

Autonomous and Independent School Administrators (DiSAL),
A Professional Association of Administrators of Public and Separate Schools¹

A Glance Beyond our Borders:
International Experiences of Administrators Compared:
A Report on Professional Exchanges between School
Administrators

In conjunction with the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)

Translated from Italian by R. Drew Griffith

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¹ In Italy, as in Ontario, there is both a public and a separate (that is to say, Catholic) school system; the difference is that in Italy the public system receives the full economic support of the state, while the Catholic system, called *paritaria* – “separate, yet equal” – is funded mainly by students’ families. (Thanks to M. Cristina Mignatti for this explanation.)

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INTRODUCTION

Crossing Borders: Professional Exchange for Training School Administrators

Prof. Ezio Delfino,

President of DiSAL, Italy

People don't take trips; trips take people.

- John Steinbeck

The present report is the result of a series of meetings, friendships and hospitality given and received between school administrators on two continents: a story of collaboration between Autonomous and Independent School Administrators (DiSAL), the Italian association of administrators of public and separate schools, and the Ontario Principal's Council (OPC), a Canadian organization that offers support and professional development to some 6,000 principals in that province. Shared objectives and the surprising discovery of similarities in the idea of schools as learning communities led the governing bodies of both organizations to find opportunities for mutual dialogue, and to undertake professional exchanges of school administrators as a form of job shadowing: brief visits at partner-schools in Italy and in Ontario to learn new skills, make new acquaintances and share best practices in both professional and cultural spheres. As the present report amply demonstrates, the outcome has been our discovery that one can learn educational models and systems meaningfully only by entering oneself into a

similar school, wandering its hallways while classes are in session, seeing classrooms and labs, and taking part in activities, watching as one's colleague works to administrate his or her own school. The "Report on Professional Exchanges between School Administrators" aims precisely to set forth and make useful to a wider public the rich experience born of the visits of the respective schools and school-systems on the part of some twenty Italian and Canadian school administrators undertaken by the two associations in the 2015-16 academic year. The initiative had the aim of improving the professional abilities of the principals involved, while laying the groundwork for an international collaboration between the two associations.

This document was written as a group by some of the school administrators of DiSAL who took part in the exchange, and by exponents of the two associations. The articles composed by the Italian administrators show which professional aspects were illuminated by the exchange, and which new practices each one adopted upon returning to his or her own school. CHAPTER ONE, written by Joanne Robinson, Director of Professional Learning, Education Leadership Canada and CHAPTER TWO by Cristina Mignatti, School Administrator and Education Advisor to the Italian Consulate in Toronto focus on characteristics of the school systems and the way of administrating schools in Ontario, pointing out similarities and differences with the Italian system. CHAPTER NINE, contributed by Prof. Angelo Paletta, economist, scholar of educational management models, and expert in the theoretical basis of Canadian teacher-training that guides OPC, gives an expert's validation of professional exchanges and the best practices involved.

Our hope is that by documenting the experience outlined in this report, we might inspire and motivate other school administrators to participate in future professional exchanges, which the two associations intend to propose, and that this type of professional development becomes

recognized and maintained by the authorities governing Italian schools as an innovative activity in the area of professional development for school administrators.

CHAPTER ONE

Training and Innovation: Models and Tools for Improving Professional Performance: the Ontario Experience

Joanne Robinson

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1. Teacher Performance Appraisal

Ontario's teacher performance appraisal (TPA) system for new and experienced teachers is designed to:

- promote teacher development;
- provide meaningful appraisals of teachers' performance that encourage professional learning and growth;
- identify opportunities for additional support where required; and
- provide a measure of accountability to the public.

The TPA system helps strengthen schools as learning communities where teachers have the chance to engage in professional exchanges and collaborative inquiries that foster continuous growth and development. Professional dialogue and collaboration are essential to the creation and maintenance of a healthy school culture. An appraisal system in which both teachers and principals are actively engaged provides a framework for assessing teachers'

practices in a way that meets their professional learning needs. The TPA system engages principals and teachers in professional dialogue that deepens their understanding of what it means to be a teacher, as reflected in the Ontario College of Teachers' Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession.²

A principal must:

- schedule performance appraisals for every teacher assigned to the school and notify each teacher when an appraisal is being scheduled (see section 6, “Scheduling Requirements”);
- meet with the teacher to prepare for the classroom observation component and to discuss the competencies that will be the focus of this observation (see section 10.2.2, “The Pre-observation Meeting”);
- conduct a classroom observation to appraise the teacher’s performance in relation to the applicable competencies (see section 10.2.3, “The Classroom Observation”);
- meet with the teacher to review the results of the classroom observation (see section 10.2.4, “The Post-observation Meeting”);
- prepare and sign a summative report on the performance appraisal, using the ministry-approved form (see section 10.2.5, “The Summative Report” and the forms in Appendices A and B; 4 Roles and Responsibilities 12 Teacher Performance Appraisal – Technical Requirements Manual);

² <http://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-ofpractice>.

- give the teacher a signed copy of the summative report within twenty school days of the classroom observation;
- upon a teacher's request, meet with the teacher to discuss the performance appraisal once the teacher has received a copy of the summative report;
- provide the board with a signed copy of the summative report; and
- in instances where the performance appraisal results in an Unsatisfactory rating, follow the applicable procedures set out in section 12, "Procedures Following a Performance Rating".

Highlights:

This is a growth model of appraisal and teachers are expected continuously to work on their professional practice and the principal is expected to support ongoing professional learning.

Compensation (pay) is not based on the results of the performance appraisal. If a teacher receives an Unsatisfactory report, the expectation is that the teacher, supported by the principal, will work on improvement. Unsatisfactory rarely leads to dismissal, but it is possible.

2. Principal Performance Appraisal

Principals and vice-principals are required to participate in an appraisal once every five years. The appraisal process consists of a minimum of three meetings throughout the appraisal year, followed by a summative report that includes a performance rating, as outlined in the document below. In the event of an Unsatisfactory rating, the appraisal process as outlined is

repeated, including the three required meetings.³

During the performance appraisal process, the principal/vice-principal develops one or more professional goals that support the improvement of student achievement and well-being, while taking into account the board improvement plan for student achievement, the school improvement plan, and provincial educational priorities. Goals may also be based on the school community and local context as well as the personal development goals of the principal/vice-principal being appraised. Principal/vice-principal performance appraisal, as set out in Ontario Regulation 234 of 2010, was implemented across the province in 2010. It is focused on supporting principals and vice-principals in setting and attaining the following goals to:

- strengthen their leadership practice by focusing on student achievement and well-being; and
- focus on leadership growth and ensure professional accountability grounded in a commitment to school and district improvement.

The principal/vice-principal performance appraisal fosters leadership development by providing opportunities for principals and vice-principals to:

- engage with their supervisors in frequent and meaningful dialogue about their performance;
- consider what support they need in order to achieve their performance goals; and
- identify ways in which they can enhance their professional growth.

In Ontario, supervisory officials are responsible for appraisal of principals, and principals

³ http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/PPA_Manual.pdf.

are responsible for appraisal of vice-principals. The qualities of leadership that are appraised are based on the domains and practices of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and the Personal Leadership Resources from the OLF.⁴

3. School Improvement

The School Effectiveness Framework (K-12) is a self-assessment tool for schools. It serves to:

- help educators identify areas of strength, areas requiring improvement and next steps;
- act as a catalyst for shared instructional leadership through collaborative conversations focused on high levels of student learning and achievement;
- promote inquiry focused on student learning, achievement and well-being that informs goals and effective teaching and learning practices/strategies;
- support educators in determining explicit, intentional and precise improvement planning decisions which inform monitoring and feedback for continuous improvement and future planning in relation to enhanced student learning, achievement and well-being;
- maintain communication with stakeholders to foster increased public confidence about school effectiveness; and

⁴ <https://educationleadership-ontario.ca/en/resource/ontario-leadership-framework-olf>.

- build coherence in and across schools and districts.

There are six components to the tool that guide the school improvement planning process. Each component has a specific set of indicators that are used in the self-assessment of the school:

- assessment for, as and of learning;
- school and classroom leadership;
- student engagement;
- curriculum, teaching and learning;
- pathways, planning and programming; and
- home, school and community partnerships.⁵

4. Networks for Leading Student Achievement

Ontario is a jurisdiction where educators are offered the opportunity to work in learning teams and share expertise as they focus on continuous improvement for students' learning.

There is clear evidence provided in the following excerpt from a study by Leithwood and Ndifor Azah (2016) that demonstrates that leaders working in networks is a strategy for district wide reform.⁶

⁵ <http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/SEF2013.pdf>.

⁶ permanent link to this document: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2015-0068>.

This study was undertaken as part of the annual evaluation and research work associated with Ontario's Leading Student Achievement (LSA): Networks for Learning project. In its tenth year at the time of writing this paper, the LSA project is funded by the Ontario government and led by the province's three principal associations. Its goal is to nurture the development of school leadership in the province as a means of improving student achievement and well-being.

The project offers its members, now about 1,700 in number, a series of face-to-face and web-based professional development opportunities, along with significant guidance about the most productive focus for their school-based improvement initiatives. Project facilitators also work directly with school and district teams on the implementation of key project priorities. At the time of this writing, for example, LSA was supporting many project members who were working with their staffs to implement significant instructional reforms associated with one very well-developed approach to teaching for deep understanding called knowledge building (Scardamalia and Bereiter 2006).

"Principal Learning Teams" have been strongly advocated as a source of professional learning by the project for the past eight years and most members now belong to at least one such network typically based in their own districts. Among the four-fold classification of networks (peer leadership networks, organizational leadership networks, field-policy leadership networks and collective leadership networks) proposed by Hoppe and Reinelt (2010), principal learning teams are most like peer leadership

networks but include, as well, participation by senior district leaders. Annual project evaluations conducted over the life of the LSA project indicate that participation in these networks is consistently rated by members as among the most useful sources of their own professional growth. A desire by the project steering team to offer practical, evidence-based guidance to members about how to further improve the productivity of their networks was the primary motivation giving rise to this study.

This study addressed two questions. The primary question concerned the characteristics of effective leadership networks while the second question asked about the relative contribution to members' learning of their network engagement. Guided by a model of network effectiveness, data for the study were responses to a 53 items survey by 450 principals, all of whom belonged to a network of their peers in their own districts and, in some cases, outside their districts as well. The primary motivation for the study included a desire on the part of those guiding a large provincial leadership development project to provide practical guidelines to project members about designing and leading effective networks. Results of the study also add to the limited body of evidence (Provan and Milward 2001) about the relationship between network characteristics and network outcomes.

The characteristics of effective networks included in the framework tested by the study were initially identified through an extensive review of prior evidence and results of the study largely confirm the contribution of many of these characteristics to the further development of individual members' professional capacities – both cognitive and affective. For this reason, we

believe the study offers at least provisional guidance of the sort giving rise to the research in the first place. Furthermore, these results suggest that, in the opinion of respondents, participation in their leadership networks is a powerful source of their professional learning, a source exceeded in value only by their own individual reading. Encouraging school leaders to participate in leadership networks seems justified as a key strategy for school leadership development and the consequences of that participation are likely to increase to the extent that the practical implications of the results for future practice outlined in the paper are followed.

In Ontario, the principals' associations have facilitated the organization of their members into principal learning teams for over a decade. The power of networks has become clear and the strategy has become the operational norm of the organization. Global and international networks are also part of the modus operandi of the association that are operationalized through our Leading Educators Across the Planet (LEAP) program and Global Principal Partnerships (GPP) programs.

CHAPTER TWO

School Administration in Italy and in Ontario: A Comparison of Models

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1. The State of the Art in Ontario

To discuss the Canadian education system is a complex matter, because one must of necessity consider the different laws of each province and territory. Canada is in fact a confederation of ten provinces and three territories, and the constitution gives an exclusive mandate to each province and territory to pass laws concerning education from elementary school to the post-secondary level. Therefore, school-legislation, policy, funding levels and even the curriculum itself are decided at the provincial level, even if the thirteen educational systems share obvious similarities. The public school system is free of charge up to the secondary level at eighteen years of age, a right guaranteed to citizens and permanent residents of Canada.

Each province has one or two ministries that govern education, each headed by a minister elected in the usual way, who must be by law a member of the provincial legislature. The vice-ministers, however, are civil servants, without political office, and are responsible for the operations of these ministries. The ministries therefore oversee the educational,

administrative and financial policies, and in this way constitute the frame of reference for their respective systems.

The area involved in our exchange was Ontario, Canada's second largest province, with forty percent of the whole population of Canada at nearly twelve million inhabitants, who live in large cities or on the shores of the Great Lakes. Greater Toronto by itself includes six million people. It is also the province with the highest rate of immigration; 77% of its population speaks English, while 43% of new arrivals speak neither English nor French, the country's second official language, which however is spoken by only 5% of the population [of Ontario]. School-age children – i.e. those between five and fourteen years old – make up 13% of the population.

The two Ministries of Education and of Colleges and Universities are tasked with hiring and training on the job instructional staff, regardless of who administers the public education system. This last is a blend of public and Catholic, divided into districts and governed by school "boards".

The Education Act, overseen by the Ministry, establishes the level of learning to be attained at each level of schooling, given each school's environmental and security limitations, to develop and maintain the curriculum at the provincial level, which is very structured and ambitious, and also to maintain didactic excellence, giving to each board the grounds for creating and implementing different programs. In addition, the Ministry establishes programs and requirements for earning diplomas and certificates, governs schools and boards, setting also performance-standards for school administrators, teachers and district employees.

Ontario has set itself three major objectives: to attain high levels in student-testing, to narrow

the gap between these scores, and, as a result, to enhance the prestige and trustworthiness of public education.

These goals include that by the end of grade six (in Ontario this is still in elementary school, though it corresponds to the first grade of Italian middle school [*scuola media*]) 75% of students will have met the targets for Math and English language. The nine key strategies include: bringing about all the conditions for real equality that respects each individual student in the course of his or her training to obtain these results; offering financial aid to boards and staff, with the participation of local communities; aiming to reach an equally strong position in international rankings, including the OCSE-PISA test, coordinated at the federal level. In these tests Canada typically scores well, after Shanghai, Korea, Finland and Hong Kong. There are also interprovincial or federal tests in which Ontario scores well for Science and Math. At the provincial level is the “Education Quality Accountability Office” (EQAO), which oversees outcomes in Ontario. Student results are not only given to students’ families, but also published, and each board is required to put in place an ongoing plan constantly to improve the achievement of learning goals. The provincial tests take place each year for eight-year olds (grade three), eleven (six) and fourteen (nine), and test their mastery of Math, Writing and Reading. At fifteen-years old (grade ten) a literacy test is a prerequisite for the graduation diploma.

As mentioned above, the Education Act draws boundaries between the districts within which boards oversee the schools. There are 72 boards, 31 of which are English public (that is to say secular), 29 English Catholic, four French public and eight French Catholic. Each board involves trustees, who are regularly elected at the district level. These are local citizens from

different socioeconomic strata and professions, not necessarily parents of students in the district. They have a full mandate to decide board policies.

There are also inspectors called “Superintendents”, who in conjunction with the principals, teachers and administrative staff, are hired by the board. Instructional and support staff are registered and protected by a province-wide union, which negotiates contracts with the districts.

Grade-Level Schema

Kindergarten (4-5 years old)

Consists of Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten

Public schools for very young and young children (English, French and Catholic)

Childcare before and after school must be arranged privately

Elementary (6-14 years old); grades 1-8

Public elementary schools (English, French and Catholic)

Also private elementary schools

Secondary (14-18 years old); grades 9-12

Public secondary schools (English, French and Catholic)

Grades 9 and 10: students can choose between academic and applied courses, between province-wide courses and those that operate at a local level

Grades 11 and 12: these offer academic courses in preparation for university, courses that prepare either for university or college, courses geared only toward college and courses that lead directly into the workforce.

Private secondary schools

There are also special schools (e.g. for the blind) run directly at the provincial level. High school therefore lasts compulsorily for four years from 14 to 18, and for the most part students customize their own programs, choosing electives as well.

However, students must complete 30 credits in total to receive an “Ontario Secondary School Diploma” (OSSD), 18 of these being compulsory credits, including those in English, Math, Science, Canadian history, Canadian geography, Art, French as a second language, Health and Phys. Ed., Civics and Career Studies. Still among compulsory credits are Co-operative Education, Guidance, Business Studies, Technological Education or a third language. Optional subjects with 12 credits in total are chosen to highlight students’ various aptitudes, and are offered in schools according to provincial mandate. Students do not undergo a province-wide final exam to matriculate and receive their final marks, but must obtain a certificate of literacy, and hence must pass a written test called “Ontario Secondary Literacy Test” (OSSLT), or, if they fail this, they must take and pass a related course called “Ontario Secondary Literacy Course” (OSSLC). Important moreover is the Ministry’s decision to review the curriculum every seven years to keep up with the changing times, as regards the relevance, coherence and appropriateness to the students’ level of development at their respective ages. In this way boards and schools have more time to make the curriculum their own, to experiment with it and to implement it in schools. In Ontario there are also 900 independent, that is private schools, which receive no government funding and account for 5% of the student population. If they issue a recognized final diploma, they are inspected directly by the Ministry. These include Montessori schools,

which are considered and treated as private educational enterprises. In Ontario there are 4,020 primary and 911 secondary schools.

To become a teacher one must have an undergraduate degree as well as attending two additional years of teachers' college (OISE) or other accredited university faculties. Basically, any student with an undergraduate degree can apply for this degree, based more on broad subjects such as pedagogy and psychology, taken concurrently with an apprentice internship specific to one's own area (called a "practicum"), which takes place over at least forty days in designated schools, with the support of an associate teacher. Once this degree is finished, if the newly minted teacher is considered adequate, he or she is allowed to join, having first paid the dues to it, the "Ontario College of Teachers" (OCT), a professional regulatory body that allows one to begin one's own teaching-career in public schools, at the discretion of the principal him- or herself. One is qualified for elementary school up to grade six, or from grades four to ten, or from grades seven to twelve. OCT is an independent body charged with regulating the teaching profession, ruling on professional standards and conduct of teachers, giving teachers their teaching certificate, accrediting refresher courses (whether ones it offers itself or those given by other institutions), watching over and investigating matters of adherence to professional codes of conduct, and publicizing the availability of teaching jobs.

To become an administrator of a public school one requires an undergraduate degree, five years of teaching and qualifications in three of the four levels of school (primary, junior, intermediate, senior), and either two specialist qualifications similar to Italian improvement courses [*corsi di perfezionamento*], or instead an MA or MEd. In either case one must complete the qualifying course, "Principal Qualification Program" (PQP). This course, whose costs are

borne completely by the candidate, involves in-class hours and internships in schools accompanied by a mentor administrator for a total of around 600 hours, and a written paper discussing these experiences. In this case too there are accredited professional organizations and associations tasked with the initial instruction of future administrators so they have more than just on-the-job training. "Ontario Principals' Council" (OPC), institutional partner of DiSAL, is one of these professional associations. It numbers about 5,000 members, not just principals, but also vice-principals and lower level administrators (department heads, etc.), and bases its professional development on the principles of educational leadership. The initial training of a new principal has as its general scope an approach that is not bureaucratic and administrative, but rather education-based. The main objective is one's success in training one's students. The school administrator, here defined as principal, but above all as educational leader, is someone capable of creating the conditions to facilitate student's learning processes thanks to constant work alongside his or her teachers, using the methodology referred to as "instructional practice". As Michael Fullan, one of the world's foremost experts in educational leadership, and professor emeritus at OISE, affirms, principals must be "right drivers in action", that is, persons able to guide their schools in concrete projects, and hence in action. They must have a propensity to instil professional competence in others by their attention to results, by collaborating in the pedagogical and educational sphere as well as by their systematic approach, which entails a policy of coordination at all levels. According to the Education Act, a principal's responsibilities include the quality of teaching in the school, the organization and conduct of the school, the professional development of the instructors, the behaviour of the

students, the oversight, administration and containment of the budget assigned to the school, and the hiring of teachers.

It is the role of the Ministry to bring forward a policy for the curriculum, but the responsibility to apply and implement it rests with the schools and boards. Under the administration of their district, teachers develop lesson-units, and various methodological approaches starting from the training needs of their students, using the most advanced multimedia technologies. Specifically, there are acquaintanceships and abilities that could be considered the learning standard for each level and class, and more detailed skill-sets for each subject-matter.⁷ Students achieve different marks, divided according to levels: level one (50-59%), level two (60-69%), level three (70-79%, the level designated as normative by the province) and level four (80-100%).

As concerns student evaluations, there are two report cards established at the provincial level: one for elementary schools and one for secondary, available and downloadable online. There is no report card for Kindergarten.⁸ Teachers use report cards also to track outcomes on achievement charts to track student progress. On these there are comments on every discipline, but also on general considerations on areas of strength and weakness and what steps to take to improve. On the report card is space for comments by the student and parents. One can view these report cards on the ministry website.⁹

⁷ On this point, see <http://www.Edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum>.

⁸ There actually is a report for Kindergarten students (translator's note).

⁹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growsuccess.pdf>.

I will offer just a few words about students with special needs. Provincial law forbids all form of discrimination, which is why, except in very serious cases, such students are integrated into the regular classroom, and follow personalized plans of work. 79% are fully integrated.

In budgetary terms, the Ministry provides funding to the boards on the basis of the number of students. Each board has latitude in how it uses the economic resources allocated to it, distributing them to individual schools, given a detailed accounting of their investments, that must agree with the amount allowed for by the Education Act. Certain funds are earmarked for special programs, particularly those for special-needs children.

The Ministry of Education receives a third of its funding from the Ministry of Finance, which turns over to it a percentage of the educational property tax, which means that a third of all property taxes go directly to fund education. The remaining two thirds come from funds designated by the provincial government.

2. Educational Leadership and the System for Evaluating Principals and Instructors in Ontario

As has been previously noted, the whole educational establishment is founded on the principles of leadership, understood as a prerequisite and horizon of understanding. Effective leadership is defined by OPC as one of the foundations necessary systematically to support and advance improvement. It is a cornerstone that constitutes an indispensable point of reference for the educational enterprise and for all who work in schools, who to that degree are able to respond to the needs that surface on a daily basis, and therefore to put the focus on students'

real training needs, achieving concrete improvements as a result. Historically, this transition from a bureaucracy-driven management of schools to one that focusses more on quality, began in the '90s when Ontario's Ministry of Education passed a law removing principals from simple collective bargaining, abolishing their unions and forcing them to reorganize in more professional associations that are better able to define their role. In fact, management recognized the need to find trustworthy allies, and not merely an organization that fought for their rights, much less a group of bureaucrats that only carried out rules and regulations handed down from on high. On the contrary, it was necessary to create a group of professional educators with whom to discuss the quality of the education-system, its curricula and learning-improvement strategies.

OPC has taken up this challenge, and, thanks to the support of university-level research produced in those years, has developed a unique expertise in this area, recognized the world over thanks to the creation of a program entitled, "International School Leadership", which has been exported around the world.

Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves and Ken Leithwood, names well known at the international level, inspired and continue to support this great cultural and training operation, which has brought about a change of approach in operating and managing schools, and in responding to the ever more pressing challenges to education posed in the global village.

The principles of leadership, which arose in business circles, have been adopted by the world of schools, where the sole objective remains success in training and educating young people in terms of the social context appropriate to them. It has been scientifically proven that there is a close relationship between effective leadership and the improvement of student's

results and sense of well-being at school. The “Ontario Leadership Framework” (OLF), developed by OPC, affirms that leadership helps educators identify and bring to reality their visions by encouraging the creation of an organizational system fit for the task. In fact, leadership succeeds when it contributes significantly to advancing the organization, and is ethical in so far as it supports and helps the organization, which is to say, it neither dictates nor manipulates.

In short, this new approach to managing schools involves three fundamental cultural aspects:

- creating a complete ability for administration, capable of accomplishing the five essential tasks of leadership: being able to define objectives, prioritizing the use of resources, promoting a culture of collaborative learning, knowing how to make use of available data, and undertaking extensive professional dialogues to keep in sight improvements and innovation;
- creating a strong sense of responsibility at the school-level or of mutual responsibility at the level of local networks in which the principal advocates for education and shares this burden with his or her instructors and with his or her own colleagues at the district level;
- recognizing and consequently valuing leaders, not just as necessary add-ons, but as integral parts of schools, ready to respond in terms of their own mandate to achieve constant improvement.

This is the context of OPC’s task as an institution: to train new administrative cadres or principals already in service through itinerant tutoring, refresher courses, personal consultation

and mentoring activities, as mandated by the Ministry of Education, as is the case for other similar accredited associations in Canada. Thus there exists a strong network of professional support, side by side with technical assistance of a more managerial, bureaucratic and legal sort offered by the boards. School principals can count on a management that responds directly to users, answering every question (for example concerning security issues or physical school buildings), which lie outside the direct competence of an individual principal, who however is obviously required to draw attention to problems.

As concerns principals' performance-appraisals, and in parallel those of instructors, it must be emphasized straight away that it is not a question of "assessment", also called "evaluation", i.e. a process designed to check up on them, but is defined in the term "principal's performance appraisal" (PPA) as "appraisal", a word whose root lies in "praise", meaning, eulogy, appreciation or esteem. It is seen not as a taxonomic evaluation, but rather as proof of the professional development of the administrator by his or her superintendent-cum-mentor. The focus is on professional growth in leadership, and is a result of an accountability in this area that has its terms of reference in how it shows the direction in which the leader wishes to take the school, his or her ability to build professional relationships within and outside the immediate environment, capacity to grow the people and organization of the specific school, ability to offer leadership for instructors to improve themselves, and finally, acknowledgement of such improvement transparently by his or her own actions, based on observations and not only on quantitative data.

The PPA presupposes and facilitates constant dialogue between a principal and the superintendent required to evaluate him or her. The superintendent takes into account the

professional comportment of the principal and of any request for support, to find concrete pathways for improvement to promote his or her own professional development as a school leader.

The watchword is trust in a constant process of comparing and supporting, which does not come down only to periodic inspection tours.

The PPA was test-driven in the 2007-08 academic year in twelve boards, then revised by a committee made up of school-principals, superintendents and directors of professional associations, who offered suggestions and advice for improving, developing and implementing this appraisal-process.

Nevertheless, if it is true that the school principal is an agent of change, because he or she motivates the personnel and guides the organization even under difficult conditions, proposes models of learning and creates the conditions for bringing them about, promoting changes in the system (Fullan, "Three Keys to Maximizing Impact," OPC meeting, Spring/Summer 2014), it is equally important that he or she must be able to count on having a robust corps of instructors to support, value and hence evaluate.

Once again, we are speaking of "teacher performance appraisal" (TPA), which aims first and foremost at improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Each contract teacher is evaluated after every five years of service by his or her principal, who takes into account three fundamental aspects of the instruction-profession: performance, in-class observation and evaluation by students. Specifically, the indicators of performance concern:

- lesson-planning and preparation;

- implementation of the lesson-plan;
- conducting the class;
- teacher-pupil relationships and the various needs of the student;
- evaluation of student progress;
- more general contributions to the life of the school community; and
- teaching techniques used.

As concerns in-class observations, the principal decides together with the teacher on the manner of observation, the date and in general how it will take place.

After having paid the visit(s), the principal is required to formulate within twenty business days a training report based on observation, which contains the evaluation of the teacher, the score obtained (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory), and the rationale for reaching that judgment. The principal must also add at the bottom of the report his or her recommendations and suggestions for improvement, which he or she must then discuss with the teacher.

The final appraisal report is signed by both parties, and then sent to the board, where the superintendent will sign it. Once signed, it is forwarded to the Human Resources Office, to be inserted into the personnel file. In this way, the teacher is constantly monitored over his or her career, which proceeds in stages by negotiated salary increases. There is not, however, any criterion of merit tied to a monetary reward for anyone, even though all are subjected to this course of professional training.

4. A Glance at our own House: the Italian Panorama

When one tries to compare Canada's – and specifically Ontario's – system with that of Italy, there is less point in considering our traditional pedagogical-educational system than its renovation. The latter has barely begun in consequence of the passing of Law 107 "The Good School Act" of 2015, whose application is already revealing points both of strength and of weakness, especially if one begins one's observation, as we have been doing, by considering leadership in education. The Italian context is broader and more problematic than the Canadian, not only for geographic reasons, or from blunt population density, but also for cultural and political reasons that affect the general view of educational matters. Our country has never resolved the structural dichotomies that are necessarily at the bottom of a democratic, multicultural and advanced nation, as rich in history and deeply rooted local traditions as is Italy.

Centralization versus decentralization, public schools versus comprehensive schools, nationally or regionally based recruitment, a system of instruction and professional training alike for all the regions, but with competing subject-matters are only some of the macro-aspects that markedly differentiate the two realities, and of which one must take account also when embarking on reform-projects. Centralization of decision-making inevitably burdens the process of bringing about any change. Whereas a managerial structure that delegates in matters of education, as in the Canadian federation, would probably have facilitated its accomplishment, once devolved to local realities as diversified as in the vast territory of Canada.

From the point of view of operations, our regional school offices (USR) and, notwithstanding our territorial unity, the provincial school offices (UST) simply represent a managerial decentralization with peripheral returning-offices that pass on at the local level whatever is approved and decided on centrally (one thinks for example of the procedures for recruiting instructors). There is no consultation on the substance of provisions, which continue to be disseminated as state laws in force over the whole national territory, applied with the help of USRs and USTs, except for special statute regions.¹⁰

Leaving aside instruction and professional training, when managed at the regional level, our system entails thirteen obligatory years in school, and students complete their studies at the age of nineteen, which is a year later than Canadians, who do not have preliminary and supplementary secondary schools [i.e. *ginnasio* followed by *liceo*], but only a single high school, with a resultant one-year shortening of the whole course of training.

The path to becoming a secondary school teacher begins with an MA (*laurea magistrale*) to which is added apprenticeship training (TFA), which leads to outright competition for a position, uniform as to rules and timing over the whole country. In short, over against the five years necessary for a Canadian to finish the process of being ready to be hired by a school, the Italian instructor must count on seven years of preparation, plus succeeding in the competition, a total of eight years on average, assuming that the competition takes place in a timely fashion, and that one is successful on the first attempt. The Good School Act, even with the best

¹⁰ There are five such: Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Valle d'Aosta, Sicily and Sardinia. They were given special status either because of their mixed cultural patrimony in the first three cases, or as being islands as in the last two (thanks to M. Cristina Mignatti for clarification).

intentions, follows this model: TFA, national competition, and entry into service, though it foresees changing this path (paragraph 180 of law 107 of 2015), but insisting on a trial or apprenticeship period of three years with salary, which does not, however, guarantee a full-time job.

The procedure for creating a contingent of school administrators establishes recruitment through a national competition, entailing primarily certification of one's knowledge of standards, one's managerial and planning skills, followed by a period of training, partly in person, partly on-line, and an apprenticeship, the nature of which is still subject to discussion.

The school administrator, forming part of the administration of the state (as Area Five of the administration), in accordance with Senate Ruling (*DDL*) number 165 of 2001, article 25:

is responsible for the management of financial and material resources, and the outcomes of service. As to the powers of the collegial bodies governing schools, school administrators have independent administrative powers to co-ordinate and evaluate human resources. In particular, the school administrator organizes the scholastic activity according to criteria of efficacy and efficiency,¹¹ and deals directly with the union.

The principal is at once, as it were, first among equals, and having become administrator with power to act independently in school matters, as provided for by Presidential Decree (*DPR*) 275 of 1999, has taken on greater responsibilities, which have lately been put into focus and defined by the Good School Act. His or her powers are enumerated as follows in paragraph 93 of law 107 of 2015:

¹¹ I understand these terms to mean in effect "achieving goals and managing resources" (translator's note).

- *managerial and organizational competence aiming at achieving results, fairness, transparency, efficacy and efficiency in administrative dealings in relation to the objects laid out in one's three-year posting;*
- *respect for the obligations asked of one, and professional skills offered by the institution's personnel, considered both one-by-one and in their mutual interrelationship;*
- *a grasp of how one's own behaviour affects one's colleagues and the community;*
- *contribution to improving the training and scholastic success of the students, the organizational and instructional processes, in the context of systems for self-evaluation and accountability to the public; and*
- *effective administration of the school, promotion of the participation and collaboration between the various subgroups in the school community, relationships with the local community and with the network of other schools.*

It is noteworthy that a principal intervening to promote the training-success of students is ranked fourth in importance, while for Canadian principals it is foremost, being the sole priority around which all other functions revolve.

Beyond the objectives of a managerial nature, tied to the principles of efficacy and efficiency, the principal has also assumed the responsibility for self-evaluation of the institution by means of the above-mentioned RAV, according to the Presidential Decree of March 28, 2013 number 80, and has taken on direct responsibility for part of the instructional personnel, the so

called “working cohort” (*organico di potenziamento*) on the basis of the three-year plan of instructional-offerings of the institution, previously prepared by him- or herself. In his or her role as education leader, the Canadian principal gives him- or herself similar objectives in consultation with his or her superintendent cum mentor, and establishes more than a plan for improvement, a proposal for bringing it about, but always measured by the students’ results, keeping in mind that these remain strictly under the control of the board.

If to this one adds the aspect of teachers’ performance appraisal, tied to monetary rewards, namely the so-called “bonus” (see paragraph 127 of law 107 of 2015), one can truly say that his or her professional profile is becoming burdened with ever more responsibilities and “power”, even though the performance appraisals must follow criteria laid out by an appraisal committee, guarantor of the objectivity and transparency of the whole operation. It is undeniable that in his or her role, the school administrator must of necessity bear final responsibility for the administration and management of the school, even though often not given the tools to do so on the ground that he or she holds a purely official post. To put it another way, the school administrator is not culturally prepared and trained to become a real educational leader, because, on the one hand, he or she is burdened with responsibilities (if often only bureaucratic errands), and on the other, one is left to deal with them on one’s own, without there being direct involvement or systemic assistance on the part of the administration of the Ministry. The lack of this educational and training aspect has recently disoriented many current administrators, and as a result other stake-holders in the sector to the extent that school administrators have come to be viewed as the schools’ new “sheriffs”. If the spirit of law 107 of 2015 were rewritten from the point of view of schools as learning communities – the

idea that holds sway in Canada – it is likewise true that, for example, instructors’ performance appraisals would venture to be seen more as professional encouragement rather than an occasion of a dangerous face-offs between the principal and his or her teachers, very far from experiencing the school as a zone of common effort filled with involvement as a team on everyone’s part.

On the contrary, educational leadership presupposes at all levels people interiorizing such concepts a responsibility, recognition and encouragement, whose primary objectives are not to blame or criticize, but to orient, salvage, integrate and improve all the processes that facilitate teaching and learning – in short, companionship on the journey, rather than mere evaluation of final outcomes.

As Dewey observed, a hundred years ago in his *Democracy and Education*, there can be no democracy unless there is also education, that is, unless one lives in a mutual exchange of rights and obligations about which all citizens have been educated. School in particular requires that democracy be a context of active social participation in which one teaches and learns solidarity and the political ideals that constitute the unwavering basis of living together in society. That is why today we ask of educational leadership not so much an efficient officialdom, manifesting itself in more reports to write and to plan around the table, as a cultural position, which, to the extent that it is educational, is able to journey with instructors in their daily practice, keeping alive the dialogue that fosters the handing on and development of skills as the primary objective of their teaching.

From this point of view, even the recent directive number 25 on the performance appraisal of school administrators – which, beginning on September 1, 2016, calls for an annual

performance appraisal of school administrators by an evaluating body composed of one administrator (whether technical, managerial or scholastic), who serves as co-ordinator, and two experts with special experience in matters of organization and appraisal – runs the risk of focussing solely on technical managerial ability, without taking into account all those motivational aspects, which, however, are the basis of successful leadership, and which truly matter. To appraise the performance of administrators 60% on their administrative and managerial ability, 30% on their ability to evaluate human resources and 10% on the view of them held by the personnel of the school, as the Ministry website states, gives grounds for short-sightedness regarding the very reason schools exist: to educate and successfully train young people.

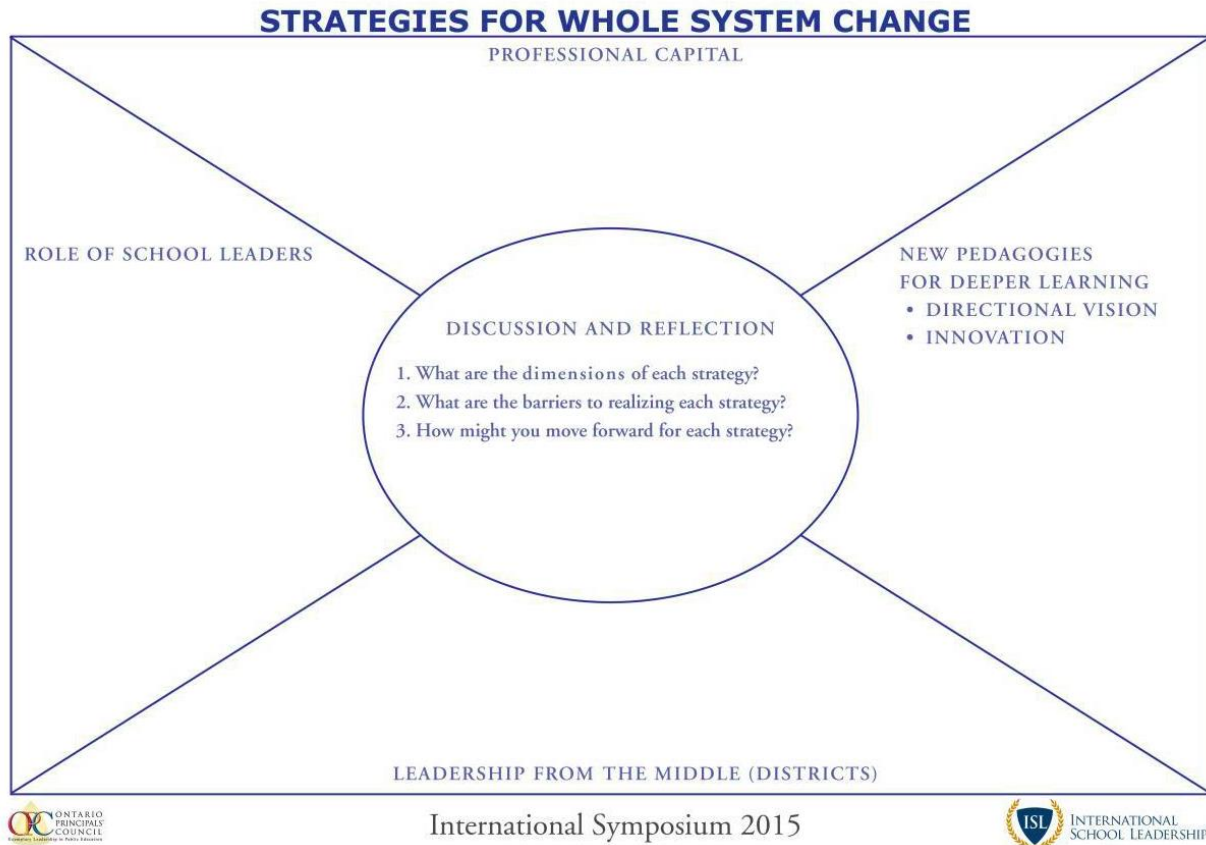
Yet once again the human factor, relationship-dynamics and processes of effective integration make a difference, and must necessarily be at the root of a real appraisal that takes account of all the factors at play, not least of which are the relationships of open and dynamic co-operation with all the actors who make up the school community and frame of reference in its broadest sense.

To conclude, the challenge of the Good School Act reveals itself in an ambitious program of change that can certainly be shared, which runs the risk of remaining just that at the level of first principles and written documents, without effecting transformation in mind-sets, unless it is accompanied by a network of concrete support in actualizing these principles themselves. One can find perfect three-year plans for training programs and equally excellent criteria for appraising principals, which run the risk of not achieving that cultural revolution lived day by day in classrooms and in principals' offices, based on a culture of working together for change.

The same problem was experienced and resolved in Ontario, when the principals were asked to organize themselves as a professional association, and to work together to rebuild their profile on other principles. It was at that moment that they discovered educational leadership as a functional approach, able to meet day-to-day challenges systematically, but also in detail.

At the last international symposium of the Association of School Administrators from various European and Asian countries, held in Toronto in November 2015, there was underscored the important role associations have to play in this cultural revolution. The working report, cited below, began work in groups, who were called upon to reflect on four topics: 1 The role of school leaders (by which they meant not only school administrators, but also middle management), 2 professional capacity, 3 new pedagogical theories for a deepening of vision, tied also to innovation, and finally 4 the intermediate district leadership, as Michael Fullan calls it, that is the idea of networks of schools, which work and learn together to arrive at solutions to specific problems. The idea of territorial precincts, inferred from the Good School Act fully embraces Fullan's proposal. The interaction of networks is successful, because it brings together and co-ordinates the interests of individual schools and their best practices, which in such a way can be disseminated at the system-level. By promoting the interchange and a culture of experimentation, networks allow for the constant improvement of the system. (See the reference-report treated by the website, "The school Leadership Association: Six Building Blocks to Maximizing Impact – Integration Symposium 2015:¹²

¹² <http://www.internationalschoolleadership.com>.



Yet again Steve Mumby, chief executive of the Centre for British Teachers' Education Trust, was affirming at the same symposium for success, a reform requires four elements:

- effective leadership at all levels;
- performance data-driven reform;
- building coalitions for change; and
- making teaching a career of choice for talented young people.

If therefore the Good School Act has undeniably set in motion a true virtuous process of necessary reform – among other things very complex and ambitious from various points of view – it will be equally urgent to embark on a change of course as concerns the training of new school administrators, and consequently of instructors, following the lines suggested by international experiences, which speak of inseparable ties between educational leadership and

the success of training systems. The collaboration begun one year ago between DiSAL and OPC seeks to move in this direction, to contribute support to the Good School Act and to facilitate its application in schools, procuring the concrete tools to bring this about.

CHAPTER THREE

The Role of the School Administrator in Evaluating Teachers: From Job Shadowing to the Good School Act: Elements of Reflection

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1. Introduction

To have lived in December 2015 the adventure – albeit limited – of a week of job shadowing in Canada constituted a profitable occasion for reflection on various themes launched by law 107 of 2015 and in particular on the role of the school administrator as “learning leader” and on his or her performance-appraisal of instructors. When I returned to Italy, obviously my reflections on what I had observed were integrated with depth of materials and precious documents, and especially by reading the Canadian manual, “Teacher Performance Appraisal”, guidelines to define the requirements for newly minted instructors and those with experience.

The life of a Canadian school administrator, in so far as I was able to observe, seemed to me less beset by bureaucratic encumberments, which, while not wholly lacking, are more directed toward educational dynamics.

Particular attention, supported by the school districts, was given to training related to administrators' leadership. Having been present at a dinner-party, and above all at a district principals' meeting in Algoma, I saw a profile of a school administrator far more practical and less formal [than those with whom I am familiar in Italy]. Monthly meetings in the district, equivalent to our service conferences, are begun by playful moments aimed at breaking the ice, before turning to deal systematically and in a structured and open approach with the help of charts on which are written topics suggested by key words or phrases freely and spontaneously contributed by each person present. Everything is aimed at discussing topics in an efficient way, spontaneously and not imprisoned by ritual formalities. In short, small space afforded room for long discussions and much concreteness, guided by methodological problem-solving. Here too meetings were broken up by planned interruptions to space out the work with periods of social time.

There was constant talk of the theories of Michael Fullan, a scholar of training systems and a consultant to the Ministry on training for leadership. This topic emerged immediately as a central and strongly appealing theme in various formal and informal meetings with various interlocutors and a central axis for developing and renewing the school system.

These positive first impressions immediately reveal key aspects, such as practicality, mutual involvement, the centrality of schools in their communities, problem-solving approaches, flexibility, and attention to learning processes. One small point: I was astonished when – inconceivably in the Italian context – at the end of the meal at the district meeting, one of the principals with great aplomb rolled up his sleeves, and spontaneously set to work

washing in a little sink in the dining-room the dishes we had used, drying them and putting them away.

My return to Italy coincided with the time for performance appraisal of instructors, since Italy had instituted for the first time procedures for “appraising the merit of instructors” that would be tied to economic considerations.

It became immediately extremely interesting and stimulating for the required evaluations to take up again how the approach of the Canadian TPA guidebook corresponded fully with my personal view of teachers’ performance appraisal, understood as a “tool for developing instructional professionalism”, believing that professionalism means always growing in a sensible way, and with a vision of “life-long learning”, above all in a sector like education, whether because of its complexity or the way in which teaching and the methodologies concerning it have evolved.

By analyzing the Canadian TPA manual, one can separate out the following five areas of observing and evaluating instructors that have been illuminated, and reconstruct them according to the aspects laid out by paragraph 129 of law 107 on qualities of teaching, didactic and methodological innovation and coordination. By studying the details, the areas demarcated into sixteen skills are:

1. Obligation toward students and their learning

Instructors dedicate themselves with care and a sense of obligation toward their students. They treat students equally and with respect, and are aware of factors that influence

individual student's learning. Teachers facilitate the development of students to contribute to training citizens for Canadian society.

2. Professional knowledge

Instructors are obliged to be up to date in their professional knowledge and to recognize its relationship with their practice.

3. Teaching practice

Instructors apply professional knowledge and experience to advance their students' learning, using appropriate pedagogy, evaluation and testing, and bringing to bear the resources and technology of planning to respond to the needs of individual students and learning communities. Instructors perfect their professional practice by means of continual research, dialogue and reflection.

4. Leadership and learning communities

Instructors promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, established and well supported learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles, which strive to facilitate student success. Instructors maintain and support the principles and the ethical norms of these learning communities.

5. Ongoing professional training

Instructors recognize that the obligation of ongoing provisional learning is an integral part of effective practice and learning on the part of students. Professional practice and self-teaching are renewed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge.

It was particularly interesting to verify how, to belabour the obvious, the first three areas of the TPA relate to teaching, the fourth to school organization and the fifth to the training sphere. This insight has been particularly fruitful in the procedures laid down for performance appraisals of the instructors at the school that I administrate.

I can go into specifics:

- In five areas of the TPA, sixteen skills are mentioned, of which only eight apply to new hires;
- the Canadian principal evaluates newly hired instructors for the first two to three years with periodic in-class appraisals regarding eight skills;
- each skill is broken down into very detailed descriptions and in a form that calls for collecting evidence;
- when an instructor receives a permanent contract, he or she will be evaluated every five years on the basis of a detailed and structured collection of evidence regarding each of the sixteen skills;
- the advantage lies in the fact that the evaluation is not directed all at once at the whole instructional faculty, but in any given year only at new hires and one fifth of instructors on permanent contract; and

- the approach aims at professional development, at actualizing skills that have been less developed and at responding to justified criticisms.

2. The Experience of performance assessment of teachers

In light of the Canadian suggestions about the learning community, of the role of school administrator I played this academic year as “learning leader”, the TPA’s success at separating various criteria and ways of appraising instructors’ performance has become a process in which the school is obliged to reflect upon itself, solidifying its own sense of identity as a community.

A journey that has developed affords the opportunity and the necessity of “entering into play”, whether individually in the school community or as a group in its entirety. Performance appraisal of instructors is an opportunity to reflect on the themes of self-evaluation and improvement, gathering the value of important interactions between the formal and informal levels of the lived experience of people and groups within the school.

It is clear that a pathway of this sort is possible only if in a particular school there exists a *shared vision* or at least an orientation toward such a thing, which has laid the foundations of a shared sense that one is part of a thinking and acting whole.

This last is an aspect that cannot be written off, even if it cannot be proven beyond the explicit and formal level of the organization, above all in the implicit and informal level of interpersonal relationships. On these attitudes and feelings depend consequently the quality and value of procedures and practices.

I have been able to ascertain that such a project can permit us to overcome the limitation that often afflicts many organizations, namely that of pursuing performance and qualitative levels that only *seem* to be the best, because they are justified either by formal consistencies with regard to procedures and accomplishments, by individual and partial projects or by qualitatively relevant aspects, but that do not capture the real life of the school, the flavour of relationships, and the climate of well-being.

For this reason, the role of the school administrator is important in discerning and valorizing the dimension of informal experiences lived within an organization such as a school: above all when perfection (as evidenced, for example, by a sense of ambient well-being) has not been achieved, if it is crisscrossed by conflicts, apathy, a feeble sense of belonging, and by the lack of positive identity, without which the process of self-evaluative reflections (RAV) cannot be authentic, and process of improvement (PDM) that alone can give real meaning to any type of “recognition of merit”.

There is a risk that such procedures, be they approached with however noble intentions, will not achieve useful results unless they are supported by a chorus of diverse actors, and one is prey to the temptation, however, of maintaining the status quo, which blocks improvement, reducing the opportunities for innovation and improvements for which the present situation calls. From this point of view an *integrated approach* is called for, in the process of improvement and the valorizing of professional resources (recognition of merit) experienced as a challenge to everyone in the community and of the community in its entirety, overcoming in this way the unavoidable competition between individuals or frequent rivalry of cliques, which often manifest themselves in schools, making their unsightly mark on the level of informal

relationships, which help to determine the climate of the working environment and our stewardship of education.

An eventually important aspect, which is decisive for the relationship between various stakeholders (administrator/staff, administrator/instructors, instructor/instructor, collaborator/collaborator, instructor/collaborator, instructor/pupil, and so on, all the way to the relationship of the institutional partners) should be on the level of formal dynamics (boards, colleges, project-groups) and on the quality of processes and the outcomes of same.

This dimension, even when appreciated for its extraordinary importance, often risks not being adequately dealt with, either because it makes great demands on the level of personal work or through an over-valuation of serendipity at the formal level of the life of organizations.¹³ In this direction the Canadian experience and the observations of Fullan on the “learning community”, on the school administrator as “learning leader” and on the importance of tacit and informal levels of relationship constitute an extraordinary and very useful reference point.

3. Systematic relational vision of the school as a learning organization

A valid theoretical basis for change-management, certainly tried out and built on in the Canadian experience, as it is just beginning to be in Italy, is the division between the tradition of organization studies on the one hand and, on the other, a systematic relational vision that often constitutes the cultural point of reference of lawmakers and fully fledged training agencies

¹³ Translator’s note: in other words, an attitude of closing your eyes and hoping for the best.

(universities, researchers, research bodies and trainers) who support processes of organizational innovation in the school system in Italy.

In these approaches what takes on great value is the vision that appreciates the aspect of schools as a learning communities, that sees them as binding together all stakeholders: pupils, of course, but also school personnel and families.

In this sense, the responsibility for important decision-making roles falls on various configurations of administrative staff, from the narrowest to ones expanded ad hoc to respond to various situations, which must always be aware that processes and changes, to be real, require a sense of balance in which one respects the importance of the implicit and informal interpersonal dynamics. Hence arises the importance of individual biographies, or individual styles of dealing with people and educating, of the high cost involved in self-improvement, which must be supported by a community spirit, by accounting for oneself and going beyond the pigeon-hole of one's title, and by job-performances that, to be truly effective, must be professional and humane. Because in the realm of education above all professionalism is impossible unless it is rich in humanity, so varied are the personal forms that it assumes.

In particular, to understand school as a learning community offers a chance to observe the various stakeholders (instructors, staff and families) as learning subjects, who question themselves about the meaning of their actions, and who, if organized in the right way, gravitate toward effective paths of learning, research and initiatives for improvement.

Such an approach – which, in the context of recent, nay very recent, normative provisions introduced in Italy, seems to be of central importance – implies, unless we are willing to limit ourselves to merely superficial adjustments, a difficult change of attitude on the part of

various actors, that has extraordinary impact both on the organizational structure and on teaching itself.

In order that change and improvement be authentic, as an organization evolves from one governed by the logic of execution that typifies hierarchical bureaucracies into a more open and flexible one, governed by a logic of autonomous responsibility for decision-making, the attitude and willingness of each stakeholder, from the school administrator on down to the lowest team-member, to reconfigure themselves to reflect on themselves and on their self-critique, to act dynamically and to play their part in quest of a more evolved balance, aiming for its own well-being in harmony with the dynamics of the context in which it operates.

The challenge lies in the movement from an executive cultural paradigm, focused on fixed and clearly defined duties in a so to speak vertical chain of command with a static and predictable ambience into a more “uncertain” paradigm that values intelligence, creativity and the interplay of the various parts of a given school.

At the centre of our thoughts stand guiding concepts such as flexibility, change and improvement, aiming at setting in motion processes directed toward responsibility and acting on one’s own initiative. The vision and management of the school as an “open cultural space”, moreover, corresponds well to the long-since affirmed and universally recognized need to conceive of a school in its relation to the territory in which it is situated, to its needs, resources and problems.

In a systematic and relational vision, correct management of a school must constantly make reference either to the sub-systems that make it up (families, different grade-levels, local cultures and traditions, relationships, professions and professionalisms) or to the various

persons and institutions with which the school interacts. Pupils and families hold a place of special importance, which as end-users of the service assume, each according to his or her own abilities, the role of protagonist. The school, relying on expert knowledge derived from research, professionals and families, and valuing all the cultural resources that are to hand, does not renounce its role; in a circular dynamic of education in which everyone learns together and self-importance and reaching from the front of the room are fading away, the school proudly affirms itself in a greater role: nurtured by such interactions, it grows and improves.

Such a vision, which puts the accent on the cultural dynamism of the school institution, calls either for types of system open to perceiving and promoting change, or to a diffuse culture, predisposed to improvement and managing problems with a problem-solving approach. This vision places at the centre of organizational and educational processes a diffuse educational and relational leadership, which is put together in an organizational structure (office of the principal, staff, part-time staff, departments, work-groups, student councils, instructor-colleges, institutional councils, working groups comprised both of instructors and parents) in which aspects of co-ordination assume a role of the first importance. For a start, group trainers, activity-coordinators and student councils, skills in both the purely human and the technically instructional aspect will be indispensable to guarantee the integrity of the system, the efficacy of its processes and a vision of constant improvement. A key element has become the ability, “repeatedly to get into the game” to meet the various and continuous challenges posed by reality, allowing to come forth, supporting in each stakeholder and in the system itself:

- the ability to reconfigure itself in the face of constant challenges;

- an awareness of its own problems; and
- the mobilization of a process for overcoming these, aiming at striking a more evolved balance and oriented toward greater harmony with the dynamics of the context in which it operates.

4. The leap from an executive culture to a discretionary one

It is becoming ever more clear in so urgent a moment as the present, in which school administrators are called upon to shoulder the responsibility of giving instructors performance appraisals and rewarding them with a bonus, that everyone is called upon “to come out into the open”, by acting in ways that have real and serious consequences, and to reveal their own vision of instructional quality and the corresponding implied vision of the quality of the school. There are reemerging with particular clarity the two opposed cultural paradigms between which oscillate one’s manner of situating oneself and consequently acting in the various school communities and in particular between which one must choose either a static approach and top-down decision-making, or dynamism and allowing people to act at their own discretion.

In fact, notwithstanding schools’ autonomy with all the innovations that have taken place going back to 1977, and the consequent changes in schools obviously did not come about automatically, and this calls for difficult transformations in school culture, which imply in the various stakeholders, especially those in administrative roles, a change of mindset, of the nature of relationships, habits and ways of doing business. In many schools it is still no simple thing to go from a cultural model with a centralized executive with well-defined duties in a vertical chain of command, which refers to a context characterized by the fixity of roles and

duties to an uncertain “turbulent environment model” in which roles and duties, no longer assigned once and for all, are constantly revisited to respond to changing realities and their various challenges.

It is in reference to reality pure and simple that (if one is to understand and govern the system “from within”) orientations and processes become central and determining, if guided by flexibility, change and constant improvement, brought about by working minds focused on the responsibilities and creative discretion of one’s own role.

5. How to advance with a systematic vision

In the logic hitherto described in light of our encounter with the reality of schooling in Canada, the challenge of the process of reform underway in Italy concerning performance-appraisal of instructors and awarding of merit separated from a course of self-evaluation that, reconstituting one’s own identity, and drawing attention to points of strength and weakness within a clear administrative act, break down in a specific context principles and orientations, interrupting the concrete dimension of the school and activating and supporting real processes making reference both to formal and informal levels, which characterize the process of improvement. Consequently, only within a horizon of authentic agreement and synchronization between the act of self-evaluation and the objective of improvement can the awarding of merit have sense and value, as though lived as a way-station on a journey:

- of some people, who, whether because of their personal make-up, sense of calling and spirit of service, have put themselves into the game in the “learning community” in the

areas of teaching, organizing and training, not with personal gain, but rather shared service in view, operative on both formal and informal levels of the organization;

- of the whole learning community whose real process of improvement, through actions and the processes that make them up, must necessarily define themselves as “persons at work”.

In this way in a systematic vision recognition of merit becomes a challenge both in and of the community in its totality.

6. The administrator between objective authority and exercising discretion

Yet once again the former opposition between the certainty of executive authority on the one hand and exercising discretion, and the responsibility in uncertain contexts on the other reveals itself at every moment, in which schools are called upon to recognize a certain merit, paying attention to operate on a spectrum whose end points are once more defined by two opposing paradigms:

- on one side, “objective documentability” of performance and persons in whom one sees a certain merit; and
- on the other, the “subjective exercise of discretion” of the school administrator to make certain choices that gather the momentum of an evolution and the improvement to sustain it.

The fear of making mistakes and using one’s discretion inappropriately, with consequent risk of exposure to questioning, seems to turn many administrators toward a fine sifting of the evidence of instructors’ performance. This is rather complex and, in the absence of adequately

studied ad hoc mechanisms (ideally such as those described in the Canadian “teacher performance appraisal”), risks drawing only on formal aspects gathered orally, through documents on file, and in registration, in fact disavowing the role of administrators called upon above all to exercise an administrative role by directing, governing and taking upon themselves the responsibility to assign bonuses.

On the other hand, to take up the challenge of school autonomy, of which law 107 of 2015 may represent an important final support, urges either a dynamism of the institution’s stakeholders to bring forth and support more advanced forms of performance to improve the school, or a pioneering attitude of the school administrator who often undertakes to support quality performance, which cannot yet be perfectly documented with the certainty of formal evidence, but is clearly perceived informally at the level of lived experience.

Obviously, one would hope to act in a timely way without further burdening instructors already proven to have above-average accomplishments, with agile systems of revealing and perceiving evidence (using mechanisms of customer satisfaction already in use to some extent in many schools): the accurate analysis of various experiences conducted this year as a pilot-project may reveal solutions for future use that are well balanced in this sense.

7. Recognition of merit and “key drivers of system reform”

To conclude, let us pause to pick up again simple elements gathered by Fullan (2015) to describe actual challenges that, partially perceived by us from the reform process to the self-evaluation report in the course of improvement, profoundly crossing school-systems at the international level and in particularly what we observed in Canada.

Next to the awareness of our national scholastic specificity (on the one hand, rigidity of a centralized and muddled system, bogged down by complex dynamics of institutional negotiations and with very little tradition of training personnel, on the other a very rich and diffused millenia-old culture), one can point with greater certainty to some key functional facts for improving school systems, which in a given measure correspond to starting points for the present reflections. In *Maximizing School and System Leadership* Fullan lingers on the central role of the school administrator defined as:

- learning leader: who orients learning processes and the conditions necessary for everyone to learn in an optimal “learning community”;
- system player: capable of managing a network of learning with other schools interacting with the local community and with the public system, not understood as a *deus ex machina*, but as the central organizer and diffuser of best practices that grow from the ground up; and
- agent of change: who mobilizes people, motivating them through formal and informal interactions, and guides the organization through difficult challenges.

A central element of the various roles of the school administrator is that of being able to promote and activate real “collaborative practices and styles of relationship”. As a result, it is explicitly noted as a characteristic of the effective leader that he or she can create a learning community, which values skills and personal acquaintanceships, and promotes authentic organizational innovations, investing in relational dynamics and (on a level profoundly tacit and unexpressed), determines the configuration of awareness and feeling, and becomes extraordinarily influential on the level of balancing entire learning communities.

At this juncture, when we must evaluate and recognize instructors’ merit, one can and must construct, if one wants boldly to activate and support effective processes of improvement, a nexus that agrees with the various stakeholders of individual schools, beginning with administrators and staff colleagues, to enter into play both personally and as a community as a whole.

Attachment:

<i>Board-Mandated Competencies</i>	
Table 2. The 16 Competency Statements	
Domain	Competency
Commitment to Pupils* and Pupil Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers demonstrate commitment to the well-being and development of all pupils. Teachers are dedicated in their efforts to teach and support pupil learning and achievement. Teachers treat all pupils equitably and with respect. Teachers provide an environment for learning that encourages pupils to be problem solvers, decision makers, lifelong learners, and contributing members of a changing society.
Professional Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers know their subject matter, the Ontario curriculum, and education- related legislation. Teachers know a variety of effective teaching and assessment practices. Teachers know a variety of effective classroom management strategies. Teachers know how pupils learn and the factors that influence pupil learning and achievement.
Teaching Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers use their professional knowledge and understanding of pupils, curriculum, legislation, teaching practices, and classroom management strategies to promote the learning and achievement of their pupils. Teachers communicate effectively with pupils, parents, and colleagues. Teachers conduct ongoing assessment of pupils’ progress, evaluate their achievement, and report results to pupils and their parents regularly. Teachers adapt and refine their teaching practices through continuous learning and reflection, using a variety of sources and resources. Teachers use appropriate technology in their teaching practices and related professional responsibilities.
Leadership and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers collaborate with other teachers and school colleagues to create and sustain learning communities in their classrooms and in their schools. Teachers work with professionals, parents, and members of the community to enhance pupil learning, pupil achievement, and school programs.
Ongoing Professional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers engage in ongoing professional learning and apply it to improve their teaching practices.
<p>Note: The eight competencies highlighted in light green are those used for appraising the performance of new teachers. Principals must provide a comment for each of these eight competencies as a minimum requirement in the summative report for a new teacher.</p> <p>* In the Education Act, students are referred to as “pupils”.</p>	

CHAPTER FOUR

Evaluating the School Administrator to Improve Schools

Giovanna Battaglia

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1. Introduction

“The source of strength of our system of public instruction, which is known the world over, derives from great principals, who are educators, managers and administrators in their schools and communities. The principals contribute enormously to the creation of learning environments that allow all students to succeed.” So says Akela Popoli, former President and Chief Executive Officer of the Learning Partnership, a Canadian organization that each year awards school administrators, as decided by panels, colleagues and community-members, have distinguished themselves by their entrepreneurial spirit and creativity in finding solutions and opportunities.

In Canada people recognize the direct relationship between the organizational and managerial qualities of the school administrator and the results of students in school.

Already in 2011 the above mentioned evidence was documented by the investigation undertaken by the Agnelli Foundation (2013) on the managerial skills of administrators, the school organization and students’ learning. But scientific evidence and common sense in Italy

have a hard time becoming widely known, and only with great difficulty do they inform the choices made by lawmakers, whether in defining the characteristics sought in recruitment or in assigning school administrators tasks and administrative duties, which multiply and render all but impossible the exercise of an educational leadership that concentrates on the instructional offerings of schools.

The experience or professional exchange allowed us to observe in Canada a school administration absolutely founded on research and directed to achieving a high quality school system.

2. How one becomes a school administrator in Canada

When one seeks the origins of the difference in professional profiles as great as that between the Canadian principal and the Italian school administrator, it becomes clear that across the ocean administrating a school is not viewed as the final stage in an instructor's career, but is its own professional trajectory different from that of teachers'. Also the vice-principal has a specific career and a professional profile different from that of instructors.

To become a public school principal in Ontario it is necessary to have an undergraduate degree, and to have acquired five years of teaching experience, but in addition to these requirements, shared also by Italy, much else is also needed.

First of all one needs certification, or qualification in three of the four levels into which the school-system is divided:

- primary (grades K-3);
- junior (grades 4-6);

- intermediate (grades 7-10); and
- senior (grades 11-12).

One also requires teaching experience in three of these levels.

Finally, one must get two Ministry-regulated specialization diplomas or a Master's degree designed to give educators the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective school administrators.¹⁴

To synthesize this information, in Ontario school administrators are required to have a specific training and experience relative to the whole school-system. The principal is a school-expert and follows a course that aims at acquiring the effective leadership to guide and support teaching and learning.

3. How school administrators are evaluated in Canada

The whole system for evaluating a Canadian principal, in agreement with the idea outlined heretofore, conceives of him or her as a support, underpinning and guide to educational leadership.¹⁵

Each "experienced" principal is evaluated once every five years. Any administrator is considered to be experienced from their second year of work in the profession.

The process of performance appraisal of school administrators in Peel School Board, a district visited by the Italian administrators, constitutes a strategy of leadership development: it

¹⁴ One should note the crucial final step: one must take the PQP course (translator's note).

¹⁵ See the website quoted in note 3 above.

is designed to ensure that school administrators are well supported in their professional growth, providing formal and informal opportunities for feedback, dialogue and constant professional learning. In fact, the participation of principal and vice-principal in the process of performance appraisal is a legal requirement in order for the process to be valid.

The evaluation consists of three meetings, conducted by what one might define as the “nucleus of evaluation”, with a superintendent of public education, over the course of an academic year. The superintendent of public education, within twenty days of the beginning of the academic year that has been earmarked as a year for a given principal’s appraisal, must notify the school administrator that he or she will be evaluated, identify other superintendents who will form part of the appraisal-team, and choose the personnel within the school itself and other stakeholders who will be interviewed.

There are also prepared in advance and made public the texts of the interviews in which are examined three areas:

- learning leadership;
- work climate; and
- teaching and learning.

To evaluate a principal’s performance, superintendents consider the following skills which can only with difficulty be translated into Italian:

- setting direction;
- securing accountability;
- developing people;
- developing the organization to support desired practices; and

- improving the instructional program.

In addition to these one also draws attention to the following personal abilities:

- cognitive;
- social; and
- psychological.

The period of formal appraisal begins with a first meeting between the superintendent and the principal to discuss the Performance Plan, including the objectives for the year under review and a revision and bringing up to date of the annual plan for professional growth.

A second meeting with the principal follows to discuss progress toward the objectives contained in the Performance Plan, indicators of success, obstacles and broader assistance that might be requested.

After the second meeting, the nucleus of evaluation meets with selected personnel to gather information about how workers in the institution, families and other persons related to the school view the principal's leadership.

Finally, a third meeting takes place with the purpose of reviewing and updating the results of actions undertaken by the principal to meet the objectives laid down in the Performance Plan, and to discuss the feedback gathered from the interviews with third parties. If the report is positive, the process is complete, otherwise, if the evaluation is Unsatisfactory, a course of accompanying the administrator is worked out to focus on difficulties and write and carry out a new improvement plan.

4. Conclusions

The experience of professional exchange has revealed the enormous difference around the professional profile of administrators of school institutions in Canada and Italy.

- The first point is the fact that in Ontario school administration is directed toward the training offerings; this entails the fact that the links in the institutional chain and the tasks related – to give only a couple of examples – to maintaining security and preserving the integrity and maintenance of school buildings are very limited and peripheral compared to the educational goal of the schools.

- The evaluation of the administrator does not have the aim of reviewing organizational and managerial acts put in place by the administrator in relation to the objectives to be reached, but is a process aimed at revealing and actualizing skills useful for orienting and directing an educational community. This is clearly different from the system put in place by the recent Italian directive on the evaluation of school administrators in which, aside from a declaration in principle, the whole operation is directed at determining and paying retribution for the outcome.

- Principals get together! One desirable aspect, and a strong point absolutely to be increased in Italy is the ability to form networks of administrators. Canadian principals get together very often in meetings of a regional nature: administrators of neighbouring schools organize monthly social gatherings, preferably in the morning, to share breakfast and discuss topics varied in nature, from relations with the unions to didactic experiments, but also to tell each other their experiences. There are also higher level meetings at the board office, in which representatives of the various regions discuss learning outcomes regarding various questions

analyzed, and formulate proposals to put to the organs of government. Very different in nature is the application in Italy of law 107 concerning territorial networks, which are imposed by the regional school offices.

In effect, if in Italy the school administrator experiences isolation, in Canada professional sharing is a meaningful reality. This helps to unify the school-system, with a cohesion that is not imposed from above, but created by workers in the field, and it lightens the load of a profession that remains always burdened by responsibilities, even though it can be accompanied by the support of one's peers and the respect of one's superiors.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Process of Improving the School Institution

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From an exquisitely cultural point of view, to occupy oneself with processes of improvement means to ask oneself about the opportunities and challenges of growth that each situation allows for, if sought with a passionate eye and lived with reflexive industry. To move from a tension of being, living and working to formulating a plan and analyzing a process of improvement cannot be separated from the concrete context in which one works.

My experience in Canada and my reading of documents generously provided for me by my colleague, Susana Costa Popovic, school administrator of Allan A. Greenleaf School in Hamilton, allows me to underscore that in Ontario school improvement planning (SIP):

- aims at supporting schools in their constant improvement regarding student learning;
- is considered a tool to guide the reflexive practice of teaching and learning;
- is based on the analysis of data regarding perception, performance and results;
- is broken down into the SMART objectives, namely *specific*, that is no room is allowed for ambiguity; *measurable*, that is without equivocation and verifiable by observation; *achievable*, that is reachable, since an objective that cannot be reached discourages

action as compared to one that is easily attained; *realistic*, this is relevant from an organizational point of view, in that it coheres with the school's mission; and *time bound*). These objectives must agree with those relating to improvement established by the board (our *ambito territoriale*), which in turn agree with Ministry guidelines.

- Four specific areas are involved: literacy, numeracy, community-culture-caring for oneself, for others and for the environment (CCC); and Pathways.
- It is recorded in real time, not hermetically sealed, but susceptible to revision and annual adjustments according to the improvement of students' learning.
- it involves various stakeholders.

Altogether, there emerges a concentration on the key objective of any scholastic institution: the student, and the constant improvement of his or her learning. We can make this out as the central avenue along which decisions are made, which means reflecting on teaching practice and on winners and losers in learning. The improvement plan of individual school institutions is framed in a broader context: the priorities are shared by the relevant organizations of the educational and instructional sector at both the local and the central level. Among the four areas defined at the central level, objectives are carved out whose achievement is monitored. The whole process is not something self-referential on the part of the school administrator and his or her staff, but involves various interested parties: instructors, parents, and the region, and it begins with the analysis of evidentiary data.

School in Ontario has at its disposal many data, on the basis which to determine individual areas of particular strength and weakness. The analysis of these data is one of the elements that converge in the self-evaluation of any particular school. I learned and saw in the field the original

sources of these data, which demarcate the limits for a possible work of study and careful examination:

- Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), a government agency created in 1996, prepares tests to measure students' ability in relation to understanding various kinds of text, writing using correct grammar and punctuation, and problem-solving employing specific math skills. The results are used to define provincial standards and to make comparisons between schools, territories and provinces. The tests take place each year at ages 8, 11, 14 and 15. Adaptations are in place for special needs students.
- Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR): evaluation-rubrics available to schools containing reference-parameters to evaluate ease, comprehension, quality and quantity of reading in primary school students.
- Ontario Writing Assessment (OWA): tools and parameters offered to schools to evaluate ability at writing.

Testing using DAR and OWA takes place three times in the academic year, and the outcomes allow one to identify need for improvement on the part of pupils in the class.

In the school I visited and in the staff of the administrator with whom I had occasion to exchange conversations, I was able to see that the conviction is widespread that whatever process of improvement one uses should cause one to devote time to the analysis of results that emerge from teaching and learning activities, from comparing marks from one class with those at a similar level, relating them within a single school or with results that emerge from centrally designed standardized testing and objectives expected at the end of specific years. To reflective analysis are dedicated afternoon hours between instructors, among the instructors of

individual classes and the administrator, between components of the directional staff, involving if necessary also the inspector of the local board, who periodically visits schools, with the role of consultant for the school administrator. I was able to attend a broad staff meeting whose focus was, “Can new technologies improve pupils’ learning? How? What evidence for this has been collected so far?”

Teaching Learning Critical Pathways is a process for effecting the school’s Improvement Plan. This is the work that takes place in class to ensure that the school is making progress toward the objectives identified in the SIP. Periodic meetings of teachers among themselves, who share the same grade or the same subject area, and with the school administrator allow them to plan the teaching and learning cycle for the next four to six weeks.

Schools in Ontario, moreover, can make use of a document entitled, “School Effectiveness Framework”. This document provides indicators on which basis to evaluate the school’s efficiency ranking. In particular, this is the document that guides the school’s Improvement Plan: indicators are chosen for a specific area of improvement, strategies to adopt and evidence to monitor it are decided upon in order to keep in view that reaches the determined improvement objectives. Other indicators and signs of a school’s efficiency can be found in the “Components of School Effectiveness Framework Document” written by the province of Ontario’s Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

Obviously, supplementary indicators and evidence designed for individual school institutions can be added to the SIP.

In these meetings one breathes a cohesive working atmosphere, favoured by a sharing of leadership that asks for and develops in principals, vice-principals and teachers listening, collaboration and reflection: in a word – learning.

By this point the reader will already have noticed similarities and differences with the Italian school system, which I may briefly summarize. With the premise that there is no norm that sets in motion processes of improvement, but that it is up to individuals and organizations devoted to the purpose to seek means of improvement, already presidential decree 80 of March 28, 2013, “Rules Governing the National System for Evaluation in Matters of Instruction and Training,” ratifies a strict correlation between performance-appraisal and improvement, so that the first evaluation (at whatever level it is conducted) must be aligned with the implementation of processes for improving the school institution, which are always possible. This presidential decree, in fact, by instituting the “National Evaluation Service” (*Servizio Nazionale di Valutazione*) defined its objectives as evaluating the goal-achieving and resource-management of the educational system of instruction and training with the aim of improving the quality of training offering and learning for students. The strategic priorities of the National Evaluation Service are, in their turn, decided by Ministerial directives, renewed at least every three years as provided for by legislative decree 286 of November 11, 2004. The same presidential decree clarifies the role of *Invalsi* and *Indire*¹⁶ respectively prefixed to the definition of indicators of goal-achievement and resource-management and of autonomous school

¹⁶ “Invalsi is our agency which support students' OCSE PISA tests and the ones we do at the national level to implement students' learning. Indire is the agency which mostly works on curriculum and teachers' professional development. It also facilitates all the European programs to be developed at that level with European partners, like Erasmus plus for the secondary school partnerships and exchanges.” (M. Cristina Mignatti).

institutions and, to support school institutions in defining and actualizing plans for improving the quality of training offerings, judged by how they meet the objectives autonomously elaborated and along with those assigned by the administration.

Directive 11 of September 18, 2014, defining the priorities for the 2014-17 period, finalizes the acts of improvement for students' scholastic success: the student remains at the centre. Self-evaluation of schools, external evaluation, evaluation of the administration, national planning for student learning, participation in international studies, and evaluation of the system are all tools to guide the process of improvement.

As of today, paragraph 14 of article 1 of law 107 of 2015, replacing article 3 of presidential decree 275 of 1999 calls for combining the Three-year Plan of Training Offerings with the Improvement Plan. The Ministry, University and Research Report of September 1, 2015 protocol 7904 dictates that the Improvement Plan start from the priorities laid down in the self-evaluation report, that it be a dynamic rather than a static process, that it involve the broad participation of interested parties, that it leverage organizational capabilities and the strategic choices that each individual scholastic institution independently succeeds in putting in place, that it renews teaching and learning practice, reflecting on data gathered under different headings, especially those used in drawing up the self-evaluation report. In its Report on Performance Appraisal, analyzing four areas tied to outcomes and seven areas related to processes, the school describes its own points of strength and weakness, singles out one or two priorities in one or two areas for improvement, and specifies the relative plans and objectives to reach. In this way are defined the functional process-objectives for reaching objectives: such objectives articulate the contents of the priorities in observable and measurable form, and

represent the targets at which the school is aiming in its improvement-activities. By paying attention to the connections between processes and objectives, one can assign human and financial resources to various aspects of the Improvement Plan. The Ministry, University and Research Report has allocated, with departmental decree 937 of September 9, 2015 specific funds to schools and also to networks of schools to assist processes of reflection and the actualization of improvements. Result: cost savings, but also non-auto-referential reflection.

I attach as appendices:

- a summative table comparing the Canadian and Italian systems as concerns improvement processes;
- a schema for carrying out and evaluating the Improvement Plan of the Comprehensive Institute of Villasanta; and
- one from a Canadian school.

1. Comparison of School Improvement Processes

	ONTARIO, CANADA	ITALY
<i>aimed at</i>	student and his or her learning	student and his or her learning
<i>tool for</i>	reflection on didactic and managerial practices	reflection on didactic and managerial practices
<i>starting from</i>	standardized tests; district level requirements	standardized tests; national requirements
<i>divided into</i>	SMART school objectives, agreeing with district-level and ministerial objectives	Territorial Precinct objectives Ministerial objectives, national indicators, directives...
<i>in relation to</i>	<p>4 specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • numeracy • CCC (community-culture-caring) • Pathways 	<p>4 areas tied to student outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scholastic results • results in standardized national tests • key skills and citizenship skills • long-term results <p>7 procedural areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation and evaluation of curriculum • learning environment • inclusion and differentiation • continuity and orientation • strategic orientation and school organization • development and performance appraisal of human resources • integration with the territory, and relationships with families
<i>dynamics</i>		Three-year plans reviewed annually
<i>involving</i>		various stakeholders
<i>overseen by</i>	superintendents who control	superintendents who verify that independent schools have achieved their sought after objectives, guided by school administrators who are responsible for the results
<i>context</i>	centralized model of system-management of instructors and education schools of 200-400 pupils, not formed into networks	decentralized managerial model of autonomous scholastic units schools of 1,000-1,300+ pupils, increasingly interconnected

2. Example of a planning and verification schema from the Improvement Plan of the Comprehensive Institute of Villasanta:

<i>Student outcomes</i>	Results in national standardized tests to improve outcomes in math in primary school
<i>Priorities</i>	
<i>Description of objective</i>	To reach performance levels in math at least on a par with regional and national mean within two years
<i>Area of process</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curriculum planning and evaluation • learning environment • inclusion and differentiation • continuity and orientation • strategic orientation and organization of the school • development and performance appraisal of human resources • integration with the territory and relationships with families
<i>Objects of the process:</i>	1 to construct the vertical math curriculum
<i>Description</i>	2 to codify criteria for evaluation of math, so it is uniform across Classes and sites (for school with more than one location) 3 to prepare common math tests for primary grades three and four and secondary grade two 4 to conduct common tests 5 to analyze the results of the common tests
<i>completion-dates</i>	1 December 2015 2 February 2016 3 April 2016 4 May 2016 5 July 2016
<i>actions planned</i>	1 gather existing plans; work by groups related by subject-matter; joint meetings of parallel classes 2 drafting evaluation rubrics for parallel and vertical classes 3 meetings of groups related by subject-matter and parallel classes 4 review by teachers not at the same subject or level 5 tabulating outcomes for subsequent reflection by the nucleus of evaluation
<i>persons responsible</i>	1 instrumental function, school administrator 2 instructors, co-ordinators by instrumental function and school administrator 3 class instructors co-ordinated by instrumental function and

	school administrator
	4 school administrator and vice-principal
	5 instrumental function, school administrator
<i>results obtained</i>	1 vertical curriculum structured following European skills, skills of the third cycle, objectives for the term, annual objectives
	2 evaluation rubrics coherent with the objectives laid out for the academic year
	3 common test formats for third and fourth year of primary and second year of secondary
	4 outcomes of common tests
	5 comparison between parallel classes and confirmation of objectives at the end of the year in question
<i>adjustments made</i>	5 revisit in September
<i>results actually obtained</i>	1-5 as predicted
<i>aspects of administrative professionalism involved</i>	definition of the strategic orientation, management, performance appraisal and development of human resources management of resources and normative accomplishments, monitoring, evaluating, accountability

3. Refer to supplementary document “Improvement Plan.DOC”.

CHAPTER SIX

Administrating Adult Education

Aldina Arizza

School Administrator

Como (Como)

1. Professional profile and organizational system observed in external partner school

My experience of job-shadowing in December 2015 took place in Peel District, an Ontario School District, which has a very well designed school reality dedicated to the training of adults,¹⁷ one which in many ways is rich in affinities and analogies with the project of adult instruction that began in Italy with presidential decree 263 of 2012, taking effect on September 1, 2014.

The school for adults in Mississauga proved even at first glance very interesting. The system for adult education in Canada involves four macro-areas:

- adult credit, that is courses that allow people who dropped out of school to obtain their secondary school diplomas, which equate to our first and second level courses;
- adult English as a second language, literacy training in English, intended mainly for new immigrants, following a precise program of linguistic and cultural integration with

¹⁷ <http://www.peelschools.org/adulteducation/Pages/default.aspx>.

pre-established steps for learning language-competencies for both oral and written communication in the language of the host country;

- adult literacy and basic skills, a course to solidify basic linguistic competence and to improve one's command of vocabulary and grammar, particularly with the realistic aim of getting a job; and
- international languages, or programs for foreign language learning.

For each of the programs described above there are dedicated staff, a principal and a team administrative in nature. Basically, each activity offered for adults is one particular person's responsibility, namely the school administrator's, who is responsible for choosing and evaluating instructors, administering the budget assigned to the school institution, making the most of it not just in the quality of the public service entrusted to him or her, availing him- or herself of the aid of organizational supports such as the vice-principal (a separate role distinct as a career from that of instructor), and the secretarial personnel. The vice-principal plays a role that is in large part organizational, laying out the timetable for courses, and helping with selecting students, based on norms prepared for internal regulation and ratifying plans of study as, for example, in cases where adult credits are to be earned.

The administrator bears above all responsibility for managing and ascertaining that the aims of each scholastic institution are being met. For this reason, he or she also makes choices about the training of instructors. The prominence given to the training of instructional personnel is very great, and economic resources are earmarked for that purpose.

Other people are also involved in adult education, such as the counsellor, who has a fundamental role to play in welcoming students, and directing them toward the program of study best adapted to, and most useful for them. Often this role is assigned to retired instructors, who can return to work for limited periods, and so offer the whole wealth of their vast educational and pedagogical experience.

The system organized in this way is also one in which all parties involved in welcoming newcomers are in constant contact, so decisions can be divided as much as possible, and so directed to help the adult who comes to enroll.

In the school for adults, teaching activities unfold over the course of the whole day, from morning to evening; there are special summer courses and also weekend courses. Naturally, each program has its own person in charge, and its own terms of reference.

English language teaching follows didactic methodologies of co-operative learning and working in groups, lessons structured as dialogues and constant feed-back, using Survey Monkey, administered at the end of each unit.

Technologies are at the service of teaching without any exaggeration, and I would dare say, are used naturally, but also with a strong sense of their limitations in teaching that follows the Bring your Own Device (BOD) method, which values the responsible use of personal devices already owned by students. The multicultural nature and the number of adult students I met and got to know fascinated me more than any other aspect.

Finally, the school for adults constitutes also a place to recommend for those borderline students, who suffer because of the “ordinariness” of school, and often go beyond the limits of behaviour considered acceptable. Such pupils can find a temporary home in adult

school, and follow very individualized programs in a context that can more easily absorb their excesses.

2. Comparison and characteristics of the profile of a school administrator and training/organizational aspects in Italy

The Canadian school system for adults reveals itself to be very similar to our own, above all in the macro-areas identified as its mission;¹⁸ also in Italy in fact provision is made for:

- introductory courses for everyone, already of the age of majority, which is at least age sixteen, who has not received the conclusive title of the first cycle of instruction (middle school diploma), divided into a first teaching phase (to obtain the title of middle school diploma) and a second teaching phase (to obtain the certification of competency in compulsory schooling);
- introductory courses for everyone, already of the age of majority, which is at least age sixteen, who has not received a secondary school diploma of the second grade, divided into three teaching phases; courses of literacy in Italian language (Italian Language Two) for foreigners, who also receive civic education to help their process of integration; and
- courses of functional literacy, computer science and/or foreign languages for the cultural promotion of the adult citizen.

¹⁸ Presidential decree 263 of 2012, "Regulation giving general norms for the redefinition of the didactic organizational structure of centres for adult instruction", including serial courses as laid out in article 64 paragraph 4 of law number 112, decreed on June 25, 2008, carried over with modifications by law number 133 of August 6, 2008 (13G00055), *Official Gazette* number 47 for February 25, 2013.

Added to the similarities laid out above, are one first major organizational point of difference: in Italy all training courses for adults are joined under a single administration. Each of the provincial centres for adult instruction born under the shadow of presidential decree 263 of 2012 in fact have a single administrator, whose task it is to bring about this diversified training offering in the territory concerned.

The first outcome of this kind of organization is the excessively broad extension of the centres, that wind up in some cases covering the territory of the entire province in which they are situated, with consequent difficulties for internal administration both managerially and didactically, and inevitable disruption of a logistical nature.

The Canadian experience suggests that in a similar situation one can avoid logistical difficulties with technological support and, at the same time guarantee permanent training for the body of instructors, by investing, for example, in social media networks and on-line training agencies, or in existing web-based training material, making it available through individual subscriptions. The administrator of a school for adults we visited in Mississauga had employed in this way the money assigned by the local government, explain that training the instructors would be the best guarantee for the school's future, and that his instructors would on a daily basis be in a position to update themselves, and give themselves new material to use in class.

However, the difference between our school and the one we encountered in Canada remains clear, because the administrator has within his or her own program the possibility of exercising constant monitoring, and can equally ensure a timely awareness of the training needs of his or her own instructors, thanks to the small size of the school. The administrator

knows how each of the instructors works, what methodologies they use, what outcomes they obtain, their professional evolution, and also is not overburdened with tasks of an administrative nature, as for example having to find supplementary personnel in cases of employee absences, because the region has a centralized system that provides supply teachers in a timely and efficient manner. However, the administrator does play a managerial role, by choosing how to use resources, in keeping with the school's objectives, but also checking and following the learning processes.

The team dimension is linked to the managerial one, in fact a fixed program of periodic meetings guarantees that working choices are shared, and solutions are reached more easily for day-to-day problems, which differ but little from those we ourselves face in our own schools.

Certainly, the new institutional arrangement of adult education in Italy, which also uses precise training programs, opens new avenues toward administrating a participatory management, and sharing responsibilities at least as concern pedagogical and didactic choices, and lays the groundwork for implementing a team culture that can borrow best practices from the Canadian experience.

Schools for adults in Canada experience certain difficulties that are encountered also in Italy. Chief among these is a noticeable difference between the number who enroll and those who actually attend. To provide a remedy to what would seem to be a waste of the resources invested, rigid parameters are laid down directly by the board governing absenteeism, and delinquent students are quickly replaced from waiting-lists. This happens for all types of course

or program offered, and corresponds to a limit of at least 70% attendance for successful completion of adult courses set out in our norms of reference.

3. Training and investment in human resources in Italy for development of adult education in innovative terms

On two points it would be worth orienting the development of adult education in innovative terms in Italy, given the experience of professional exchange with Canada: certification of credits, and guidance and counselling for newcomers.

To certify credits is a basic operation in constructing a training program for adults. The Canadian experience already constitutes a model for weighing skills,¹⁹ and so a comparison with that model by intensifying professional exchange, so that, for example, an Italian administrator or instructor of a school for adults could intern for at least three to six months would constitute good training and a research activity to establish clear criteria for evaluating credits, whether linguistic for literacy courses or cultural for making up school diplomas, both mandatory ones or at a higher than minimum level.

In the same way, a prolonged internship for administrative personnel in Canada could translate into positive training to establish criteria for a protocol of welcoming newcomers and learning techniques for guiding them, which can help in dealing with adult students.

In fact, no school for adults can be imagined except as a space for making up training skills in order to enter or re-enter the job market, and opportunity for improving skills already acquired in light of new horizons and new chances in the production sector, which the recovery

¹⁹ Authier-Lévy 2000, Sabatano 2005 and Various Authors 2012.

following the last serious world economic crisis is now able to offer. To deepen and make concrete the weighing of skills, one's citizenship papers and the portfolio of one's experiences, means bringing school closer to reality and finally realizing the dynamic and fruitful connection with the territory to which one belongs, so much awaited even by the most recent transitions from one set of standards to another.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Schools in “Connection”: Professional Networks, Based on Territory and on Projects

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1. Introduction

My Canadian experience, lived in a locality west of Toronto, had, among many positive suggestions, the effect of revealing the functional and cultural richness of the local board, of which essential services are asked.

In the pages that follow, as suggested by my Canadian colleagues, I will explain the characteristics of the workings of the board, in a point-form manner.

I will, however, take the opportunity at the outset of my chapter to point out the experimental value in matters of training and of some organizational traits.

An entire day spent in the local school board office, where a group of around thirty high school instructors and some school administrators joined in a systematic reflection on language-teaching, was certainly the choicest occasion for constructing a fruitful comparison between the two realities, that of Canada and our own.

Coordinator of the meeting: a university instructor from the United States, who, at the end of the day, flew back home to the U.S.

Some observations that point to great differences:

- average age of instructors: forty;
- classroom setting: very friendly and informal;
- Academic instructor: endowed at once with deep specialist knowledge (an ample and detailed bibliography has been provided), and at the same time with great in-the-field experience, a continual mixture of theoretical explanations and examples drawn from teaching practice;
- lunch- and coffee-breaks together; and
- homework assigned at one meeting to be done for the next, effective integration between the didactic and organizational aspects, thanks to the contribution of the school administrators present.

Differences as compared to the Italian system, which confirm its limitations (we have been aware of these for some time):

- average age of instructors, above all in secondary schools, is much higher;
- resistance to ongoing training;
- considerable discrepancy between school and academy; and
- preference of the university system for an overwhelmingly theoretical approach, with one exception, interesting for anyone who has experienced it: labs and apprenticeship training, when they take place.

A few other organizational details: school in Ontario provides a centralized system for assigning supply teachers – a sort of call centre, situated in the middle of the school districts, allows operators, using lists of names, very early in the morning (by 7:00 a.m. schools are

already fully in session) to phone supply teachers, and immediately assign them to the school that has phoned in a request. Local boards also take care of programs to prevent students from dropping out of school (projects that link school and work, transfers from one school to another), financial management and many practices of an administrative nature that bog down our secretaries.

Of the secretaries of individual schools one expects above all the management of relations with students and parents and curriculum- and other planning within the school institute itself.

2. A glance at Italian norms

I will now try to wander through the labyrinth of our legislation to verify the possibilities of gathering from the positive points to narrow the gap between our bureaucratic and centralized apparatus and the more positive one we saw working efficiently in local boards, whether in matters of instruction or of organization. In particular, can the norms that relate to networks of schools find any equivalent in what we appreciated in Ontario?

Could the present juncture, which has seen administrators employed in collecting scholastic institutes into supra-regional networks (*rete di scopo*), be effectively the precursor of new developments?

Perhaps it is useful to recall how supportive presidential decree 275 of 1999 already was in the matter of networks: chapter two, article seven, subsection one, "Scholastic Institutions can agree to form networks or belong to them in order to achieve their own institutional ends". Moreover subsection two affirms that, "the agreement can have as its objective didactic

activities, those involving research, experimentation and development, of training and bringing up to date administrators and accountants, while the individual budgets remain separate, the acquisition of goods and services, of the organizations and of other activities supporting the aims of the institution, if the agreement focusses on teaching or research activities, experimentation and development, of training and bringing up to date, it is approved, not merely by the counsel for the network or institute, but also by the college of instructors of individual schools on their own behalf.”

Subsection five provides for the possibility that instructors can temporarily trade places.

The agreements are open to the membership of all school institutions that intend to participate and that are planning initiatives to support the participation of scholastic institutions that find themselves in difficulty.

Reading further on (article 7, paragraph 7), the same presidential decree (275) has supported laboratory teaching [activities involving concrete real-life tasks in which pupils learn by doing] with the possibility, by means of the networks, of defining jobs that can be entrusted to people who have specific experience of organizational tasks and communal work.

For that reason, decree 275 already contained provisions for scholastic institutions collaborating in order to effect administrative activities shared in common.

Also decree 275 approved within networks the exchange of instructors of a uniform legal status, should the individual in question give his or her consent, in order to avoid transferring instructors outside of their previously agreed upon terms of contracts.

Still, with the aim of rationalization, it provides for the optimization of staff resources, especially those of administrative assistants.

The so-called institute for assistance has in fact foreseen that one public administrator could use the office of another to achieve his or her own institutional objectives.

If already in 1999 legislation was enacted to counteract the ever more widespread complexity, and to envisage positive synergies, now that this complexity has become a day-to-day reality, perhaps it is a good time to revisit the issue. We know what has not worked in the application of law 275 – that many possibilities, for various reasons, have not been developed.

Can law 107 of 2015 afford some more opportunities? National Operating Plan, edicts, new contract codes, alternating places would sorely tax the most diligent employees of solid organizations. Our personnel who up to now have been made up of people nearing retirement who have learned computing skills only with difficulty are living in this period through a challenge that risks destroying precarious balances. The point that as a rule has aroused greater worries is certainly not the section in which the theme of supra-regional networks is broached, which, by leaving untouched the freedom of planning of schools, has seemed fully to endorse the criterion of autonomy. The passage that has caused greater distrust is the section in which is laid out the category of regional networks (*rete di ambito*).

In paragraphs 70 to 72 of article 1 we read, “regional school offices promote, without new or increased burdens on the public purse, the setting up of networks between school institutions of the same territorial region. The networks established by June 30, 2016 are aimed:

- “• at evaluating professional resources;
- “• at the shared management of administrative functions and activities; and

“• at realizing projects or initiatives whether didactic, educational, sport-related or cultural, of interest to the region, as defined on the basis of agreement between independent schools of the same territorial region, by means of specific network-agreements.

“The network-agreements specify:

“• criteria for, and means of using instructors in the networks, related to the three-year plans of training offerings;

“• plans for training school personnel;

“• resources to be allocated to the networks to carry out their objectives; and

“• ways and means of rendering transparent and public both decisions of and accounting for the activities undertaken.”

We have seen what the application of these paragraphs has produced.

Whether from the instructors' point of view or that of a professional union, in the administration's haste to carry out this directive and draw up network agreements before June 30, there has been a dangerous return to centralized administration and toward undoing the process toward autonomy.

If we then add to these choices the larger theme of strengthening school organizations, first promptly promised and then, in the implementation phase, largely reneged on, the road is paved for reasonable fear that, given new and very heavy responsibilities, the school administrator, but also colleges of instructors and school councils, must once again yield to centralizing pressures.

The administration has tried, even to the extent of involving legal experts, to allay these fears. We would like to believe them, and, based on international interests, we seek to gather some positive elements afforded by the reality that we have seen.

3. An example of best practices

An interesting case-study is afforded by the province of Monza e Brianza, created already when the existence of provinces was called into question; a province with a high level of education, with a traditionally cohesive territory, but recently dramatically thrown into crisis, in which for some time there has been a tradition of forming networks.

The school networks of Monza e Brianza, born at the end of 2013, now take in 99 public and 16 separate schools in the territory.

In this case, the institutions are directed by a group of administrators who serve as mediators, most of whom have a decade's experience on the job, but joined by some newly appointed administrators.

Already in the last decade many aggregations – what we now call supra-regional networks – were put in place. Particularly active are the Trevi network, in the eastern part of the province, with a strong counselling component, the network of schools that promote health, the Ali network, made up in particular of comprehensive institutes, whose mission is to pinpoint and resolve difficulties experienced by minorities, with close ties to social services and legal authorities.

In more than one case, both comprehensive institutes and secondary schools have joined the networks, in a positive synergy – which has developed the system's culture and has

prevented it from turning into a patchwork, without however each school giving up its strong identity – rooted in the territory, with a precise educational and cultural mission.

At the prompting of the regional director, the network has been reinforced over the last two years, succeeding in building within it poles of development and research that have allowed it not only to use efficiently the funds coming from the regional level, pursuing initiatives either of a technological nature, or those to prevent school drop-outs, but also promoting further agreements that have created three sub-networks, each consisting of twelve to sixteen schools, to achieve the regional directive, “Generation Web”, which has called for digital training for about a hundred instructors.

It is beyond doubt that behind the networks there are people, and, in particular, school administrators, many of whom, in the case under consideration, in addition to the ideal common pressure, have obtained Master’s degrees in the second level of educational management, have benefitted from training aimed at evaluating networks offered by the province in collaboration with Bocconi University and work with the Milan Polytechnic and the University of Castellanza: an integration of professional skills in the context of constant training between teaching and administrative traits typical of the school administrator with a shared managerial component that has, over time, given a theoretical basis to the work-team who share the school network. A control room coordinates the whole system.

Is Brianza a paradise then?

No, but certainly some factors such as a territory, fairly small but easily accessible, a cohesive group of administrators, many of whom have a high level of training, a distinct social awareness in which the school institution still takes pride, good relations between institutions,

situated relatively closely to the needs of the school, a territory open to interacting with the school system, the absence of conflicts as exacerbated as one finds in other context, have brought it about that in recent years networks have solidified, predominantly supra-regional ones, and they have undertaken more demanding projects both in managing and accounting for substantial sums. Very probably, in short, the network structure of Monza e Brianza will be subsumed by the administration into the construction of territorial networks.

The habit of working together, and the climate of strong collaboration can constitute a model of interest also for the future.

To find an area in which both strategic and administrative skills come together in a moment as complex as this is truly a great opportunity to share responsibilities that would otherwise be extremely burdensome.²⁰

²⁰ Paolucci 2004, Biagioli 2012 and Morzanti Pellegrino 2012.

CHAPTER EIGHT

International Experiences of Active Citizenship

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In the course of the twenty fourth national DiSAL conference, which took place in Rome from 25 to 27 last February, around 150 school administrators from all over Italy met to develop the outlines of systems tied to institutional plans of evaluating school systems and the role of principals.

The last day of the conference was dedicated to meeting international guests. Particularly interesting was the talk by Joanne Robinson, Director of Professional Learning Education Leadership, Toronto (Canada). Thanks to our collaboration with OPC, represented at the conference by Robinson, it was possible to undertake with DiSAL a series of professional exchanges that in the 2015-16 academic year involved some Italian school administrators in job-shadowing activities at Canadian schools. In the course of her talk, Robinson illustrated the chief principles of a system whereby educational leadership can produce results for pupils' learning. The principles that emerged in the course of this professional testimony represented a Leitmotif of the encounter “International Experience of the Learning Community: Rights of Citizenship and Inclusion”, organized by DiSAL Sicily, which took place last March 15 at “Rita

Atria” Comprehensive School in Palermo, in the popular Vucciria district. Coming on the heels of the experience of job-shadowing that saw paired together Principal Giovanna Battagli of the “Rita Atria” School and Canadian principal, Paul Officer of Riverside Public School in Mississauga, Ontario, the seminar represented an occasion to narrate to a hall packed with teachers and principals of Sicilian mandatory schools [i.e. those whose students are minors] how it is possible to move from the theoretical statement of constitutional principles of equality to the practice of social and constructive integration of all children, even the “most difficult” ones.

He illustrated the human and structural resources and the organizational strategies put in place by the Canadian school, also thanks to the help of volunteer services: the end result was extremely valuable, and hence the instructional success of special needs pupils, carried out by an educational community in close collaboration with the central training system, represented by a very active local community, which is able to provide the school with adequate support of goods and services.

The teachers of Vucciria and many Sicilian principals listened carefully to Principal Officer’s talk. The meeting between the Sicilian and Canadian schools gave an opportunity for a full final discussion that saw attendees participate in a question period that lasted nearly two hours. The presentation of the school reality as it exists in Canada in which the citizenship rights of the weakest are cared for and supported by both local and central communities had the effect of amplifying and reinforcing the local educational dialogue, in the need to understand better and to be able to capture the essence of the best practices that were narrated. And in Officer’s words one can appreciate how much of the extraordinary there is in

ordinary work, when it is well done. In a difficult historical moment in which Italian schools are trying to emerge from the shoals of bureaucratic immobility, which can seize hold of one in a complex land such as Sicily in which educational necessity and professional orientation of the younger generation represent a dramatic urgency, the report by a school leader has helped us to raise up our gaze toward new horizons.

Thanks to the “provocation” represented by the experience narrated, the educators present regained their trust: the beauty of collaboration and the change that comes from it had taken place, had been recounted, and so is still possible. All it takes is to wish for it with passion and with dedication.

The foreign principal was not expecting the passionate participation of those present, and was stunned by the stir the meeting created. “All I did was talk about my work,” he said to us at the end of the discussion.

Something unexpected that gave us all new hope.

CHAPTER NINE

Transnational Exchange to Improve Management in Education

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1. Introduction

The international exchange project between two professional associations of school administrators, DiSAL in Italy and OPC in Ontario, represents a rare example of collaboration aiming at developing leadership skills through job-shadowing.

Direct observation in the field in which administrators work is at the same time the most basic and most refined of techniques of modern research (Earley and Bubb 2013). This method offers many advantages with respect to other qualitative and quantitative methods, because it allows researchers to come into direct contact with the social reality, gathering precious information for understanding the daily behaviour and comportment of individuals in the organization (Paletta 2015). An important advantage of this method of observation is to capture how the school administrator behaves in his or her own reality, analyzing it over a significant period of time. In fact, interviews and questionnaires capture the administrator's actions in a static snapshot, leaving out some important particulars in the story of his or her leadership role.

Observation contributes to enriching the description of the complex social and managerial figure of the school administrator. Being present in the field, the researcher has the possibility of investigating and understanding better how leadership evolves. In this way, what we learn by observation not only serves to help us understand the data gathered by other methods, but also asks of us questions useful for orienting research in the field, training activities for the professional development of school administrators and, not least in order of importance, helps to reflect on the expectations of the administrative authorities contributing to reveal how prescription (i.e. what one expects administrators to do) and reality (i.e. what they in fact do).

The contributions contained in this research-report allow us to take a “glance beyond our borders”, as the title puts it, through the lucid recounting of the lived experience of school administrators who participated in the international exchange program in Ontario, Canada.

The various contributions give us a prospect for analyzing the complex nature of the job of school administrator, contextualizing the practices of leadership within the central theme of evaluating administrators and teachers.

The framework within which the account of job-shadowing experiences moves is set out in the model for learning-leadership that has inspired the Canadian teaching establishment since the 90s, “when Ontario’s Ministry of Education passed a law removing principals from simple collective bargaining, abolishing their unions and forcing them to reorganize in more professional associations that are better able to define their role” (C. Mignatti, p. 25 above).

Thanks to the contribution by universities, professional associations and centres for research and training, which has seen right in Ontario the active participation of students of educational leadership who are eminent at a world level (among others, Michael Fullan, Andy

Hargreaves and Ken Leithwood). Canadian school administrators have been able to experience and elaborate a new professional profile that is the result of a process of cultural change over the course of more than a quarter century.

The experiences that the Italian school administrators narrate for us give lively testimony to their interest and enthusiasm, but also to a scarcely concealed sense of frustration that emerged in comparison with their Canadian colleagues:

“The life of a Canadian school administrator, in so far as I was able to observe, seemed to me less beset by bureaucratic encumberments, which, while not wholly lacking, are more directed toward educational dynamics” (F. Lorusso p. 40);

“The administrator knows how each of the instructors works, what methodologies they use, what outcomes they obtain, their professional evolution, and also is not overburdened with tasks of an administrative nature, as for example having to find supplementary personnel in cases of employee absences, because the region has a centralized system that provides supply teachers in a timely and efficient manner. However, the administrator does play a managerial role, by choosing how to use resources, in keeping with the school’s objective, but also checking and following the learning processes” (A. Arizza pp. 78-79); and

“...if in Italy the school administrator experiences isolation, in Canada professional sharing is a meaningful reality. This helps to unify the school-system, with a cohesion that is not imposed from above, but created by workers in the field, and it lightens the load of a profession that remains always burdened by responsibilities, even though it can be accompanied by the support of one’s peers and the respect of one’s superiors” (B. Battaglia p. 63).

The experiences described in this report place the attention on the profile of educational leadership of Canadian school administrators in all the stages of their professional career, from recruitment to selection, to training all the way to performance appraisal. Even if the characterization has been used by the Italian school administrators as a contrast better to draw attention to the bureaucratic-administrative dimension that in many aspects continues to distinguish school administrators in our country, the red thread that unites the chapters is the awareness of a clear process of rupture triggered in Italy first by presidential decree number 80 of 2013, and then with the “Good School” law 107 of 2015. In effect, Italian school administrators clearly glimpse the course pursued by Italy toward a new approach to school administration, centred on structural processes of self-evaluation, improvement, accountability and external performance-appraisal, of both individuals and organizations, that takes into its view the whole school community.

However, worries exist over “grey areas” tied to uncertainties in the new Italian norm. In recounting the lessons learned in the field, the Italian school administrators maintain that the experience of professional exchange has brought to light significant difference between Italy and Canada in assigning performance appraisals to administrators and teachers.

From the description of actual practices, it clearly emerges that in Ontario the evaluation processes are inspired purely with the aim of professional development and appraisal of the education leadership of the school administrators; by contrast, the new system of evaluating school administrators in Italy – ultimately answering to the need to classify administrators on performance-scales and to hand out retribution for outcomes – winds up promoting an evaluation that is essentially an end in itself.

The training aspect of evaluation, tied to the restoration of controls, to the free discussion of strengths and weaknesses in the administrative action, to the open and unconditioned comparison of alternative professional paths, is weakened by the rigid formalism of “contradictory evaluation” described in the *Guidelines for the Evaluation of School Administrators*.²¹

Evaluation as training presupposes constant support and dialogue, mutual trust between the one doing the evaluation and the one being evaluated to seek out areas for improvement and to work coherently on the professional development of the school administrator. As Mignatti explains with regard to the Canadian case, “the watchword is trust in a constant process of comparing and supporting, which does not come down only to periodic inspection tours” (p. 28).

Another critical aspect put forward by the Italian school administrators in comparison with their Canadian colleagues is the heavy weight of performance-appraisal given to administrative activity: 60% based on the school administrator’s contribution to the outcome-targets laid down in the school’s self-evaluation report, 30% based on their ability to put to use professional resources, engagement and professional merit, and the final 10% based on the evaluation of his or her comportment by the professional and social community.

The guidelines define precisely the criteria for measuring the school administrator in respect to results (“The general reference point is the three-year objective laid out in the self-

²¹ The restoration of control in the evaluation of the Director of the Regional School Office is mandatory in cases of “failure to attain objectives”, and optional in cases of positive evaluation, when the interested party requests (cf. *Guidelines for the Evaluation of School Administrators of Directive number 36 of August 18, 2016 on the Evaluation of School Administrators*).

evaluation report, while the object of the annual evaluation is the trend toward a verifiable application of data to the system...”), generally leaving aside, however, the other two criteria.

As regards the measuring mechanisms for the “use of professional resources” one refers to the way in which the fund for awarding merit is distributed, on the level of training, research, management and the organization of professional resources, with which to appraise the school administrator’s comportment, the “instructors’ evaluation questionnaire, with data and control on the part of the stakeholders” represents the source of training from which the evaluating nucleuses could draw objective elements of appraisal.

However, while 60% of the performance-appraisal of school administrators is firmly anchored in typically reaching the quantitative three-year objectives, 40% of the weight is left to the broad discretion of the evaluating nucleuses.

The rigid break-down of the performance-evaluation weighed by area implies that the final evaluation of the school administrator’s performance will result from adding up the points obtained in each area, having taken care to exclude the modalities of measuring three areas precisely to avoid overlapping and duplication of evaluation-parameters. However, such a mechanism implicitly acknowledges that, for example, the school administrators can obtain a low level of evaluation by the professional and social community (10% of the evaluation) without this significantly influencing their performance as concerns the quantitative (60% of the evaluation). Otherwise said, the employment of the school administrator on criteria of merit-evaluation of the instructors abstractly judged correct by the nucleuses, falls to the final 30% of the evaluation, even if the same criteria could leave the instructors largely unsatisfied according to the results obtained through the questionnaires.

In short, the way in which the nucleuses of appraisal will interpret their own role will constitute a determining factor to give credibility to the appraisal. In effect, a rigid application of criteria and weightings will result in a partial and fragmentary representation of the complex job of school administrator, focussed for the 60% on a dimension largely out of his or her own direct control (the training and educational results indicated as objectives in the self-evaluative report) and for 40% in the important, but certainly not exhaustive, aspect of managerial activity (the management of human resources).

As another Canadian, Henry Mintzberg, one of the most influential students of management, has had occasion to write, the administrator's job often is seen in a partial way, emphasizing a part rather than the whole. This goes also for the work of school administrators often broken down into many components, each of which is analyzed in isolation. In the literature on education, there are many lists of functions of school administrators either in the area of qualitative research (among others, Sergiovanni) or in quantitative research (Robinson et al. 2008). Even when quantitative effects of leadership are studied, the analyses tend to consider the effects of individual elements, causing the unity of the administrator's work to disappear (Paletta 2016). The managerial leadership done by a school administrator is, at different times, strategic direction, organization, self-evaluation and improvement, management of human resources, management of networks and relationships with families. Managerial leadership is all of these things, not separate and then added together, but fused one with the other from the outset. As Mintzberg notes, "Take away one of these elements, and you will no longer have a precise idea of the managerial work in its entirety. In this sense, by concentrating on one aspect

to the exclusion of the rest, one narrows down, rather than expanding our vision of managerial leadership.”

2. Evaluating administrators on the basis of results

In keeping with the spirit of legislative decree 150 of 2009, presidential decree number 80 of 2013 has identified the processes of self-evaluation, improvement and accountability as the axis around which the whole cycle of managing school performance must revolve.

Administrators are called on to develop, in a way contextualized by school realities, a methodology for the strategic diagnosis of shackles/opportunities and strengths/weaknesses, offering an analytic and documentary support for the identification of school-improvement objectives (strategic priorities). School administrators must be supported in developing leadership capacity that can guide and organize within the school a new directional philosophy. The efficacious leadership of an administrator represents a fundamental aspect of the politics of his or her accountability in keeping the whole system from dissolving into a costly bureaucratic machine, which propagates information solely from the ministerial centre, without any real change of professional and didactic practices for the whole school.

In effect, an efficacious guide to current processes for measuring and evaluating performance in regard to the school context is an indispensable condition for leading professional communities to interrogate themselves about the gap that exists in respect to social expectation and the objectives of the system, and to work to overcome this discrepancy. The strategic alignment of school objectives implies the capacity of the school administrator to shepherd professional groups toward long-range objectives, in which they necessarily have to look at

students' outcomes in one or more areas of results (results in the curriculum, results in national standardized tests, key skills and those of citizenship and long-term results) and must be measurable through precise performance-indicators and result-values obtained (three-year targets). The system of performance-management of schools asks administrators to promote a hierarchical organization of objectives, passing from long-range objectives to short-term targets, from general school-objectives to specific objectives broken down by grades, addresses, sites and other sectors of management of school performance. This affords school communities the strategic frame of reference for improvement planning.

According to the recent guidelines for carrying out directive number 36 of August 18, 2016 on the evaluation of school administrators, the school improvement objectives (priorities) set out in the self-evaluation report, with national and regional objectives, are the starting-point for evaluating school administrators, "in this they represent the frame of reference within which the administrator's action is located and his or her contribution to improving the service", as set out in paragraph 93 of the "Good School". Since the objectives set out in the self-evaluation report refer to student outcomes in terms of results (curriculum, standardized notional tests, key skills and those of citizenship, and long-term results), the new system of evaluating school administrators in fact introduces a leadership profile for learning.

The effects of leadership on student learning are largely indirect, mediated by a series of general factors recognizable in the school climate, in the capacities and motivations of instructors and the quality of learning environments.

Therefore to make 60% of the evaluation of school administrators depend on the pursuit of results with regard to which the school administrators have a capacity of middle- and long-

term influence (Leithwood and Mascali 2008, Paletta 2014, Hallinger and Heck 2010) not only represents a blind faith in the capacity for leadership for learning of our school administrators, but implicitly assumes that it is possible to reconstruct the logical causal web between administrative acts and the consequent learning-results of students. We know such a connection exists, but it is indirect, mediated by numerous variables. It is necessary to learn these in order deeply to understand the work of each individual school administrator, and this cannot be done with a remote or second-hand study of administrative practices (Porter et al. 2010).

Earlier research conducted in Italy on the evaluation of school administration has shown clearly the limits of putting too much emphasis on students' learning-results (Paletta et al. 2015, Paletta and Bezzina 2016, Paletta 2015).

The experience of the autonomous province of Trento (PAT) has offered points for reflection on the paradoxes of evaluation with respect to the nature of leadership of a school administrator in a context where, analogously to what is stipulated by the national guidelines, meeting the result-targets is weighed at 60%.

The results of this research have shown clearly that school administrators focus on the improvement of student learning- and training-outcomes. However, their leadership practices look "obliquely" at final results. While we recognize the need to delineate the administrators' organizational activity for improving student learning, it is apparent that the administrators' work is focused chiefly on creating the internal organizational conditions and external institutional protections to allow others effectively to record those final results.

This, according to the situation, can signify a managerial leadership that concentrates on activities to connect and negotiate with the school's outside stakeholders, for example, through

building networks with other schools, agreements with local public organizations and businesses or close collaboration with the central administration. Often these practices aim either to ensure a constant flow of resources and other tools of support, or to resist outside pressures, which can have a negative effect on the instructors' work.

The cases observed tell us that the managerial leadership of the school administrator is often oriented at reinforcing the school's culture, in the sense of community, and the affirmation of its fundamental values. Even when school administrators occupy themselves with apparently bureaucratic-administrative aspects, such as problems related to security, discipline or privacy, these activities represent precious opportunities to give meaning to, and to build a census around final objectives and the quality and equality of teaching/learning processes.

When school administrators perceive that a project or a particular initiative is strategic for the school's future, they get directly involved and enter personally into questions. In cases like computer literacy, content and language-integrated learning, teaching for skills or the vertical curriculum of the territory, the direct intervention of the school administrator is aimed at presiding over changes, guiding in person strategic projects to build innovation from the ground up and in a shared manner. These initiatives are not necessarily planned, and are not structured as formal processes. The administrator acts as a first among equals, assumes direct responsibility for affirming the sense of priority and collective effort, sometimes intervening with the role of consultant or specialist, making his or her own prior experience and professional background available, rather than as a formal activity.

School administrators act as "leaders of leaders". The organizational activities of those who work with the administrator and other figures in the system that occupy formal positions

(instrumental functionaries responsible for educational sectors, departments heads, etc.) cannot be interpreted within the typical categories of “middle management”. It is not a matter of “committee officials” in the sense that this term has assumed in the hierarchical structures where middle managers have the main task of facilitating the flow of information from top to bottom or vice versa, mediating communication and control. The school administrators’ collaborators, broadly understood, exercise a true and proper educational leadership; their role is also that of sensors scattered inside and outside the school to relay and receive information, but they are much more than that. They take part in activities of supervision, support, coaching, observation and feedback of their colleagues, sharing materials and practices and many other activities for coordinating processes of teaching and learning that, without their contribution, would have remained beyond the reach of the school administrator.

School administrators in general act as learning leaders, but in their day-to-day work they do not seem conditioned by the preselected result-indicators and precise targets on which depend 60% of their evaluation. The link between their actions and the indicators and targets is not deterministic: administrators are aware of the general context within which certain results develop, they work to create conditions for learning, manage the flow of work to avoid obstacles, and try to hold the rudder in the same direction and in the right one, are active within the confines of their organizations, overseeing their relationships and potentialities, but administrators do not act as cold analysts concerned only to calculate the effects of their actions with regard to performance indicators of their own schools. Generally speaking, they seem to have a broad idea that what they are doing must have an impact on learning, but it is not at all

clear how, and above all to what degree or when. In truth, other administrators who will come after them might be the ones to reap the fruits of their labour.

If things are like this, to tie 60% of the evaluation to precise targets and performance-indicators could have as a consequence that the performance-evaluation is not able to bring to light effective differences, which certainly do exist and are important in the quality of school administrators' leadership.

To measure final results, to make them visible and even to connect them to part of the performance-evaluation of school administrators is appropriate, because it stimulates entrepreneurial behaviour in school administrators, forcing them to seek to influence factors that contribute to the co-production of results, outside of his or her direct control. In effect, this implies the capacity of the school administrator, by putting into effect an approach to leadership based on vision, persuasion, trust and support, to convince people that their contribution is important for results, but on which a "command and control" approach has little effect.

However, to make the performance evaluation of school administrators depend in an important way on results that he or she cannot control means also accepting the perverse effect of opportunistic behaviour, short-term thinking, reining in of objectives, conservative attitudes, reluctance to take big risks on projects and initiatives whose outcome is uncertain, and above all whose results will be seen only in the long term.

To the DiSAL school administrators who have chosen to avail themselves of the job-shadowing experience have been clearly revealed the limits and possibilities of the new system. The Canadian principals' performance appraisal is the fruit of experimentation that took place in twelve boards over the 2007-08 academic year, constantly improved thanks to the contribution

of school administrators, superintendents and directors of professional associations. This makes us understand yet once again the complexity of the evaluation-processes and the necessity that these be deeply rooted in school culture. Therefore, if it is true that on the world stage Italy has come not a little late to make the performance-appraisal of school administrators obligatory, we have the chance to learn from others' mistakes, while we may hope in this way to avoid depriving the appraisal of administrators of social legitimacy, and even more importantly, to implement a new system with an approach that respects the complexity of human behaviour in the educational field, opening the fine mesh of a mechanistic evaluation through weighted areas, which in the present form could impede an authentic training approach. Under this aspect, the evaluative nucleuses will play an important role, because the equity of the evaluation will depend on their professionalism and on their deep understanding of the work of school administrators in the specific context under consideration.

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Translator's Appendix: Abbreviations and Acronyms

English

BOD	bring your own device
CCC	community-culture-caring
CEO	chief executive officer
CLIL	content and language integrated learning
DRA	diagnostic assessment of reading
EQAO	Education Quality Accountability Office
GPP	Global Principal Partnership
I	intermediate
ISL	International School Leadership
J	junior
JK	Junior Kindergarten
LEAP	Leading Education Across the Planet
LSA	Leading Student Achievement
MA	Master of Arts degree
MC	math curriculum
MEd	Master of Education degree
NT	new technologies?
OCT	Ontario College of Teachers
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
OLF	Ontario Leadership Framework

OPC	Ontario Principals' Council
OSSD	Ontario Secondary School Diploma
OSSLC	Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course
OSSLT	Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test
OWA	Ontario Writing Assessment
P	primary
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PLSA	Program for International Student Assessment
PPA	Principals' Performance Appraisal
PQP	Principal Qualification Program
SEF	School Effectiveness Framework
SIP	School Improvement Planning
SMART	specific-measurable-achievable-realistic-time bound
TLCP	Teach Learning Critical Pathway
TPA	Teacher Performance Appraisal
WMSS	World Management Survey in Schools

French

OCSE	<i>Organisation de coopération et de développement économique</i> [= Organization of Cooperation and Economic Development]
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Italian

AA.VV.	<i>autori vari</i> [= various authors]
ART	<i>articolo</i> [= article, a section of a law]
AS	<i>anno scolastico</i> [= academic year]
AT	<i>ambito territoriale</i> [= territorial precinct]
ATA	<i>assistenti tecnici e amministrativi</i> [= staff]
C	<i>comma</i> [= paragraph, i.e. subsection of an article of a law]
DDL	<i>disegno di legge</i> [= senate ruling]
DiSAL	<i>Dirigente Scuole Autonome e Libere</i> [= Autonomous and Independent School Administrators]
DLGS	<i>decreto legislativo</i> [= legislative decree]
d.lgvo	“
DPR	<i>decreto del presidente della repubblica</i> [= presidential decree]
DS	<i>dirigente scolastico</i> [= school administrator]
GU	<i>Gazzetta Ufficiale</i> [= Official Gazette]
IC	<i>istituto comprensivo</i> [= comprehensive institute]
IDA	<i>istruzione degli adulti</i> [= adult education]
IIS	<i>istituto di istruzione superiore</i> [= highschool]
L	1 <i>legge</i> [= law]; 2 <i>lingua</i> [= language]
MIUR	<i>Ministero, università e ricerca</i> [= Ministry, university and research]
N	<i>numero</i> [= number]
PA	<i>pubblica amministrazione</i> [= public administration]

PAT	<i>Provincia Autonoma di Trento</i> [= Trento Autonomous Province]
PDM	<i>percorso di miglioramento</i> [= Process of improvement]
PON	<i>Prgramma Operativo Nazionale</i> [= National Operating Plan]
PROT	<i>protocollo</i> [= protocol]
PTOF	<i>piano trienne del offerta formativa</i> [= three-year plan of training courses]
RAV	<i>rapporto di autovalutazione</i> [= self-evaluation report]
SNV	<i>Servizi Nazionale di Valutazione</i> [= National Evaluation Service]
TFA	<i>tirocinio formativo</i> [= apprenticeship training]
USR	<i>uffici scolastici regionali</i> [= regional school offices]
UST	<i>uffici scolastici territoriali</i> [= provincial school offices]
V	<i>vede</i> [= see]

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