's Strategic Plan for Excellent Schools. The Plan calls for a system that will be customer-driven with local flexibility to achieve mastery of core skills with high levels of accountability in areas of student achievement. It includes five priorities: High Student Performance; Safe, Orderly and Caring Schools; Quality Teachers, Administrators and Staff; Strong Family, Community and Business Support; and Effective and Efficient Operations.

Closing the Gap

Closing the academic achievement gap that exists between white and minority (African American, Hispanic and Native American) students is a top priority for the State Board of Education. North Carolina is working to close the gap by requiring local schools systems to develop annual plans for closing gaps, increasing funding, developing resource centers and pilot programs, encouraging community/school collaboration, and implementing other initiatives to ensure that the achievement gap closes.

For more information regarding the educational initiatives in North Carolina, please visit
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/edinit.html>

The Road to Educational Reform—In Conclusion

The purpose of this section in the "Instruction Guide for New Teachers" was not to overburden the new teacher, but rather to provide an opportunity for thinking about a "moral purpose" for teaching.

Once you get your feet wet, (and they dry a little) you might want to go back and read this section again. What do you believe? How does it fit? Are you already doing these things? Remember, the success of your students depends upon your success as a Health Occupations Education teacher.

Have a safe journey!