



## The Effect of Changes and Innovation on Educational Improvement

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### Abstract

All organizations require constant change and innovation for improvement. Educational changes are often perceived as being so problematic, that is, it is not the nature of the change itself but the nature of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of those involved and the way that these are expressed in action. Educational reforms involve many aspects like human resources, teaching method, finance and lost potential. Change and innovation is a hard and long-term process. Any progress in history is the result of change and innovation.

**Keywords:** Educational change, Innovation, The nature of the change

### 1. Defining change

There are almost as many conceptions of the change process as there are writers on the subject, but despite this there are some broad areas of agreement on it.

Robbins & Delenzo (2001:230) give the definition of change: “ Change is an alteration of an organization’s environment structure, technology or people.”

“Change can be described as the adoption of an innovation, where the ultimate goal is to improve outcomes through an alteration of practices”. (Carlopio, 1998:2).

Bell& Ritchie (2002:157) state that change is the way people improve. It is not going to go away nor should it.

Fullan (1992:22) claims, “ Change is a process of learning new ideas and things. It is learning to do and learning to understand something new”.

Of all the definitions, people are given an idea that change is a process of improving your practice. The process of change is complex, with many different types change possible. Further, there are a number of different strategies for implementing these changes, with the success of implementation being highly variable. Handling change is not easy and can sometimes a painful process. Therefore implementation is the most important procedure in the change.

### 2. The need for change

People need change to improve their work. Robbins & DeCenzo (2001:231) pointed out that factors that drive change are both external and internal forces that constrain managers.

These forces also bring about the need for change. In educational institutions,

changes are imposed from outside or motivated by internal pressure. The ultimate goal of change is to make practice better or more effective in the work.

Preedy et al (1997:69) mentioned three perspectives on education force the need to change: the technological, the political and the cultural.

The technological assumes a rational view of the world. People live in non-rational world, most educational policy assumes a rational logic: If A happens then B will follow. When the “if-then logic does not work, it is common to resort to ‘if only’ statements. If only X had not happened, then B would have occurred. The problem with ‘if-then and if only’ thinking is twofold: 1) it only rarely mirrors reality, and 2) it encourages individuals to externalise blame and not take action themselves. Be this as it may, the technological approach continues to be the dominant perspective, and by trying to pretend otherwise one also falls into the ‘if-only’ trap.

The political perspective emphasizes that educational change inevitable involves conflict. Change by its very nature involves certain individuals and groups doing new things, which inevitably disturb the status quo.

The culture perspective is concerned with the social setting in which innovation intervenes. It demonstrates a commitment to the everyday reality, the cultural norms that are disturbed when innovation threatens.

Swenson (1997), cited by Credaro (2001) notes that external force refers to 'globalisation' of society has produced an imperative for continual reappraisal of practices in order to maintain a competitive edge. In educational terms, this may be interpreted as the need to update practices in keeping with the findings of international research, and to continually conform to national trends.

Internal to the school are the pressures brought to bear by curricular reform. Further, alterations in staff--student relationships from teacher-centred to student-centred create the need for modification of teaching practices, and policies and procedures.

### **3. The change process**

Change management is the core activity in realising organisational goals, whilst implementation is the practical or physical process of delivering an innovation. Change is ongoing process of delivering an innovation. According to Fullan (1991:117), "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think--it is as simple and as complex as that." Many people have written about managing change in organizations. (e.g. Eason 1985; Fullan,1991; Whitaker 1993). The origins of a change and its nature will clearly affect teachers' responses and subject leaders' approaches to managing it. In the change process, people and relationship are the major components to successful implementation. Support mechanisms are required to achieve an improvement in practices and procedures.

Therefore, managing change involves identifying needs, planning, implementing plan and evaluating the success of the change. In the changing process, leaders are the key role in managing the change. They should facilitate each element of the change process and looking for opportunities to delegate in order to make their staff be involved in the change process. MacGilchrist et al (1997), cited by Bell & Kitchie (2002:60) offer some key messages about change:

It takes time.

- A school's capacity for change will vary.
- Change is complex.
- Change needs to be well led and managed.
- Teachers need to be the main agents of change.
- Pupils need to be the main focus of change.
- Change agent refers to people who act as catalysts and assumes the responsibility for managing the change. The processes are called change agents. (Robbins & DeCenzo: 232)

The above messages give us a clear change process and the positions of teachers and students in the change process. It is well known that not all changes are successful. A successful change in school can take place simultaneously through: first subject leaders should have a plan; and then practise the plan. The implementation will involve behaviours, beliefs and attitudes.

Fullan (1991: 105-109) provides a set of assumptions as follows:

- Don't assume that your ideas about changes are the ones that ought to be implemented.
- Assume that individual who are attempting to implement changes will continually need clarification about them in order to make sense.
- Assume that successful change will inevitably involve some conflict and disagreement.
- Assume that people will only change if there is pressure to do so, a supportive environment, and opportunities to share experiences with others in similar situations.
- Assume that it will take two or three years for significant change to take place.
- Don't assume that the change itself has been rejected if it fails to be implemented—there may be other factors, which have contributed to the failure.
- Assume that it is impossible to bring about widespread change in a school: aim to increase the number of people affected.
- Don't assume that knowledge can be the sole basis for decision. They will usually be based on a combination of knowledge, politics and intuition,
- Assume that change will be fraught with problems and new challenges.

Therefore any change in education may not seem to be as simple as it seems. The implementation will take longer and people need time to understand it. Change and innovation is a complicated process. Fullan (1993:46) notes that

education reforms are “hard to conceive and even harder to put into practice”.

#### **4. Barriers to effective change**

It has been recognized that not all change is improvement, but all improvement involves change. Effective change to any educational institutions is not an easily obtainable goal. During the change process, dynamics in operations may resist the proposed change, such as school culture, the lack of holistic approach, absence of follow-up or support and even the process of change itself all present barriers to achieving effective change.

There are many barriers to effective change. One-way people have the ideas of change; on the other hand, they worry about failure. Newton & Tarrant (1992:191) pointed out that resistance is as natural as a phenomenon as change itself. Plant (1987), cited by Newton & Tarrant (ibid), outlines a number of factors that can fuel resistance and unwillingness to change which including the following:

- Fear of the unknown
- Lack of information
- Threat to core skills and competence
- Threat to power base
- Fear of failure
- Reluctance to experiment
- Reluctance to let go

These resistances have great effect on the process of change and innovation.

#### **5. School culture**

Handy (1988), cited by Dunham (1995, p.44), describes of four different types of culture in the school: Power, role, task and person.

Power culture has a central power figure surrounded by ever widening circles of power and influence, just like a spider’s web. The ability of the person in the centre is the key to understanding how these relatively small organizations function.

Role culture is as carefully and thoroughly organised as a bureaucracy, which is closely resembles. It is managed by means of an organization chart which defines the role occupants, their job descriptions, who they are responsible to, who they are responsible for and so on.

In task culture, specialist groups or teams together to solve, particular cross-curricular problems or achieve specific multi-disciplinary objectives. Person culture puts the individual first and makes the organization the resource for the individual work.

Obviously different resources affect school culture. Change in a school will involve many aspects. A school has many small groups. They may have different ideas among them. This raises the possibility that not all groups can understand the implications and for the change, and thus will not effectively participate in the process of change. Fullan (1991, p.XIV) pointed out, ‘ It isn’t that people resist change as much as they don’t know how to cope with it.’ Subject leaders need to accept this as natural and, to some extent, inevitable, It must be emphasized that practice must concentrate on listening, suspending judgement and seeking common understanding. Senge (1992, p. 5) comments that many of the “best ideas” are not put into practice due to conflict with “deeply held internal images”.

#### **6. Teacher development and school development**

It is essential to understand the relationship of change, teacher development and school development. Fullan (1992, p.22) states ‘ change is a process of learning new ideas and things’. People want to make things better and more flexible. But jus as Marris(1986, p.321) states, “ The fundamental problem of change is that it disturb the framework of meanings by which we make sense of the world. It challenges, and thereby potentially threatens, the values, attitudes, and beliefs that enable us to make experience meaningful and predictable. Yet, like growth, no development is possible, with such disturbance...”.

So change is a process of growth, no conflict, and no change. School review and evaluation are always done with a purpose and that purpose is to improve school. Not all change is necessarily an improvement.

In the school, teacher development is the core concept for implementation. It is well known that implementation involves new beliefs and behaviours. Teachers are the main roles of implementation. In teacher development, in-service training is thought of as a form of professional development.(Newton & Tarrant 1992, p.135). . Duigan & MacPherson (1989, p.13) states, “ An initial assumption was that professionals would want to take primary responsibility for their own learning, and in-service education. This meant that the content and processes of in-service

education had to be sensitive and responsive to learners' perceptions of needs. It also implied that in-service activities had to be seen as opportunities for real growth along intellectual, emotional, social, educational, aesthetic, skills and career dimensions." Therefore, teacher development is a long-term task.

"School improvement is a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change", according to Hopkins et al. (1994, p. 3). Change in a school will involve the awareness of the first and engage in the second. Sammons et al (1995, p.8) offer a concise summary of characteristics found in effective schools. These are:

- Professional leadership;
- Shared vision and goals;
- A conducive learning environment;
- Concentration on teaching and learning;
- Purposeful teaching;
- High expectations;
- Positive reinforcement;
- Monitoring progress;
- Pupil rights and responsibilities;
- Home-school partnerships;
- A learning organization.

It is clear that as subject leaders have a key function in the change. Improvement is a dynamic process that should lead to a school moving forward a situation of improved effectiveness or a greater degree of success in their core function—pupils' learning. Pupils' learning is the result in terms of teachers' development. The success of pupils' learning and teachers' development is closely related with school development.

### **7. A case study**

Since China began its door policy, it has increased contact with foreign countries, which has given more importance to the use of foreign languages. Nearly all trades and professional need people who have attained foreign language proficiency in varying degrees. Learning a foreign language is also conducive to the development of children's intelligence, culture awareness, and outlook on the world. With the china's entry to WTO, more and more professional English people are needed, especially in spoken English. From the international situation, Chinese English Teaching Method which emphasized grammar –centred was required to be changed.

The State Education Commission organized a team of experts as early as 1986 to design new curricula and syllabi for all the school subjects in light of the new syllabi and the new textbooks. The new syllabus for English in schools calls for modern language teaching theory and highlights the use of language for the purpose of communication. It states that ELT should aim to develop the students' four basic skills, especially in listening and speaking. It is the first time in the history of ELT in China that the actual use of the language for communication has been placed in such a prominent position. The syllabus pays careful attention to the students' needs and interests.

According to the teaching syllabus, the new English textbooks require the emphasis on listening and speaking, reading and writing the second. In some places, since 1997, listening test was added in the College Entrance Examination. Listening in the College Entrance Examination guided the teachers to change their teaching method.

Facing the external need and the internal need, the English teachers had to make changes about their teaching method.

SheXian High School is an old school in HanDan City. In 1998, Considering the Grammar-Translation Method out of fashion and the new environment needs, the English teachers began to make some change about their teaching methods. A new teaching method ----The Lexical Approach was introduced.

The Lexical Approach was devised by Michael Lewis (1993). In SheXian High School, it was introduced through teacher-training and new syllabus. (1997). First the English teachers had a meeting and were told what was the Lexical Approach. The Lexical Approach argues that "Lexis is the basis of the language". ( Lewis, 1993, p.95). "It places communication of meaning at the heart of language and language learning". ( Lewis, 1997, p.15). Its idea is based on the Communicative Approach. The centrality of lexis touches deep theoretical roots of language. It makes the teachers thinking about changing their teaching methods. The new English textbooks also adopt a spiral approach so that items taught are systematically revised and extended periodically. Listening is required to teach as a separate lesson.

The English teachers received the new teaching method easily, however, it is difficult to accept it and completely

change their old teaching method in terms of a new method. The change process is hard.

First the teachers are convinced that the Lexical Approach emphasizes listening. Listening lessons need recorders, tapes, audio visual aids and electrical equipment for creating a foreign language environment. So the English teachers need the subject leaders to support. The school invested a lot of money on English teaching method change.

Many teachers don't know how to give an English lesson in English. The teachers learn from each other. Some professional English teachers gave presentations. The school also bought some video tape and show the teachers how to change their teaching method step by step.

Any change in education first takes into account of the students' needs and interests. Feedback from the students is the best test for the new teaching method. The teachers collected feedbacks in different forms, for example, meetings, interviews, questionnaire. They can change according to the students' needs.

In order to improve the students' ability in listening, the teachers arranged the "English Corner"; play authentic films. The students are offered much more opportunities to be exposed in real situation.

After three years' efforts, the students' ability in listening and speaking has improved a lot. The result of listening and testing of SheXian High School is 72%, while the other three schools: 65%; 62%; 60%. (This is the average result of all the students).

## 8. Conclusion

It is well known that change in education focus on the students learning. The whole change is very complicated. It involves teachers' development, outcomes the students learning. School development is based on the both. Therefore, students learning, teachers' development and school development are closely related. It can be said that students learning is the centres of change, teachers are the key roles in the change, and school is the supporter. School improvement cannot be perfect without any of them.

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