Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute
The Unit for Learning from
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Secondary Education Division

LEARNING FROM SUCCESS AS LEVERAGE FOR SCHOOL-WIDE LEARNING:
A PILOT PROGRAM – 2002-2005

The First Method: Learning from Past Success - The Retrospective Method

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Israel's education system faces many challenges, primarily in three areas: scholastic achievements; the school environment; and resources, which are ever dwindling. These challenges harbor an opportunity for renewal.

It is from this perspective that the Secondary Education Division of the Ministry of Education, together with the Unit for Learning from Success and Ongoing Learning in Human Services, which has been part of the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute since 1995, initiated the program "Learning from Success as Leverage for School-wide Learning". The goal of this program is to create the infrastructure for revitalizing the teachers' room, through (1) ongoing mutual learning in schools; and (2) consolidation of the faculty.

The program was founded on four assumptions: (1) there is an autonomous body in every school, which identifies the educational challenges facing that school; (2) every school has the ability to meet these challenges through its ongoing work, with the help of mutual learning; (3) learning involves reflection on action, and requires identifying patterns of learning that promote educational outcomes; (4) the work of teachers is rich in resources of knowledge and skills, which have not been but can be identified and used.

Prior to inculcation of this program, a program of learning for school principals was implemented by the Secondary Education Division in the 1999/2000 school year. Between 1999 and 2004, it trained some 60 secondary school principals from around the country at a school for senior-level teachers in Jerusalem. This program was the basis for the development, expansion and structuring of a joint program for multi-stage learning, which began by focusing on the learning of principals and continued in schools, where it was monitored by a learning facilitator.

After the principals had been trained, a pilot program was implemented in some 20 schools throughout Israel in 2002/2003; it was known as "Learning from Success as Leverage for School-wide Learning". During the 2003/2004 school year, an additional 37 principals were trained. Their schools joined the program, despite sizable cutbacks in the education system.

The program covers two complex spheres or circles, which encompass all relevant staff in and outside the schools.

- ◆ *The inner circle*: (1) A learning workshop in schools, attended by all interested parties or "stakeholders", including teachers, coordinators, students, and parents. (2) The "leading forum", which engages in planning, consultation, quality assurance and evaluation of the learning workshop. This forum includes the school principal and the supervisor of the school, the learning coordinator in the school, and the external learning companion, as well as additional members of staff.

◆ *The outer circle*: Coordinators of the program from the Ministry of Education and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, including the director of the Secondary Education Division, the supervisor of in-service training, and others. In addition, the circle of learning companions constitutes the main point of contact between the school and program leaders.

The program uses three interrelated methods:

◆ *The first method*: of "**learning from past success** - the retrospective method" develops a school's ability to learn retrospectively from success. Prior to implementing this method, a learning workshop is held where teachers identify successes in their activities. This enables them to reflect on their actions, and thereby identify those actions that facilitated success. Shared learning makes it possible to turn tacit knowledge ("knowledge in use") that the staff actually used into espoused or "actionable knowledge", which can be implemented in other contexts.

◆ *The second method*: is a "**from a learning question to a learning venture** - the prospective method", which develops educational action in response to the challenges a school has set itself, These challenges, posed as "learning questions", address vital, unresolved issues at the heart of the actions of all or part of every school faculty.

◆ *The third method*: "**learning on learning: decoding and developing patterns of school learning**" identifies and develops a school's shared, continuous patterns of learning. The learning workshop is used to examine, again through reflection, how learning evolves during the program, and the steps taken by the school to promote it. This is used to identify actions, the settings initiated, the patterns of dialog, and the modes of dissemination of learning.

Learning from Past Success: Ongoing Learning in Organizations that Generates Outcomes

Human services organizations tend to address failures or difficulties rather than events or processes that are deemed successful. Unlike focusing on learning from failure, which skews discussion in a negative direction and can cause opportunities for learning from success to be missed, learning from success focuses on identifying the knowledge concealed in successes and turning it into available, "actionable knowledge". Indeed, it is pure logic to use something that has already succeeded to both acquire the skills to document what contributes to success and to produce outcomes.

The idea of learning from aspects of successful professional endeavors is the heart of the Unit for Learning from Success of the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. The unit's work is founded on the assumption that knowledge exists in the field, and that learning from success is an essential step toward turning inappropriate services into "good enough" services.

Description of the Retrospective Method

This report describes the retrospective method of learning from past successes, which enables those who use it to turn tacit knowledge – inherent in the work of professional human services – into available knowledge presented in "actionable forms". This method is founded on the belief

that, given the traditional division of labor between the field and universities, a great deal of the knowledge available in the field is not documented in the professional literature, and is not accessible enough to be used in training professionals. In contrast, learning from past successes places those works in the field in the limelight: It extracts from actual successes the actions and common elements of knowledge that will most help those in the field. This information contributes to the development of professionals, the organizational setting, and the development of policies that individually and together contribute to the populations that the system of human services aims to help.

The method of learning from past successes that is part of the "Learning from Success as Leverage for School-wide Learning" program has three different, complementary components:

1. *The "learning from success" format of inquiry*: This format is the foundation of the method, and was designed to respond to the challenge of learning. To this end, it directs participants in the learning process to be conscious of certain issues or areas, according to ten pre-defined stages of inquiry: (1) describing the organizational context; (2) identifying a success worthy of being learned, and defining the field of success; (3) concisely describing the success in terms of "before" and "after"; (4) identifying positive (objective and subjective) outcomes of the success; (5) identifying any negative "side effects" or the costs of success; (6) examining whether the "success" indeed justifies further learning; (7) detailing the actions that led to success; (8) identifying turning points between "before" and "after"; (9) deriving the common elements that underlay the actions (described in stage 7) that led to success; and (10) identifying unresolved issues for further learning.

2. *Learning through collective reflection among stakeholders*: Learning from success revolves around reflective discussion among a group of colleagues, all of whom are direct or indirect "stakeholders" in the success. The stakeholders may be (1) engaged in action; (2) guiding the inquiry; (3) participants in the success, including clients or partners (e.g., students, parents), each of whom has a unique perspective; (4) colleagues in relevant fields of activity, including those who actively participated in the actions that led to success; (5) people who are bound in hierarchical relations by virtue of their formal roles (e.g., supervisors, principals, teachers, students). In addition, collective reflection cannot take place in the absence of certain necessary conditions that support and facilitate dialog about success, with emphasis on the practices of the organization. These conditions include the allocation of an appropriate time and place; colleagues who can learn as equals, with a minimum of hierarchy; a sympathetic environment; the ability to think critically while being generous; and the willingness of staff to talk about their work with their colleagues.

3. *Structuring documentation of success*: In order to translate the process of inquiry into the best possible "actionable knowledge", which can be disseminated, a "model of documenting successes" was developed. This tool is designed to bring certain components of action to the surface: outcomes, costs, turning points, and key activities that contributed to success. This model consists of a format which makes it possible to identify each unique success. In other

words, the model of documentation guides the documenter of the product of learning to distill the knowledge created during the process of inquiry, and to extract from the collective reflective dialog responses to questions specified in the format of enquiry.

In order to revitalize the method and breathe new life and "color" into it, four appendices were added to this report. Appendix I, "the method in action", demonstrates the learning journey that took place at the Ort Alon School in Upper Nazareth in the 2003/2004 school year. Appendix II contains four PowerPoint presentations, which were produced using the "model for documenting success" and describe how the program was used in various schools for such varied tasks as reducing the level of violence, improving the scholastic achievements of students with learning disabilities, fostering entrepreneurship in the school environment, and consolidating the mathematical faculty. These were presented at a 2003 conference attended by participants in the program. Appendix III describes the learning process that took place at Junior High School A in Kfar Kana in 2003, based on documentation of collective learning meetings, which were attended by the school principal and the coordinator of learning at the school and learning companion, as well as by other participants in the program. A list of schools and teams participating in the program during 2004/5 school year is provided in the fourth appendix.

Summary

This report presents the retrospective method of learning from success, which facilitates derivation and dissemination of the knowledge inherent in the field, in order to promote collective learning in schools.

The method creates leverage for change in thinking and dialog about any area at which it is directed. It generates skills and a tradition of reflective-collective thinking, while engendering learning that promotes continuous intra-organizational rejuvenation. In so doing, it facilitates identification of the outcomes that are most in accord with the organization's vision and mission.

Our work in schools has taught us that the method indeed changes how people think and talk to one another about specific issues of importance to them, at which the method was directed, and imparts the skills necessary for reflective collective intra-organizational thinking about the school's vision and mission, and how best to fulfill them.

Acknowledgments

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