

LOUIS NEWMAN'S WISCONSIN INNOVATIONS AND THEIR EFFECT UPON THE RAMAH CAMPING MOVEMENT

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The Problem of Educational Innovation

Over the past decade, one of the recurrent thrusts in educational literature has been the attempt to arrive at an effective theory of educational innovation.¹ This theorizing has been accompanied by detailed descriptions of successful and unsuccessful attempts at innovation.² Among the key questions which researchers in the field of educational innovation have sought to answer are the following:

1. Researchers have found that many well-meaning attempts at innovation fail because the innovators neglect to consider the possible wider effects of an innovation upon the total institutional setting. A successful innovation must both (a) achieve the particular narrow objectives for which it is designed, and (b) at the same time further, or at least not disrupt, the achievement of the overall objectives of the institution. This dual concern has required researchers working in the field of innovation to concern themselves with the question of what means of making

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innovations are less disruptive to educational settings than others?

2. What qualities of an educational innovation influence its becoming a more or less permanent feature of the educational setting?
3. When an innovation is successfully diffused to other, similar educational settings, (a) by what means did this diffusion occur, and (b) what qualities of the innovation facilitated its being replicated?

Researchers have asserted that finding the answers to these questions could be helpful to efforts at school improvement.

There is no question in my mind that the educational leadership exercised by Louis Newman at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin during the summers of 1951–53 represents one of the most successful and far-reaching instances of educational innovation in the history of Jewish education in the United States. Hopefully, a review of what Newman accomplished in this short period in Wisconsin and its long-range impact can be of help to educators seeking the answers to some of the questions posed above.

Newman Undertakes to Revolutionize Ramah

Educational innovations are usually undertaken in response to problems. This was not the case, however, with Newman's work at Camp Ramah. The "revolution" which he conceived and implemented did not come in response to some crisis at the camp.³ Though the founders of the camp had built an educational institution on rather unique premises, the idea had quickly caught the imagination of rabbis, educators, lay leaders, and parents. Newman was not brought to Wisconsin to bolster a tottering institution, but to lead what was already, after only four years, a successful, if not quite yet flourishing, educational endeavor.

Newman's predecessors at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin were two very capable Jewish educators. The founding director of the camp, serving for the 1947 and 1948 camp seasons was

Henry R. Goldberg, the educational director of the East Midwood Jewish Center (Brooklyn N.Y.), one of the foremost educators in the Conservative movement. Goldberg was succeeded in 1949 and 1950 by Rabbi Hillel Silverman, who had served as head counselor under Goldberg in 1948. Silverman, who was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in June 1948, possessed great charisma, had a very strong Hebraic background, and had considerable experience in the field of Jewish camping.

Goldberg and Silverman enthusiastically and successfully implemented the newly designed camp program, emphasizing spoken Hebrew, formal Hebrew classes, religious observance, and athletic and artistic activity, which had been put together by Dr. Moshe Davis and Sylvia Ettenberg on behalf of the Teachers Institute of the Seminary.⁴ When Newman was hired to direct the camp for the 1951 season, there was nothing in the educational or recreational program that required change or innovation—yet Newman undertook to create the revolution which Schwartz describes for us.⁵ Why did Newman do away with the activity schedule, change the nature of the counselor's role, do away with social dancing, etc? What was it that influenced Newman to devote countless hours and tremendous energy to pursuing educational objectives far beyond the requirements of his position as Ramah camp director?

The problems to which Newman was responding may not have loomed large before Goldberg and Silverman, but Newman saw them as widespread, insidious, and threatening to undermine the efforts of all Jewish educators. His grasp of these problems and his perception of the urgent need to find solutions to them had been sharpened by his experience on the staffs of Camp Massad and Camp Yavneh,⁶ his employment as a synagogue-school teacher and principal; and most of all, by his conviction of the need for Jewish educational enterprises to have strong moral purpose and to be consciously and deliberately guided by a philosophy and psychology of education which was in harmony with the nature of the child as revealed by contemporary educational and psychological research.

For Newman, then, Camp Ramah, as successful as it may have been by accepted standards, was still heir to the plethora of educational defects which afflicted virtually all Jewish educational endeavors. When he was invited to assume the directorship of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, he decided to seize the opportunity to build a new type of Jewish educational institution, free from those defects.

How Newman Made His Innovations

We will not go into the details of Newman's revolution here. Its salient features are well described in Schwartz's article.⁷ What we want to do here is to try to analyze what Newman did in the light of the questions relating to educational innovation which are posed at the beginning of this article.

The first question which we posed asked how successful innovations are made. Newman's innovations were made in two very straightforward ways: either by imposition from above, or through a process of group deliberation and decision. The decision to do away with the structured activity program was imposed by Newman from above; the decision to continue or discontinue the very popular tradition of a Maccabiah (color-war) he gave to the camp community to decide. Possibly Newman's most important quality of educational leadership, at least that first summer, was his skill in distinguishing between decisions that he himself could make for the camp community and decisions that he needed to allow the community to make for itself.

Newman made his positions on the issues that the camp community would decide for itself quite clear, but when the campers and staff were together deliberating about the issues, it was in an atmosphere of free-for-all discussion and open debate. While Newman made his views known, his efforts and those of his chief aide, Bernard Lipnick, to sell them to the community were surely rather subtle and by no means could be characterized as politicking or "arm-twisting."

As for the changes which he imposed from above, Newman, like many other educators, felt that it was the prerogative and

obligation of the director of an educational institution to order the program so as to fit the objectives.⁸ He did not hesitate to impose his educational convictions upon the community, presumably because he readily exposed them to public examination and was prepared to defend them at any time in debate with campers, staff members, or lay committee people.

How did Newman "get away" with this? Why didn't the staff rebel against his impositions? After all, the Rand Report tells us that the truly successful educational innovations are those which germinate and are implemented through the joint efforts of a school's leadership and faculty.⁹ Why did this staff of bright, articulate, well-educated college and graduate students "buy" what Newman, a stranger from the East, had to offer?

Part of the answer, it seems to us, is that in the camp setting Newman proved to be a charismatic leader who was able to have a profound influence upon many of his staff members. This charisma did not flow from Newman's personal "style"—he was not an exciting speaker or a glamorous personality. The source of that charisma lay in the recognition on the part of the staff of Newman's deep dedication to a series of Jewish religious and ethical ideals *and* in his ability to communicate many of these abstract ideals to many members of the staff. (The previous Ramah directors were also thoughtful and articulate individuals but were probably not as successful as Newman in inspiring staff members through their words and deeds.) Everyone felt that they knew where Newman stood. Consequently, no one could accuse him of having ulterior motives, of seeking self-aggrandizement, or of trying to undermine the established commitment of Ramah to Jewish religious practice, Jewish study, and the Jewish people. In a very real sense, Newman may have epitomized for many of the staff members the quality of "fidelity" which, according to Erikson, is the value most highly prized at the end of adolescence.¹⁰

Another part of the answer to our question would seem to be that Newman had the ability to attract and select potential staff members who would help him to implement his new program.

Like any good camp director or school principal, Newman did not hire new staff members until he was able to have a long conversation with them to determine whether they were well suited to the role that he had in mind. Since, aside from some rare exceptions, he could not find potential staff members who were already educating young Jews in the style that he was advocating, it appears that he tried, by and large, to find people whose inclinations he felt he could trust, and who seemed to possess the potential for guiding children and youth on the basis of newly learned principle rather than rigid adherence to the methods by which they themselves had been previously treated by counselors or teachers at Ramah and in similar educational settings.

The Lasting Impact of Newman's Innovations

Many of the specific changes initiated by Louis Newman are characteristic of the Ramah camps to this day, thirty years after they were first implemented: the color-war was never reinstated; campers still move from activity to activity without bugles or loudspeaker announcements; prizes are not awarded for Hebrew-speaking, cleanliness, or athletic prowess; etc. Some of Newman's specific changes were not retained, yet they left an imprint on the life of the camps; e.g., social dancing never returned as a weekly activity, as it had been prior to Newman's arrival in Wisconsin, but today there is not a Ramah camp in which social dancing will not be scheduled for the older camper units sometime during the summer—though always being sure that the staff pays attention to those who do not dance, and that entertainment and refreshments are incorporated into the program so that even the nondancers can enjoy the activity. Newman required that campwide and unitwide programs be planned and carried out by the campers who were going to participate in them. If they were unwilling to get together and do the required work, there would be no program. Newman also set aside time in the daily program for each cabin group to program for itself a certain period of the day (*peulat tzrif*). The campers could call upon staff members, such as specialists

(sports, arts and crafts, etc.) or teachers, to help with the implementation of the activity, but the nitty-gritty of preparing the activity was to be done by the campers themselves with the advice of their counselors. This daily, ongoing self-programming activity gave all campers the experience of being program planners, program implementers, and program evaluators. Early on, the campers recognized that the enjoyment and satisfaction produced by an activity was often directly proportional to the effort invested in it.

Today at Ramah, such cooperative or democratic group programming as exists is much more limited in its extent than it was at the time that Newman introduced it to Ramah. *Peulat tzrif* is to be found on the schedule of all camps, though possibly only for several hours a week. Additionally, cabin groups often plan parties, hikes, or other types of activities for themselves. Such campwide or unitwide programming as exists at Ramah today is largely limited to cross-camp committees which are formed to plan special days or events, but not to deal with ongoing day-to-day events, as in Newman's time. Many of the functions of the camper *vaadot* that flourished under Newman in Wisconsin, and subsequently in other Ramah camps as well (the *vaad peulat erev*—the committee for planning evening activities, was probably the most successful of these committees), are today handled by the Ramah counselors. Possible reasons for the fading away of this key Newman innovation are the lack of patience of current Ramah staff members to lead youngsters through the laborious process of planning and implementing activities, without a Newman to goad them on; and the discomfort of camp directors (and lay committees?) with the "messiness" which camper-centered programming introduces into various aspects of camp administration.

Undoubtedly Newman's major and longest-lasting contribution to Ramah was in introducing the psychological dimension—the dimension of concern for the individual camper—and bringing it to the forefront of the attention of the Ramah staff. Henceforth, every child would be treated as an individ-

ual, possessing different interests and needs. Except for those areas specified as mandatory,¹¹ campers would be allowed and even encouraged to design their own programs. Rather than being programmed together with the other members of their bunk or unit, all the campers were able to choose individually those activities which were of greatest interest to themselves. The counselors were obliged to review the choices of the campers and to encourage a "rounded" selection (e.g., aesthetic as well as athletic activity), but ultimately, the choice was left up to the camper to make. Newman's head counselor, Bernard Lipnick, worked out a complex system to reduce time and facility conflicts between the choices of campers in different age groups, so as to guarantee that each child would receive as many of his/her choices as possible. Staff members spent many sleepless nights working out the camper programs.

Today, all Ramah camps still offer campers a choice of activities. Most Ramah campers attend camp for an eight-week session, and the choice is usually made twice, at the beginning of the first week and the end of the fourth week. Newman had begun with a daily choice of activities but had quickly moved to a weekly choice when the daily choice proved too unwieldy for the staff to implement. Later Ramah directors decided that the value of making a choice was often nullified by the short period for which the choice was made and, therefore, little by little lengthened the period for which a camper was obligated to abide by the choice.

In Newman and Lipnick's system, campers chose from an otherwise unstructured list of possible activities. The campers were required to make ten or twelve choices, assigning an order of preference to each choice as it was made. When the staff sat down to work out the program, the camper choices were "weighted" according to the order of preference. All of the weighted choices for each particular activity were added together, and listed by total from highest to lowest. Then, going in order from highest to lowest, the activities were placed on the schedule by the staff, taking care that none of the

most popular activities (i.e., those receiving the highest weighted totals) conflicted with one another on the schedule. When one activity had been placed in each of the time slots, then a second and third activity with lower totals could be placed in them. The Newman-Lipnick system allowed the most popular choices for boys, such as baseball, basketball, and tennis, to "smother" less popular choices, such as drama and choir, since they were entitled to nonconflicting positions in the schedule. This is not to say that there were not outstanding choir and drama programs under Newman's directorship—it was just very hard to schedule such activities so that boys who wanted to play baseball would also be free to participate in drama. To some extent Newman ameliorated this situation by attracting to his specialty staff outstanding artist-educators who could develop unusual enthusiasm for participating in the arts among typical middle-class American-Jewish teenagers, without the usual Ramah incentives of the color-war.

In more recent seasons, Ramah directors decided that a degree of structure should be built into the list from which campers made their choices so that camper needs and not just camper interests would determine which activities were scheduled against one another. In the newer system, when a camper chooses activities, he/she *is* creating a personal schedule, but not helping to determine which activities receive more or less desirable slots in the program schedule, as in the Newman-Lipnick system. In the youngest campers' unit, for example, there might be a time slot for sports activities three times a week and a time slot for arts activities three times a week, leaving the choice of the specific sports and arts activities to the campers, but guaranteeing that these campers would participate in both types of activities.

A second aspect of the psychological dimension which Newman brought to Ramah was his conviction that the camp program must respond to the maturing interests of teenagers. Newman's position was that if the camp did not provide these campers with a program of activities which was exciting and challenging, then they would create their own activities, prob-

ably of a destructive character, which would provide that excitement and challenge. Chief among such potential destructive activities were the intercabin "raids" which Newman had observed first-hand in the other camps at which he had worked, and which were known to Ramah staff and campers to be an accepted part of life at virtually every summer camp. Newman tabooed raids at Ramah, and when they did occur, he made use of the occasion as a major opportunity to educate campers about the Jewish tradition of respect for one's fellow man. This is what led Newman, at the very start, to purchase canoes, camping equipment, and power tools for the carpentry shop in Wisconsin. It also led Newman to encourage counselors of adolescent cabin groups to develop meaningful work projects for the campers within the camp. To this day, after thirty years, campers still use the steps which Alexander Shapiro built with his campers in front of the Wisconsin dining hall. When Joseph Lukinsky was appointed director of the Ramah American Seminar, he built the entire program around such service activities, both inside and outside the camp; most of the camps have, for many years, maintained an ongoing program of such activities. Over the years, all of the camps purchased the types of equipment that Newman purchased in 1951, as well as the equipment required to offer such activities as radio, electronics, rocketry, bicycling, and computer.

Finally, as a third aspect of the psychological dimension which Newman brought to Ramah, we would point out that Newman was very knowledgeable about the pathology of psychological illness and sensitized his staff members to the possibility that these pathologies might be present among the camper and staff population. Moreover, in response to the accusation that the Ramah director should not be so concerned with psychopathology, Newman never tired of pointing out that it was only by gaining an understanding of psychological illness that one gains an accurate picture of psychological health. Newman was the first Ramah director to introduce a staff psychologist into a Ramah camp.¹² While he did not propose to offer psychological therapy at Ramah, he felt that

the psychologist could be of great help in identifying serious problems as such, and in helping counselors to better deal with campers who exhibited less serious psychological irregularities. Over the past thirty years, most of the Ramah camps have added to their staffs psychologists or social workers to do what Newman had in mind when he brought the first psychologist to Wisconsin.

Henry Goldberg and Hillel Silverman, the directors who preceded Louis Newman at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, were both broadly educated and extremely dedicated to their roles as Jewish educators. That they did not emphasize the psychological dimension of the task along with the Jewish dimension, as did Newman, may have been more a function of the times and the pressures under which they worked than of their personalities or of instructions which they received from the Seminary, which gave them guidance. In the period of the founding of Ramah, it may have been necessary to work with the strongest resolve to establish the Jewish aspects of the program. Newman added a new dimension to the camp program his predecessors had successfully established. They had firmly placed Ramah within the rubric of Jewish education; Newman took the Jewish educational institution to which he came and moved it to the much broader rubric of general education—exploiting the fruits of contemporary educational research and thought to enrich and strengthen the Jewish educational program which Ramah offered.

Newman also provided the model for most of the Ramah directors who would follow him; in addition to camp experience, they would possess academic training both in Judaica and in education/psychology/social work. Training in the latter fields was essential in order to maintain the broad educational focus which Newman had brought to Ramah.

How Newman's Innovations Were Diffused Through the Ramah Movement

We have already indicated that many of Newman's specific innovations at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, and especially his

emphasis upon serving the needs, interests, and problems of the individual camper, sooner or later became characteristic of all the Ramah camps which were then in existence or were later opened: Poconos, Berkshires, Nyack, Glen Spey, Connecticut, New England, California, and Canada. Those other camps may also have had their own unique dimensions due to the geographic location (e.g., the large-scale canoeing/sailing/tripping program in Canada) or programmatic thrusts initiated by a particular director; but in addition to everything else, the impact of Newman's work in Wisconsin in the years 1951–53 was to be found in every Ramah camp, throughout the movement. How did it happen?

Basically it happened because Newman, during his three summers in Wisconsin, built an unusually strong institutional base for spreading the ideas which he introduced and translated into camp program in Wisconsin. The backbone of that institutional base was a cadre of young future Jewish educators who were recruited by Newman to work with him on the Wisconsin staff during those three years and who, later on, themselves served as Ramah directors in Wisconsin, and/or in other Ramah camps and programs: Jerome Abrams, Burton Cohen, Seymour Fox, Joseph Lukinsky, David Mogilner, and Alexander Shapiro. For twenty years after Newman's departure from Wisconsin, the Wisconsin directors were men who had worked at Wisconsin with Newman. A telling proof of how thoroughly Newman's innovations had suffused the Ramah movement came in 1974, twenty-one years after Newman's departure, when David Soloff, the first post-Newman director in Wisconsin who was not a member of Newman's Wisconsin staff, arrived from Camp Ramah in the Berkshires and felt perfectly at home!

Camp Ramah in Wisconsin served as both a hospitable institutional base for Newman's ideas and as a "hothouse" for training new Ramah camp directors from among Newman's best staff members. Seymour Fox served in Wisconsin as advisor and teacher to the junior counselors in 1952 and 1953 and then followed Newman as Wisconsin camp director in 1954 and

1955. Subsequently, Fox served as dean of the Teachers Institute of the Seminary, which exercised educational and religious supervision over the Ramah camps. Fox was followed as Wisconsin director for the 1956 and 1957 camp seasons by Jerome Abrams, who had come to Wisconsin to work for Newman as a counselor in 1952. Subsequently, Abrams directed the Nyack, Connecticut, and Berkshires Ramah camps.¹³ David Mogilner succeeded Abrams as Wisconsin director in 1958 and 1959. Subsequently Mogilner directed Poconos and Mador (the National Ramah Counselor Training Institute), and served as national Ramah director. He had come to Wisconsin to work for Newman as a counselor in 1951. Burton Cohen followed Mogilner as Wisconsin director and served for fifteen summers beginning in 1960. Cohen had been a camper in Wisconsin in 1947, the first camp season, and beginning in 1948 served as a staff member under all of the directors previously mentioned. Alexander Shapiro directed Poconos for two summers, and Joseph Lukinsky directed the Ramah American Seminar, an innovative work/study program for Ramah graduates offered at the Nyack camp. Both served as counselors in Wisconsin during the Newman years.

While the men who served in leadership roles at Ramah described above had dissimilar backgrounds and personalities, what they have in common is that all of them worked closely with Newman during the period 1951–1953; and that the Ramah camps which they directed were characterized by many of the "revolutionary" features which Newman had introduced in Wisconsin.

Our first answer, then, to the question of how Newman's ideas were diffused throughout the Ramah movement is that by the time he left Wisconsin after three summers, the educational leadership of the camp was firmly established in the hands of men who, if not Newman's "disciples," surely felt very comfortable with the new approaches that he had brought to the camp. They would all add their own wrinkles to what Newman had wrought; however, Newman's imprint had been firmly placed onto the camp. The six summers following New-

man's tenure were a period in which three new camp directors from among the above-named group served two-year terms as Wisconsin director and then went forth to serve Ramah in other roles, in other places. Newman had created not only an ideological institutional base, but he had created an ideological training base for the leadership personnel of Ramah. Significantly, those directors who had worked with Newman themselves soon became the mentors of other young people who would serve after them as Ramah camp directors, creating a new "generation" of Ramah directors fully informed with Newman's ideas though never having worked with him at Ramah. Interestingly, because of Newman's subsequent significant activity in the field of Jewish education, most members of this younger group ultimately came to know him, but under very different circumstances than the earlier group.

Another factor which fostered the diffusion of Newman's approach to camping throughout the Ramah movement was the centralized character of the Ramah movement: (1) educational and religious supervision of all the camps was in the hands of the Seminary faculty and administration; (2) camp directors met frequently with Seminary representatives to review policies and programs; (3) key members of the camp staffs studied together at the Seminary and spent many hours sharing and discussing their experiences at the various Ramah camps; and (4) campers from the various camps came to know one another and learn about each other's camps through participation in the National Ramah Israel and American Seminars and the Mador-National Ramah Counselor Training Institute. All of this bringing together of staff and campers from throughout the movement had the effect of formally and informally providing the vehicles for diffusing throughout the movement Newman's ideas and programs which had become so firmly established in Wisconsin.

Of special importance in spreading throughout the Ramah movement the thrust which Newman had initiated in Wisconsin were two year-long seminars for key Ramah staff at all camps, led by Seymour Fox, at the Jewish Theological Semi-

nary of America during the 1956-57 and 1957-58 academic years. Fox had already completed most of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree in education at the University of Chicago when he came to Wisconsin to work with Newman. Fox gave the seminar participants an intensive basic education along the lines of the psychological, philosophical, and group-work approaches that Newman had introduced into Ramah. All the seminar participants were paid stipends and required to write "term papers" that would be of practical use to their co-workers at Ramah; some of the papers produced in the seminars became key educational documents in Ramah for years afterward.

This, then, was the way that Newman's innovations were diffused throughout the Ramah movement: (1) by the establishment of a strong ideological base in Wisconsin; (2) through the presence in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Ramah movement of a cadre of young Jewish educators who had worked with Newman in Wisconsin and were committed to implementing throughout the Ramah movement what he had innovated there; (3) through the formal and informal centralized character of the Ramah movement; and (4) through the efforts made at the Seminary to train key Ramah personnel between summers along the lines of the new educational thrusts brought to Ramah by Newman.

Newman's Enduring Contribution

In the course of this paper, we have tried to detail the process by which Newman's innovations were made at Ramah, how they stood the test of time, and how they were diffused throughout the Ramah camping movement. Newman's impact surely went far beyond anything that Newman himself or his co-workers could foresee at the time that they were working in Wisconsin in the summers of 1951-53. Certainly, the way in which the entire process was initiated by one man represents a signal achievement in the history of American-Jewish education. Moreover, it seems to us that what we have described is worthy of serious scrutiny by all who are concerned or in-

volved with the problems of educational innovation in an open society.

Notes

1. See Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin and David D. Marsh, "Staff Development and School Change," in *Staff Development*, ed. Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), pp. 69-94.
2. See Seymour Sarason, *The Culture of the Schools and the Problem of Change* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971).
3. See Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "Ramah Philosophy and the Newman Revolution," in this book, p. 7.
4. Davis and Ettenberg had been active in the founding of Camp Massad, the well-known Hebrew-speaking camp, several years previously, and many features of the Massad program were incorporated into the Ramah program.
5. Schwartz, op. cit.
6. These were both Jewish educational summer camps: Massad was founded by the American movement for the propagation of the modern Hebrew language, and Yavneh by the Boston Hebrew College. Among the aspects of the Massad program which Newman felt were miseducative were its rigidity, its insistence upon the speaking of Hebrew as an ultimate value, the prizes which were given for "right" behavior, and the Maccabiah, which forced campers to participate in "cut-throat competition" in activities which by their nature were irenic.
7. Schwartz, op. cit.
8. See Robert M. Hutchins, "The Administrator," in *Works of the Mind*, ed. Robert Heywood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 135-156.
9. McLaughlin and Marsh, op. cit.
10. Erik H. Erikson, "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," *Daedalus* 91, (1962): 5-27.
11. Mandatory areas included attendance at formal Hebrew classes and religious services as well as cabin clean-up and curfew.
12. Mrs. Rebecca Imber, practicing clinical psychologist in New York City, with a strong Jewish background, was invited to Wisconsin to serve in this position.
13. Newman himself served as Connecticut Ramah director in the summer of 1955, enlisting a few of the Wisconsin staff people to work with him there, and introducing his Wisconsin innovations himself.