SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS

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DEDICATION

To GOD for the opportunity and strength. To my best friend and spouse, Carolina, for your constant support and love. To Cristina and Daniela, for being the 'driving forces' to finishing this project. To my parents for their encouragement and patience. Without their dedication, their support, their enthusiasm, the completion of this project, as well as my degree, would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Once there was an old sea captain who was soliciting shipmates for his greatest voyage ever. He managed to gather an entire crew of men willing to go off to sea. He huddled them together on the deck of his ship and delegated responsibilities among the crewmen when one of the ambitious sailors asked, "Captain, where exactly are we going?" Confident in his own sense of direction and impeccable navigation ability, the captain said, "Just do the job I assigned you and leave the rest to me." One night, a storm hit the small vessel tossing it about on the waves. One wave sent the captain into the mast and unconscious on the deck. When the storm calmed, the crew began to argue about where they should direct the ship not knowing the direction that the captain desired to take. Unable to agree on a common direction, the crew divided, took lifeboats from the ship and abandoned the captain.

The captain's fateful error was not sharing with his crew his expectation and his mission of the voyage. This moral tale tells us it is important to establish a common purpose so that all employees and clients of the business know exactly where they fit in and where the company is going. Just as man has always striven to define a purpose for existence, so should business and schools ask themselves "Why are we here?" and establish a mission statement (Foxx, 1996, p 21).

PART I

THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to examine the nature, development and use of mission statements in schools.

During the time that I've spent in Canada, in almost every school that I visited in Alberta, one element has caught my attention. Hanging in the main entrance, main hall, or at the principal's office is often a framed copy of the school's Mission Statement.

I have recently been appointed to become the new Vice-Principal for the Centro Educacional Adventista de Los Angeles (C.E.A.L.A.), in Los Angeles, Chile. This K-12 school that during the 1997 school year served almost 1500 students is located in the Bio-Bio region, about 550 km. south of Santiago and 16 km. west of the city of Los Angeles and only 95 km. east from the Antuco Volcano.

In 1995 this educational institution was turned into a technical vocational school. Since then, it has offered a Technical Specialization Diploma in one of the following areas:

- Heavy Duty Mechanics
- Chemicals Analysis
- Computer System Analysis
- Agricultural Studies

It will be very special coming back to the C.E.A.L.A. for two

reasons. The first is that I graduated from this high school in 1984. The other reason is that from 1981 to 1984 my father was the principal of this school.

In this last year, I've read of the benefits of having a school mission statement and its effectiveness in improving schools. I've since realized the importance that a school mission statement makes in a school. Therefore, I've decided to study the essential factors that are common to the development of effective mission statements.

The C.E.A.L.A has not developed a mission statement yet. So therefore, this will be an excellent opportunity for me to lead a process to develop the Mission Statement for that school.

With the results of this research project, I may be in a better position to help develop the C.E.A.L.A's school mission statement, and also help other school administrators and teachers in Chile understand the essential factors that are common to the development of an effective mission statement.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MISSION STATEMENTS

All effective organizations have a clear sense of direction. "From the largest corporation to the smallest club or interest groups, a clear mission helps members of the organization decide on goals, set priorities, and monitor behavior" (Arth, Johnston, Lounsbury, and Toepfer, NASSP Council on Middle Level Education, 1987, p 8). School improvement literature offers the same conclusions. By definition, "Schools with a clear understanding of their unique mission are more effective than schools that lack a sense of mission. A mission statement is a powerful tool for school improvement. Properly constructed, it empowers everyone in the school to assume responsibility for the school's ultimate direction" (Arth et al., 1987, p 9). The mission statement has become indispensable for effective school leadership.

Most important, a mission statement is something to which all members of an organization should be committed. With commitment, the mission statement should become a powerful tool in planning.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of the inquiry will be an examination and analysis of documents (i.e., extant mission statements), complemented by a literature review leading to interviews with a small sample of

school administrators who have been involved in developing effective mission statements.

This research will take samples of effective mission statements from different schools in Lethbridge and Calgary in order to clarify those key elements that are common to educational mission statements. It will describe those elements that are found in the literature reviews that are considered important for the development of educational mission statements. Finally, it will also interview four (4) school administrators who have been involved in the process of developing school mission statements.

VALUE OF THE STUDY

Through this study school administrators and teachers in Chile, may be helped to understand the dynamics of developing mission statements as a way of adjusting to current demands for accountability. The knowledge base relating to the development of educational mission statements has increased in recent years. This study perhaps will make a modest contribution to that knowledge.

PART II

MISSION STATEMENTS - THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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Mission Statements in Organizations and Businesses

Most of the literature reviewed suggests that mission statements are an important factor in developing effective organizations.

Steven Covey (1996), stresses the importance of a mission statement: "A mission statement is a broad goal based on the organization's planning premises, basic assumptions about the organization's purpose, its values, its distinctive competencies, and its place in the world. The most effective way I know to begin with, have the end in mind, this is, to develop a personal mission statement, philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based" (Covey, 1996, p 1). He also believes strongly that mission statements are essential for the development of effective families and organizations.

"A mission is the special task or purpose established for a person or an institution" (Arth, et al., 1987, p 2). In personal terms, it is often referred as the "Calling".

Covey (1996) also suggests that there are two basics and essentials to their development. First, that there is some kind of sense of what you are about, a clear picture of the end in mind. He

calls it a vision. Then, the sense of how you go about it. That's the value system. Hopefully, those values are based upon natural laws or principles (Covey, 1990, p 1).

Most important, a mission statement is something to which everyone is committed. Without widespread commitment to the mission of the organization, the statement itself is of little use. With commitment, the mission statement becomes a powerful tool in planning, decision making, and evaluating (Arth et al., 1987, p 2).

Benefits Of A Mission Statement: In Businesses and Corporations

Jim Koehneke (1996) of Right Associates states that, "If a mission statement is given the attention it deserves, it's like a rudder in a ship. It helps people set direction so that when the winds change, they don't have to change direction and can hold to a clear sense of purpose. Because there's such a huge amount of change in society, if you don't have a mission statement that is some kind of flag or banner, it's stressful to be rocked around by the winds of change. Having a mission statement is no guarantee of success. There are a lot of companies that don't have mission statements that make a lot of money, and there are a lot of companies with mission statements that go out of business. It's a tool, that's it"(Koehneke, 1996, p 1).

Ed Weems (1996) agrees that, "a good mission statement does get employees to understand not only the purpose, but the culture

of the business, and sets a tone. It tells the world who you are and what you do, but it also sets a framework for the attitude and culture of the business"(Weems, 1996, p 1). In essence, a mission statement goes or at least should go further and deeper that just simple words on paper.

There are several reasons why businesses write mission statements. Businesses write them so clients will know what type of business they are, so employees know what to expect from the business, or to direct future decision-making.

Lumpkin (1996) states that mission statements are important for two reasons. Externally it helps position you with other competitors, it shows where you fit in the market. Internally it keeps you on track and in focus. He also suggests that, it is easy to be diverted by the latest opportunity, and the mission statement keeps you on track and keeps you motivated (Lumpkin, 1996, p 1).

Susan Fonville (1996) also agrees that having a mission statement not only directs the organization but serves the client as well. In the process of making decisions, businesses have to look at their mission statement. It is a common way of doing business. If you stick to the mission statement, the shareholders will be protected and know what to expect(Fonville, 1996, p 1).

Cheston Mottershead Jr. (1996) president of TCI, an organization that provides rehabilitation services for disabled individuals, suggests that the mission statement keeps his

organization where it should be. It's like a guide post, a focal point in the distance, the direction we look at changes but our focal point never changes (Mottershead, 1996, p 2).

Mission Statements and Schools: What Is a Mission Statement?

A mission statement is a powerful tool for school improvement. Properly constructed, it empowers everyone in the school to assume responsibility for the school's ultimate direction. It is, at once, a commitment, a promise, a guide for decisions, and a set of criteria by which to measure the school's progress toward its defined purposes. Increasingly, the mission statement is indispensable for effective school leadership (Arth et al., 1987, p 9).

A mission statement is simply a statement of an organization's vision of itself that serves to guide program planning, development, and evaluation. The mission statement also serves as the basis for communicating within and outside the organization with those who are important to the school's effectiveness and success (Rogus, 1990, p 6).

For Institutions, it is their special reason for existing; it is things to which they are most committed. It is the ordering thoughts that underlie the entire operational practices of the school as an institution. A mission is the shared vision of people in an organization about what their ultimate purpose really is.

Mission statements are usually short and easily remembered; they are not long, detailed outlines of goals and objectives. Indeed they may actually be the basis for goals and objectives (Arth et al., 1987, p 3).

A mission statement attempts to establish an overall purpose for the school. Also a mission statement is a brief -one page or less- narrative that defines the focus and purpose of the school (Herman, 1991, p 79).

Schools that lack a clear sense of mission are characterized by aimlessness and high levels of dissonance. There is little harmony among staff members or between staff members and students. Discipline problems are more likely to occur because staff members lack a common set of expectations, and students have a poor sense of what the purpose of the school really is (Arth et al., 1987, p 4).

Johnston (1987) states. "A vacuum is created when the school lacks a clear purpose, and other fragmented and contradictory purposes may rush in to fill the void. In such cases, schools may have contradictory rules and policies, teachers may have conflicting expectations, and students may lack a clear sense of what constitutes appropriate behavior. Students become confused in such an environment, and parents and community members often become frustrated with what they consider to be inconsistent performance of the school" (Arth et al., 1987, p 5).

Scott Thomson (1987) observed that unstructured settings can be devastating to morale as well as productivity. Staff members operating in limbo crave a clear definition of expectations, orderly planning, adequate coordination, and feedback about performance. Furthermore, a loose organization will create internal coalitions and conspiracies to fill the power vacuum (Arth et al., 1987, p 5).

Schools that lack clear mission statements are often subject to undue influence from external sources as well. If there is no common sense of purpose, the school cannot present a united front to the outside world. Thus, the school or parts of its program are vulnerable to direct influence by groups who see an opportunity to advance their own agenda (Arth et al., 1987, p 5).

Mission Statements and Other Statements

Mission statements differ from philosophy statements, goal statements, and lists of specific objectives. The school philosophy tells what the people in the school believe about students, how human being learn, the role of education in a democratic society, and how education affects the individual receiving it (Arth et al., 1987).

Arth et al., (1987) illustrate the difference between a philosophical statement and a mission statement by setting two examples, first, A philosophical statement might attest to the

fundamental worth of the individual: "We believe that individuals, if given choices, will act for their own benefit and for the common good".

Secondly, following from that statement of philosophical belief, then, might come a mission statement such as:

> Park Middle School is committed to cultivating a respect for the individual and encouraging students to make sound, personal choices and decisions.

In other words, this school is committed to letting individuals make significant choices about their own learning and life. That is its mission, and its purpose for existing.

The mission statement may be used in setting goals, though. If the mission statement above is translated into goals, they may take the form of institutional goals (to engage students in the school governance process), goals for instructors (to increase the number of choices students are given in selecting learning activities), or goals for students (to develop skills of self-evaluation and life planning) (Arth et al., 1987, p 3).

The mission statement suggests certain goals and gives a screen through which to evaluate the appropriateness of any given goals. But it also allows for the fact that there may be different paths toward that ultimate mission of individual development. The direction is set by the mission; the specific path is established by statements of goals and objectives.

Common Elements in School Mission Statements

Arth et al., (1987) suggest that are four elements common to all mission statements.

a. A Statement Of Purpose

b. An Indication of Uniqueness

c. An Explicit Statement of Commitment

d. A Clear Value Position

A Statement Of Purpose.

Arth et al., (1987) suggest that all mission statements address explicitly the overall purpose of the institution or the organization. The purpose of schooling may be to "prepare students for life in the Twenty-First Century" or "teach students the skills, attitudes, and values necessary for life in the pluralistic society of the United States". More specialized organizations, such as clubs or service organizations, may have much more specific purposes (Arth et al., 1987, p 7).

Little (1997), states that "the purpose of an organization is its *reason for being*, its charter, the reason it exists. For example, the purpose of a school is to educate students. The purpose of a business is to provide products or services to customers. A statement of purpose tells why the organization exists" (Little, 1997, p 5).

An Indication of Uniqueness.

Mission statements should indicate that the institution's efforts are somehow unique and that the organization is distinguished from other institutions with similar purposes. At the same time, in cases where the mission is truly shared among several institutions or groups, the unique role of the institution should be referenced (Arth et al., 1987, p 8).

Topor (1997), suggests that a mission statement should clearly specify the organization's position in the complex arena of education. It should recognize that there are many, many kinds of educational institutions; that the particular institution occupies a very clear and distinct position amongst other institutions. It is very important to note that educational institutions are known by their differences, not by their similarities. Also, a mission statement should recognize what needs the institution is filling, not simply describing what services are offered (Topor, 1997, p 73).

An Explicit Statement of Commitment.

All mission statements should be able to pass a "fill in the blank" test. In other words, a reader should be able to fill in the blank in a statement such as, "King Junior High School is committed, above all else, to _____." The blank should be filled with the mission of the school, stated as a

commitment (Arth et al., 1987, p 8).

Little (1997), calls it the *mission* of an organization. For Little, this is a clearly stated goal (or goals) that tells what the organization intends to accomplish. The mission of an organization must be compatible with its purpose. (For example, a school would not establish a mission of providing products or services to local business customers.) A Mission Statement should tell what the organization intends to do. A properly crafted mission statement sets down plausible goals for the organization and is the starting point for developing a vision for accomplishing those goals (Little, 1997, p 5).

Most important, though, the mission statement should make it clear that the commitment is shared among the faculty members, students, parents, and community of the school. Without that sense of a shared vision and common purpose, the mission statement is more of a hope than a promise (Arth et al., 1987, p 9).

A Clear Value Position.

A mission statement should be used to help make decisions. Therefore, it must reflect a clear sense of the school's core values, the fundamental values that will guide individual behavior and institutional practices. With the mission statement in hand, anyone should be able to predict what stand a school will take on virtually any curriculum, instruction, or school management issue.

First and foremost, the mission statement must be useful in making decisions about whether any given practice is appropriate or not. To do that, it must include a clear value position (Arth et al., 1987, p 9).

A properly written mission statement, suggested by Little (1997), may use the following simple format: *The* _____ *(organization) will* _____ *for* _____ *by* _____.

This format tells who the organization (or component) is, What it intends to do, for whom it intends to do it, and by what means (how) it intends to do it (Little, 1997, p 5).

Developing a Mission Statement

There is no single process for developing a mission statement. Some businesses establish their mission statement when they are first founded, some wait and see what their mission becomes, some write lengthy, detailed statements while some try to keep their statement short. Some institutions prefer to write a mission statement on their own while others request assistance from outside professionals. In developing a mission statement, some institutions strongly emphasize the need to work as a team.

Gary Tomlinson (1996), President of MED Covers, a producer of soft-sided cases, believes in developing a team and involving all members of the team when writing a mission statement. He states

that, "Our mission statement was developed four and a half years ago at the end of a four-day retreat for human systems development of the owners of the company, the executive team and the front line management. We started by writing down words that describe our company, like 'team' and 'committed to quality' from there we started writing and composing, and after several hours we had our mission statement" (Tomlinson, 1996, p 2).

Tomlinson (1996) says that, he sent all his employees from each department on week-end retreats to develop departmental mission statements. He also suggests that, mission statements should be revised on a yearly bases (Tomlinson, 1996, p 2).

Gillenwater (1995), President of Romac International, a staffing organization, repeated that its mission statement was written from an existing philosophy statement, which had been produced two years before. He states that, in writing the mission statement, he involved all of his employees who evaluated their own goals for the company (Gillenwater, 1991, p 12).

It is important to recognize that a school's mission statement must represent a shared vision of the school's purpose. Therefore, the process used to create it must be open, deliberative, and inclusive of all of the school's constituents. This is critical if the mission statement is to guide the behavior of people in the building and be useful as a criterion for assessing the appropriateness of any planned action (Arth et al., 1987, p 10).

Finally, and of great importance, a mission statement should be inspiring. It should motivate all those who participate in that organization to achieve those goals that its mission statement seeks.

Mission Statement: Principles for Its Development

Arth et al., in their book Developing a Mission Statement for the Middle Level School (1987) suggests eight general principles that serve to guide the development of a school's mission statement:

1.- ***Identify the school's major stake holder groups and formulate a plan that includes them in the development of the mission statement.***

The first step in developing a vision is deciding which stakeholders to involve in the process. This group should continue to assist the principal until the mission statement is written. Stakeholders could include teachers, other administrators, parents, students, community representatives, parent-teacher organization representatives, school board members, or representatives from any other group that is identified as an important stakeholder group.

2.- ***Develop a plan that includes these stakeholders groups in defining the mission statement for your school.***

This means that involvement of these groups is essential throughout the process. The involvement can take different forms, such as, for

example, forming committees where they can help define their perspective of the purpose of that school

3.- ***Use a process that permits the group actually charged with drafting the statement to check frequently with the stake holders groups to be sure that they are not drifting from the group's understanding of the school's purpose.***

This will help maintain the group's focus and congruence with the intentions of the people they actually represent.

4.- ***Create a process that focuses on agreements, not disagreements.***

Even though finding total agreement may be impossible, focus on those agreements that are widespread.

Arth et al., (1987) notes that, It is also important that the mission statement take a values stance and that it is not written to accommodate every possible position, no matter how vocally it may be articulated by a single individual or small minority.

5.- ***Draft a statement that is short, direct, and easy to remember.***

Little (1997), states, "Yet most mission statements are vague, boring, and wordy discourses in confusion. They are too long and diffuse to have meaning or to inspire anyone to follow them"(Little, 1997, p 5).

It is often suggested that, the essentials of the school's mission statement should be remembered. For this purpose a short, but

significant mission statement should be attainable (Little, 1997, p 5).

Rogus (1990) suggests that, In developing the mission statement, a premium is placed on language. The overall statement should employ as few words as necessary and specific statements should be included only if they can be supported with action. Also, it is a good idea to post the mission statement around the school or elements of it, as a reminder of what the school stands for (Rogus, 1990, p 10).

6.- ***Once the mission statement is drafted, refer to it frequently and acknowledge its use in decision making.***

All decisions made in that school should reflect its mission statement.

7.- ***Discuss the mission statement and review it on a regular basis.***

Some authors, such as Foxx (1996) and Koehneke (1996), suggest that mission statements be re-visited at least once a year, or that, the review should be conducted as needed Covey (1996). Rogus (1990) suggests, once the mission statement has been developed and adopted, its contents should remain constant for an extended period unless there is a major change in philosophy of operation, but the statement should be reviewed annually.

8.***Assure that the mission statement is disseminated widely in the school, the school system, and the community.***

This can be done through school's bulletins, boards, school newspaper or local newspaper. This will increase the amount of confidence the community has in the school, its mission, and its responsiveness to community concerns and priorities (Arth et al., 1987, p 12).

Ten Steps to Develop an Effective Mission Statement

Arth et al., (1987) Promotes ten steps to develop an effective mission statement.

Step One: Solicit Commitment.

Discuss with all of the stake holders the need of a school mission. After they have realized its importance, help them to willingly commit to the task.

Step Two: Assemble a Working Group.

Assemble a group that is small and manageable, but large enough to have representation from each of the major stakeholder groups. If a small group is not possible, because of the complexity of the organization, a large group might act as a steering committee and include representatives from each constituent group. A smaller subgroup of this larger committee might actually gather data, draft, and evaluate the statement with appropriate guidance from the steering committee.

If the group is to be viewed as truly representative, the criteria by which members are selected should be clear. At a minimum, the writing group should include a parent, a non parent community member, a school administrator, a district administrator, teachers, students, and a non-certified staff member. The size of the group should probably not exceed 10 members (Arth et al., 1987, p 13).

Step Three: Gather Data.

This is the collection of information from the different groups that constitutes the school about their beliefs, values and purposes for the school. This information gathering can be done in different ways, such as, interviews or conversations with large portions of the school community. It should be open enough that all interested parties have an opportunity to express their beliefs and opinion about what the school's mission should be.

There have to be questions that produce important information, such as, What is the purpose of our school?, What should our school do to serve the interests of the community?, What should our school be doing in order to be a successful school?. Once important answers have been obtained, carefully listen to those answers and avoid imposing an own interpretation on those answers.

Step Four: Analyze Preliminary Data.

Beginning this process, it is useful to list the beliefs that interviewees stated to the group that was conducting the interviews. This step will assist the group in interpreting subsequent statements about the purpose and mission of the school. The purpose of this activity is to identify the whole range of possible missions for the school, not to focus too early on one particular attractive statement.

Step Five: Create an Instrument to Seek Consensus.

The best method suggested by Arth et al., (1987) is the Likert Scale. This instrument should be distributed to a large sample of the school's stakeholders groups with the instructions that they mark the number that describes the extent to which they agree or disagree with the potential school missions statements listed on the form. This results of this survey will provide the group with the information it needs to actually draft a mission statement for the school. A sample follows:

	Agree		Undecided		Disagree
1.- Raise standard test scores	5	4	3	2	1
2.- Prepare student for high school	5	4	3	2	1
3.- Prepare students for life in a pluralistic society	5	4	3	2	1

(Sample offered by Arth et al., 1987, p 15).

Step Six: Draft the Mission Statement.

After reviewing the results of this survey, then, the group must analyze the survey results to identify the mission statements on which there is universal or near universal agreement. This is basic if the mission statement is to be agreed to by the school's stakeholders. Then, after those statements where there is universal agreement have been identified, the group actually drafts a mission statement.

Seven: Solicit Agreement on the Statement.

This is vital to the birth of a mission statement and can be time-consuming. This step can be divided into sub-steps that must be completed if the process is to be effective.

First, present the statement to the stakeholders. Then explore the implications. The task group must help others understand the consequences of the mission statement. It would be helpful for them to present hypothetical situations and show what decisions would probably be made if the mission statement were actually guiding behavior. If possible, sample scenarios should be created for each stakeholder group (Arth et al., 1987, p 18). Finally, engage in reflective consideration. Stakeholder groups should consider the implications of the mission statement for them. Groups should be

asked to endorse the statement or make modifications necessary for them to endorse it.

Step Eight: Prepare the Final Draft.

Here, any endorsement or modifications suggested by any of the stakeholder groups can be incorporated. Then the task group drafts a final version of the mission statement that accommodates as many recommendations as possible. In cases where an accommodation cannot be made, the task group is obligated to explain to the individual recommending the modification why it cannot be accommodated (Arth et al., 1987, p 19).

Step Nine: Disseminate the final Draft.

The mission statement should then be disseminated as widely as possible. If possible, a copy of the statement should appear in the local newspaper, and copies should be mailed to major civic organizations (Arth et al., 1987, p 19).

Step Ten: Assess and Review the Statement.

The impact of the statement should be assessed and reviewed on a regular basis through asking important questions such as: Has the statement affected school practices and individual behaviors?, Has the effect of the statement been good ?, Is the statement being interpreted as intended ?, And What unforseen events emerge because

of this statement ? (Arth et al., 1987, p 20). If the statement is not reviewed regularly, it can lose vitality and become yet another document that no one pays much attention to in daily operations.

Use Of A Mission Statement

Arth et al., (1987) suggest that the school mission statement can be the most powerful management tool at the administrator's disposal. If the statement is truly representative of the shared vision of what people expect the school to do, it empowers the principal and the rest of the professional staff to take actions that advance the school's mission. To the extent that the actions taken clearly advance the mission of the school, the administration (or teachers) can expect a high degree of agreement with those actions.

We can also use a mission statement to review programs, policies and practices (Arth et al., 1987, p 21). We can determine whether or not these elements of the school conform with the school's avowed mission, and can identify elements that advance the school's mission or impede it. In short, the mission statement permits school personnel to determine if what they are doing coincides with what they value and what they accept as their special purpose for existing as a separate educational unit. It is a way of deciding if what they do is consistent with what they believe.

It is also a way of helping to make daily decisions (Arth et al., 1987, p 22). The mission statement can be a guide for the school community to make decisions that are consistent to their mission statement belief.

It should also direct the kind of instructional decision teachers make, the kind of support-services decisions that staff members make, and the behavioral decisions students make. Most important, the mission statement equips all members of the school community with standards by which to judge not only their own behavior but that of others. In that sense, the entire school community sets limits on what is acceptable behavior, and all members of the community are equally able (in fact, obligated) to share in the maintenance of those behavioral standards (Arth et al., 1987, p 22).

With a mission statement clearly articulated, it is relatively simple to set goals and priorities for the school. For example, if the mission statement includes, 'to prepare students to solve problems and make sound decisions about their own lives', the school must answer two questions: What are we doing now to facilitate that mission?, What should we be doing to advance that mission? The answer to these questions then comes from reviewing the purpose of the mission statement and the statement of goals and priorities for the school. (Arth et al., 1987, p 23).

A mission statement may be closely connected to the reward and

incentive program in the school. If this is the case, not only does the mission statement allow the school to identify the kind of performance it wants to reward and reinforce, the reward system itself will strengthen the mission statement by calling attention to people who act in ways that the mission statement encourages. Because of the close connection, it is crucial that the reward system be consciously and consistently linked to the mission (Arth et al., 1987, p 23).

Like people, institutions need a sense of purpose and direction to be effective. That sense of mission must be important and capable of withstanding careful scrutiny. To assure that the mission statement is both important and durable, the process that creates the statement must be broadly based, open, and deliberative. An effective school will have a clear, widely-accepted statement of its mission and will have a powerful tool to use in school improvements efforts (Arth et al., 1987, p 26).

PART III

MISSION STATEMENTS - THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

NATURE OF THE INTERVIEW

In this section, the results of an interview process will be described to better understand the significance and importance of developing educational mission statements. The following section is divided in three major themes. First, what is the meaning of a mission statement to school administrators. Second, the description of the process of development of school mission statements. Finally, I will describe, what are the important elements in developing a school mission statement.

The interview process began on October 6, 1997, and ended October 24, 1997. Four (4) school principals were selected for this interview process. These school principals corresponded to four (4) different schools, a public elementary school in Lethbridge, a public junior high school in Lethbridge, a public high school in Lethbridge, and a K-12 private school in Calgary. The student population of these schools ranged between 125 and 350 students. Also, these principals have a total of 73 years of combined school administration experience, an average of 18 years experience.

WHAT IS A MISSION STATEMENT?

Principal N 1, a very young male administrator, responded by saying that, "A mission statement is our purpose and our goals for the school, that go beyond just attaining them (goals) on a regular basis. I would even say that they are a long range goals, that you continuously strive and work towards achieving".

Principal N 2, a male administrator with more than 30 years of principalship experience stated that, "That's a very profound thing to ask yourself in a school. To me, a mission statement is the reason why we exist as a building...in other words why we exist as a school".

Principal N 3, a mature female administrator said, "Mission statement encompasses what we believe as a school...these belief statements are the specifics, and the mission statement is the generalization of those statements, of what you want to do. Everything that you do in your school should be intimately related to your school mission statement".

Principal N 4, a middle aged female administrator, reflected on our question by saying that, "We sometimes view the mission statement as the goal, as the end, but in my view a mission statement in one sentence, is the essence of what you hope your school is all about, and it captures it in a way that it is all encompassing, but not really detailed, so that everything that you do, you should be able

to say, How does this matter to our mission statement? Where can we find meaning in our mission statement?".

Mission Statement a long or short statement?

Principal N 4 suggested that, "a mission statement should be concise, not too brief, but enough to capture the essence of things that collectively make a place what it should be. More length comes from things beyond that, like the belief statement: this is what your mission statement looks like, what you believe about what your mission statement looks like; We believe that children are valuable; we believe that all individuals can learn and grow in a healthy environment".

Principal N 2 stated that, "Mission statements should be brief". He explained that, "Staff in schools change very often, lengthy mission statement can become open to a multitude of interpretation; with a brief and precise mission statement you can avoid this problem of misinterpreting your school mission statement as a new staff member".

Principal N 1 suggested that, "Brevity is essential, but deep enough to be meaningful. Society these days cannot afford to go into great detail. People do not have the time and people do not want to make the time to read things in depth. A mission statement should be something that you can put into your heart and be able to remember it very easily".

Principal N 3 stated, "I think that mission statements should be brief, so that people can look at them and easily understand them and remember them. If you give a full page with a lengthy mission statement, you'll likely have very few people who would read it and understand it".

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

The Major Players in the Process

Principal N 1 stated that, "I don't think that a mission statement should be developed solely by one person. A mission statement encompasses too much to be one's person vision. I think it should be a process that involves collaboration and especially not be limited to just the principal, because a principal, in present days, tend to be more temporary than in the past. So, this process should include a committee and people that have the school's best interest in mind. They are, teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Since ours is a religious school, the input of the church constituency is important".

Principal N 4 suggested that, "The development of a school mission statement should involve all of the stake holders. For us, to provide a mission statement from the teachers would be the teachers' mission statement, but it would have no ownership for the kids, and the parents, and the community members who might have a

stake in what we are doing. So, I think that if you are going to develop a mission statement, you have to involve all of your stakeholders in some way".

Principal N 2 referred to this question in the following manner, "We developed ours with the help of our parents, students, staff members and community members. We did this process again, (and I keep hammering on this), because we see ourselves as a community school; we did involve other stakeholders, parents. We also had a business representative. We even involved non-parents from the community; we felt that it was important because they bring an important point of view. For example, we involved a gentleman and his wife who live across from the school, but they don't have children in our school. They had no idea what was going on inside our school, yet their perception and insights were different, valuable and very important to our school.

Then through a process of collaboration with our staff, and school council representatives, parents and non-parents, we then defined our Mission Statement as 'our reason for being', and through this process we articulated our reasons for existence as an institution".

What was the attitude from these groups to the process of developing your mission statement?

Principal N 4 stated that, "Generally the best response is by those

whom less frequently get asked. So, I would say that our student group and our parent groups gave a beautiful response; (they said "isn't it great that we have a say un our school's direction); the staff group would be enthusiastic only to the extent that it doesn't take them away from their busy things that they do all the time, and as long as they see meaning and purpose in it".

Description of the process to develop a mission statement

Principal N 2 described this process in the following manner, "My job as a principal and the promoter of developing a school mission statement began a few months prior to actually getting engaged in the process. Months prior, I started talking to staff in hallways or staff meetings about what they felt was important to them. I even asked them to write about their personal philosophy of teaching. After this, staff came up to me and told me that they had felt very good because they had felt important and cared for by having the principal ask them to talk about their personal philosophy of education. These kinds of things led to last spring when we asked ourselves, Does our school need a mission statement? We then came to the point that, as a group, we thought that it was important that we shared a common belief about why we are here and what is our purpose in this school.

Our school had not developed a mission statement. We had a belief statement and a philosophy of teaching, but a mission

statement as to why we exist, wasn't there.

Our process was done a little backwards. We redeveloped our old vision for the school. To us a vision was just a statement. We then came up with a very simple and catchy phrase 'living to learn and learning to live'. After coming up with this statement, we stamped it everywhere we could, our letterheads, advertisement and promotional brochures. Then, we had people write down three (3) words on little chits of papers that to them talked about what this school was like: a cooperative place, a happy place, a learning place, or an academic place; we then used those little chits of papers and put them up on a board. We had dozens of words. It became overwhelming. The person who was facilitating, along with those participating went through a 'cleaning process'. This was to get rid of those words that had been repeated or words with the same meaning, so we came up with different groups of words. We then had people go back and work in groups of three to try and write a mission statement using as many of those groups of words, it didn't matter if it looked or sounded right. Then the groups would interchange those statements and the other groups tried to simplify and reshape that mission statement. The actual writing of the final draft was done by a committee of staff members who took all the information that other groups had come up with, and with that information they developed our school mission statement. This group had to go back to the big group several times until the mission

statement was approved and ratified by the entire school community. This process took many, many hours. After several meetings and brainstorming sessions we finally came up with our mission statement".

Principal N 3 described their process as follows: "We first took a look at our old mission statement, and we asked ourselves, 'Does this really pertain?'. Are we really doing what this mission statement is saying? General aspects did relate to what we were doing. We then had staff write two or three things that would define their strong belief of what education should be about. Then we tried to combine those ideas with other people's ideas, searched for things that were consistent. We then took those comments, analyzed them and tried to come up with generalizations. So, we kept going back and forth from small to large groups until we had something that we can say that everyone enjoyed, understood and supported.

One thing that we made sure we had was time, because the more time you have for development, the more ownership you will have and the more people you will have that will believe and be influenced by the final product".

Principal N 4 stated that their process was developed as follows: "When I came to this school, I individually interviewed each staff member and asked them, What do you think is the mission of this school? I also asked them in a staff meeting to take five minutes

and think about what this place is all about. Then I invited them to write down, what they thought the mission of this building was? After that, I looked at those answers and saw that there were a lot of different missions going on in this building. Then, as a group, we realized that it was necessary to pull together all of those different directions and come up with one that could represent each individual mission statement. We then thought that we needed to have a large group representing all of our school stakeholders. That's why we met with each grade and told them, 'this is your school, what do you think is the primary function or goal? What do you think we should be doing here?'. We then recorded all of their ideas and came up with one main idea from the students' group. We did the same with the parents, teachers, and support staff. Finally, we gathered all of that information and took it to the group that actually wrote our mission statement. This was a long process, but, looking back, it was worth all that waiting".

Techniques used in the process

Principal N 4 said, "First, raise their level of awareness; to do this we used interesting readings that made us think and reflect on working collectively, the importance of having a vision, and the importance of collaboration. We then used discussion groups, round table discussion, visual aids. We tried to have all of our senses opened, so that, they could serve the purpose of keeping our

attention and keep us focused. It is also important to place strategic breaks so that people don't get tired too easily".

Principal N 3 suggested: "Always have that small committee go back to the entire school community and ask for their approval until consensus is reached. In our case, I think that it was that constant going back to the school community that made a difference and at the end our entire school was able to look at that statement and say 'we believe in that'".

Principal N 1 stated, "We used surveys to express our ideas. We also developed committees and boards to collect ideas and worked as a group with all of the information gathered. Personally, I think that the most important factor was having that personal contact and personal communication; we avoided the use of the written memo system".

The school community response to the process

Principal N 4 reflected: "There was a mixed reaction in our community. We've had the nay sayers, saying 'why are we doing this, we did that 20 years ago'. We also had people that said 'Yes, this is exciting, let's try this'. You also get everybody in between...I think you need to expect that. I found out that a lot of our staff members when we began this process could have cared less about it; we had some staff who are the kind of people who tell you 'just give me my mathematics, give me my kids and let me teach my class.

What's this mission statement business?'. So, a lot of your job is having them reflect why is this process important, and why is it important for them to be involved in this process. This is not an easy thing to do, because they will do what you say or ask them, but if they are not going to live this, it could be a worthless process".

Principal N 3 stated: "The level of enthusiasm varies. That's why we had a small subcommittee of people who were really interested in this task. Not everyone was involved in the final wording of our mission statement. A small group of about seven, became the group that worded our mission statement".

IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DEVELOPING MISSION STATEMENTS

The interviewees provided many other important suggestions to keep in mind when developing school mission statements.

Principal N 4 reflected on the following: "There are some basic things that must happen in building any mission statement. One thing is, 'people have to feel that they have ownership', and in order to do that, they MUST all have input. You, as the principal, have to find a way for them to have input. That could be by bringing everybody together or bringing representatives together, and each of the groups has to go through a process where their representatives are actually taking their views. If you just

say 'elect five people to talk on your behalf', that's all they will do. They will send somebody and they will have no idea of what that group is doing; this is called ownership. If you don't have ownership and involvement of all of your stakeholders, the process will not work. I had a veteran teacher, when we were building our mission statement, who did not show up for our first meeting; so, I asked the rest of the staff: 'where is ...'? The staff responded: 'he never goes to P.D. days'. I stopped the session and walked to his classroom, and there he was, involved in some professional development for his own benefit, and also for his students' benefit. So I sat down with him and said: 'I'm missing you in the room'. He responded: 'I never go to those P.D. functions'; I said: 'tell me about that...'. He responded: 'Oh!, They're a waste of time, and I get more done in my room'. I responded: 'you'd probably get lots more done in your room, but do you think it is fair for you to selfishly rob the rest of us of your years of experience and wisdom that you could be sharing with us...?'. He said: 'no'. I responded, 'come on, WE need you'. After that incident he never missed another meeting. This wasn't about a waste of time, it was about HIM feeling that he had something valuable to contribute...that's the ownership part; people have to feel that what they are saying, matters; and that they have something meaningful to contribute...and that's a big thing. That's why my personal motto is: 'Don't do things for them (your staff), but

instead do things with them, for themselves".

Principal N 1 reflected on the following: "Always let people know about the purpose of why you are doing things. Now, meaning and purpose may not come as soon as you build a mission statement. The importance is what you do with that mission statement. Our mission statement hangs on the wall in our gym. I even put it on a big chart, so when I go to parents I have notes which say: 'this is what our mission statement is... We are committed to a quality education...and this is how this is obtained in our school. 'Quality education means these are the results of our provincial exams. These are the results of our I.B. exams. This is how many kids graduate with us each year... and that's what quality education means in our school'. Then, I say: 'In a caring environment'. I then explain about our advisory program that we have in place, that we will phone you the first month into every semester and let you know how your child is doing. I also tell them about our teaching staff that puts in hundreds of extra hours each month doing things for their kids'. By the time I'm finished, parents can look at our mission statement and they can see all the things we do in our school that make our mission statement meaningful. If you just hang it on the wall, it will not matter. Your teachers will say: 'what a waste of time that was'; so, a mission statement has to be the main 'reason for being' in your school. You have to make it believable to every person in your

community. This is how a mission statement acquires 'life'. Principal N 3 suggested. "From each mission statement a school should come up with a motto which should be short, two or three words. It should say: 'this is what our mission statement means in everyday language'. Ours is painted in our gym and is '(school's name) pride'. This pride is not only within our school, but in every single thing that each of us does as an individual member of our school, as a student representative in the community, or staff member in the community. It amounts to being proud of who you are, what you do, and of each other. If our mission statement says that: 'We provide a quality educational program', we are proud of that; we also do it in a 'caring environment', we are also proud of that. That's part of who we are, what we do and WE as a school are proud of all of this".

CONCLUSION

This project has unveiled several important elements. First, a mission statement is simply a statement of an organization's or an institution's vision of itself that serves to guide program planning, development, and evaluation. The mission statement also serves as the basis for communicating within and outside the organization with those who are important to the school's effectiveness and success.

Secondly, when developing a school mission statement it needs to be a PROCESS. This process can take a long period of time, but one thing we have discovered is that this process cannot be rushed. If we are planning on developing an effective mission statement, time is an element in which we have to invest.

Third, and to my view point the most important one, to develop an effective mission statement, mission statement OWNERSHIP is essential. The most interesting finding during the interview process was the element of ownership. The most effective approach to developing ownership of a mission statement is to involve in the planning process ALL of those people likely to be affected by its implementation. The major group affected by this statement is the school staff; other groups that are also affected are the students, and parents. In light of this finding, it is also advisable to involve in the process other groups that can be affected by a mission statement, such as, community representatives and even business representatives.

And finally, the mission statement should be the 'driving force' of the school's activity. This 'driving force' should constitute the basis for developing interview questions addressed to prospective faculty members. Only those whose intellectual and attitudinal predispositions are congruent with mission direction should be given serious employment consideration.

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PART IV

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are the sample questions for the administrator's interview process.

1. How would you define a school mission statement?
2. How would you describe your school mission statement?
3. How would you describe the process by which you developed your school mission statement?
4. Why did your school decided to get involved in this process?
5. Who were the major players in this process?
6. How did the community respond to this process and to the mission statement?
7. Who were the stakeholders in your process?
8. What was the response of the school staff?
9. What was the response of the students and the parents involved in this process?
10. What techniques did you school use for developing your school mission statement?
11. What would be a set of recommendations or suggestions that you would make to schools that would be engaged in developing their school mission statement?
12. What improvements have you seen in your school since the development of your school mission statement? Can those

improvements be attributed to the 'arrival' of the school mission statement?

13. What changes, if any, would you make in your mission statement if you were starting the process, today?
14. How would you describe an 'effective' school mission statement?
15. What, in your opinion, are the key features in a school mission statement?

APPENDIX II

EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS

EXAMPLE OF SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS

As part of this project, I also want to provide those who will be engaged in a process of developing schools mission statements, with samples of them.

Forest Lawn High School, Calgary, Canada

"We are committed to building knowledge, developing responsible attitudes and demonstrating competencies for life in a complex and changing world".

Ernest Morrow Junior High School, Calgary, Canada

"Ernest Morrow Junior High School is committed to the development of a learning and teaching community that is founded in the belief that the individual learner's achievement is the priority. Such achievement can best be realized in a learning-teaching environment that fosters challenge, individual student initiative, mastery of basic skills and knowledge, and technological competency".

St. Peter Elementary School, Calgary, Canada

"WE at St. Peter School, in union with the home and Catholic Church, are committed to providing a safe, positive, Christian learning environment for all. As we nurture a life long joy in the

discovery of self, others and our world, we celebrate that God provides the strength and purpose in all we do".

G.W. Skene Elementary School, Calgary, Canada

"G.W. Skene School supports and is committed to individual student development through effective education. We believe effective student/teacher/community involvement contributes to the total development of each child. We further believe that the foremost school function is to ensure that there is a teacher in every classroom who cares that every student, every day, learns and grows, and feels like a worthy, confident human being".

James Short Memorial School, Calgary, Canada

"WE at J.S.M. School will work collaboratively to plan and implement a learning community which enables children to achieve to their academic potential through meaningful activities in a caring, safe and positive environment".

Dr. Gladys McKelvie Egbert Community School, Calgary, Canada

"To ensure individual student development through effective education".

St. Mark School, Calgary, Canada

"WE, the staff at St. Mark School, provide a positive learning

environment for children, parents and staff. All individuals have the opportunity to grow spiritually, intellectually, creatively, emotionally and physically in our Catholic community. We respect, care and support all individuals by following Christ's example".

St. Rupert School, Calgary, Canada

"The intent of St. Rupert School is to create a safe, healthy, Catholic learning environment grounded in mutual trust, respect, support and awareness that results in purposeful education. The focus will be on teamwork and collaboration using optimal resources to foster pride and ownership in our school".

St. Rose School, Calgary, Canada

"St. Rose staff is dedicated to the development of the total child, the physical, the social, the emotional, the intellectual, the aesthetic and the spiritual all blended to form the child's Christian character and personality".

The Calgary Catholic Separate School Board, Canada

"We, the Calgary Catholic School District, founded upon the pervading reality of an individual's relationship to the Triune God, have as our mission the education of the whole child-spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically.

We, the Calgary Catholic School District, securely rooted in

the gospel values of Christ, recognize parents as primary educators and the Church as our spiritual leader.

We, the Calgary Catholic School District, are committed to prepare and equip our students with the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge to enable them to solve with wisdom the practicalities of living, and ultimately to prepare them to live eternally with God".

Terry Fox Junior High School, Calgary, Canada

"Terry Fox Junior High School is a unique, interesting and well organized learning environment where everyone can make choices. It is a safe and caring community. Members of the Terry Fox Community unite in a spirit of shared ownership and commitment. We value creative participation of parents and community and we encourage collaboration through mutual trust and respect".

Grant MacEwan Elementary School, Calgary, Canada

"WE, strive to create a safe, positive and motivating learning environment which is sensitive, responsive and which facilitates the total development of each child. Our environment accepts and respects individual differences, promotes independent and creative thinking and encourages respect for self and others".

The Calgary Board of Education, Canada

"The Calgary Board of Education, as a public education system, ensures that quality learning is accessible to all students. The system supports, nurtures and connects the work of teachers, parents, and families.

The Board's governance exhibits wisdom, courage, foresight and shared leadership so that time, talent and resources are used in the best possible way. The board promotes staff, parent and community commitment to an efficient and effective learning organization. The board fosters a climate which is visionary, reflective, collaborative and responsive to change>

The Board acts as an advocate for every student to have an equal opportunity to become competent, productive and self-directed citizen. The Board acts as an advocate for every school to have the resources to assist all its students to be the best that they can be".

Chris Ackerman School, Calgary, Canada

"Coming together, learning together"

Monsignor A.J. Hetherington School, Calgary, Canada

"Together with the community, we at Monsignor Hetherington School will create a positive Christian learning environment where we will be committed to:

*Develop as a Catholic learning organization pursuing improvement in student achievement.

*Prepare and equip our students with the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge to enable them to be productive citizens with a sense of purpose and hope in their lives.

*Be confident lifelong learners who take pride in their accomplishments".

John XXIII School, Calgary, Canada

"Within the context of our Catholic values, John XXIII School endeavors to provide quality instruction to all students while promoting optimal growth of the whole child".

Lakeview Elementary School, Lethbridge, Canada

"The Lakeview School Community is committed to providing a positive learning environment that promotes the development of responsible, productive citizens".

Winston Churchill High School, Lethbridge, Canada

"Winston Churchill High school is dedicated to providing a quality education that challenges students of all abilities in a caring environment in order that they might become lifelong learners and responsible, contributing members of an ever-changing society".