

Foundations of Change for the Scholar-Practitioner Leader

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Abstract

Change is a fact of life, and educational reform is replete with change. However, cosmetic changes fail to bring about real improvement. Rather than remodel the existing concept of public education, leaders must create a new one. The schools must be recultured. The change leader must build trust with open communication supporting followers through transitions as changes are implemented. In this article the author examines how scholar-practitioner leaders allow theory to inform their practice and then reflect on their practice to revise theory. She examines how being firmly grounded in theory and possessing understanding gained from their practice, scholar-practitioner leaders have insights that neither scholar nor practitioner have as individuals.

Introduction

John F. Kennedy said, “The one unchangeable certainty is that nothing is certain or unchangeable” (as cited in Cook, 1993). Change *is* a fact of life. People deal with change in all areas of their lives. Various types of organizations deal also constantly with change, and change is certainly no stranger to the school house (Finnan, 1996; Schlechty, 2001). Finnan suggested, “The issue for school reform is not that change is foreign to schools; it is that change is usually not welcomed by schools” (p. 105). Schlechty (2001) agreed stating, “Schools are change prone, but they are also change inept” (p. 39). It seems that public education is forever undergoing reform. This practice may ironically contribute to the fact that educators do not take the reform efforts seriously. Schlechty (2001) proposed, “The

reason schools have not improved is that they have changed so much and so often with so little effect that leaders seem baffled about what to do next” (p. 2). The key phrase in his statement is *with so little effect*. Schools appear to be making lots of changes, but the effect is negligible. Schlechty (2001) claimed, “There is in fact so much change occurring in schools that teachers and school administrators rightly feel overwhelmed by it. However, this change is seldom accompanied by clear improvements in performance” (p. 39).

Inadequacy of Cosmetic Change

There is an old saying, *the more things change, the more they stay the same*. This seems to be true regarding educational organizations. Schools certainly *look* busy making changes, but the actual difference in the way they do business remains minimal (Sarason, 1990; Schlechty, 1990). Sarason describes these changes as “cosmetic and not fundamental” (p. 5).

In the meantime, the world has been undergoing radical change at break-neck speeds. Hargreaves (1994) described the effects of globalization in the postmodern world. Herein lies the problem: “When the rate of change outside an organization is greater than the rate of change inside, the continuing existence of that organization is threatened” (Schlechty, 2001, p. 1). Bridges (2003) claimed, “Change is the name of the game today, and organizations that can’t change quickly aren’t going to be around for long” (p. x). Furthermore, the schools of today are not educating students for the world of the 21st century (Schlechty, 1990). Schlechty (1990) suggested that “schools do not prepare the young for life in an information-based, knowledge-work society—the society in which America’s children now live and in which they will be required to function as adults” (p. xvii).

Changing for the sake of change is not warranted. Simple cosmetic changes in procedures and practices are ineffective. Banathy (1991) defined the problem as “a lack of realization that the current design of schooling is still grounded in the industrial societal model of a bygone era. It is outdated and has lost its viability and usefulness” (p. 6). The world has changed, but the system of public education has not. In answer to the problem, Banathy (1991) suggested that there be a shift in the direction of “inquiry from exploring the existing system as a source of its improvement, to working from the larger perspective of a societal and future-generation-focused design” (p. 17). Furthermore, he proposed a new design of education “based on ‘new thinking’ that is rooted in an appreciation of societal evolution and development, and in systems and design thinking” (p. 21).

Going Beyond Reform

Educational leaders must engage in more than cosmetic changes to bring about real improvements. Banathy (1991) insisted that educational leaders must “go

beyond reform” (p. 6). He was adamant that “improving or restructuring an obsolete system will not do; it is counterproductive” (p. 6). He described the futility of these improvement efforts as “people . . . trying to ‘rearrange the chairs’ on the deck of the sinking ship” (Banathy, 1991, p. 6).

Banathy (1991) claimed, “Whatever terms are used, ‘improve,’ ‘reform,’ ‘renew,’ ‘restructure,’ the host of recommendations and projects focus on MAKING ADJUSTMENTS IN THE EXISTING SYSTEM, rather than thinking about a new one” (p. 8). Instead of settling for adjustments in the existing system, he called for “new thinking” (Banathy, 1991, p. 21) that involves “breaking the old frame of thinking and reframing it” (Banathy, 1996, p. 45). Horn (2001b) agreed, “Educators who want to become agents of change must target education’s myths” (p. 53). This involves a “reorganization of ways of thinking” (Banathy, 1991, p. 31). Banathy (1996) stated, “Restructuring might bring about change within the system, but it does not create a new system” (p. 21). On the other hand, “Designers . . . focus on creating a new image of the system, define the purpose based on the image, and select the functions that attend to the purpose” (Banathy, 1996, p. 21).

Giving the system of public education a fresh coat of paint will not suffice. The world today demands that educators do more than reform or update or upgrade the educational system. Today’s world requires a new system based on a new way of thinking.

Reductionism

The modernistic strategies that sought understanding and reform from a scientific orientation are no longer effective. They may have sufficed in times past, but they have “been found less than useful in the context of the new era that emerged around the middle of this century” (Banathy, 1991, p. 31). Banathy (1991) referred to this outdated orientation as “reductionism” (p. 10) and explained that “disciplined inquiry during the last three hundred years has sought understanding by taking things apart, seeking the ‘ultimate part,’ and groping to see or reconstruct the whole by viewing the characteristics of its parts” (p. 10). This reductionist orientation is flawed in its inability to understand the whole by examining the parts. As Quinn (1992) so graphically put it, “Five severed fingers do not make a hand” (p. 12).

A Systems Approach

Reductionism, seeking to understand the whole by examining the parts, is no longer an effective strategy. Those interested in understanding what is needed in educational reform must take a systems approach. Wheatley (1999) suggested, “A system is composed of parts, but we cannot understand a system by looking only at its parts. We need to *work with the whole of a system*” (p. 139). Furthermore, she proposed, “We have to use what is going on in the whole system to

understand individual behavior, and we have to inquire into individual behavior to learn about the whole” (p. 142). She referred to this process of focusing both on the individual behaviors and the system as a whole as “dancing between the two levels” (p. 143). Fink (2000) explained it this way: “Change agents tend to concentrate on tangible structures to the exclusion of those forces that are unseen, but represent the interconnections and interrelationships in the organization that make the organization whole” (p. 110). These interconnections and interrelationships are crucial in understanding the system and must be considered.

Most people have had the experience of looking through a window screen to view an outdoor scene. At times, the eyes may focus on the screen, and the scenery outside becomes blurry. In an instant, the eyes can refocus on the trees in the distance, and the screen becomes obscure. With a simple act of will, the viewer can switch focus back and forth between the screen and the outdoor scene. This represents what Wheatley (1999) called “dancing between the two levels” (p. 143). Taking a systems approach, the change agent must learn to focus on one aspect of the educational system and then, with a simple act of will, refocus on another aspect.

Systemic Embeddedness

Schlechty (2001) proposed, “Improvement must be continuous and must be embedded in all systems a school comprises” (p. 3). In addition, Carr (1996) stated, “Systemic change also recognizes the importance of context and cultural understanding” (p. 19). She explained, “This embeddedness is important because changing a system without paying attention to the larger system of which it is a part or the smaller systems of which it is made up has been a key problem with reform efforts of the past decades” (p. 18). Banathy (1991) agreed stating, “Limiting the scope of inquiry to the existing system is the main reason for the failure to recognize that the design of the current educational system is outdated” (p. 12). He called for realization that the system is “embedded in a rapidly and dynamically changing larger society” (p. 12). Educational change agents must consider the big picture and attempt to forecast the effects of suggested changes. Carr (1996) explained that “when one change is made in a system, it necessarily impacts other related parts of a system (subsystems) and causes other sometimes unpredictable changes” (p. 18).

For reform efforts to be effective, they must be embedded throughout the system. Furthermore, the change agent must consider how a change made in one area or subsystem will affect the larger educational system. To do otherwise is irresponsible and shortsighted leadership.

Culture Makeover

A branch of reality television that has found popularity in recent times is one that promises to make over men and women who are looking for change. The

makeover they receive changes how they are perceived by others and, in turn, changes how they perceive themselves. Today's educational system is in need of a makeover but not one that is shallow or cosmetic. Instead, the very culture of the school system must be transformed from deep within. The makeover would change how the school is perceived by others as well as change how the educators, administrators, and students of the school perceive themselves and their work.

Banathy (1991) suggested that "the crisis in education is first and foremost a 'crisis of perception'" (p. 6) that requires a change in the way educators view themselves, their students, and their work (Schlechty, 2001). Banathy (1991) proposed, "What is needed today is a major shift in the way we think about education, in the way we approach educational inquiry, and in the kind of intellectual technologies we use in changing and renewing our educational systems" (p. 6). Nieto (1998) agreed stating, "It is becoming increasingly clear that substantive changes in education will occur only through reformation of the *entire learning environment*" (p. 431). This necessitates a change in the school's culture. Horn (2001b) stated, "For significant change to occur, the culture of education must change" (p. 60). Schlechty (2001) concurred stating, "*Systemic reform has to do with changing social structures and the culture in which these structures are embedded*" (p. 42). Fullan (2001) called for a *reculturing* of the schools. He explained it as "transforming the culture—changing the way we do things around here" (p. 44). Fullan (2001) stated, "Change leaders work on changing the context, helping create new settings conducive to learning and sharing that learning" (p. 79).

Fullan (1991) suggested that "real change involves changes in conceptions and role behavior" (p. 38). He stated, "Ultimately the transformation of subjective realities is the essence of change" (p. 36). In addition, Carr (1996) stated, "Systemic change focuses less on end goals and more on helping individuals change their perceptions of themselves" (p. 19). Furthermore, Schein (1996) described this process as a "cognitive redefinition" (p. 65). He stated, "Culture is 'changed'—in reality, enlarged—through changes in various key concepts in the mental models of people who are the main carriers of the culture" (p. 65).

Before the culture can be changed, it must be understood. Deal and Peterson (1999) stated, "... school leaders must understand their school—its patterns, the purposes they serve, and how they came to be. Changing something that is not well understood is a surefire recipe for stress and ultimate failure" (p. 86). Reformers often make the mistake of ignoring the influence of school culture on shaping the intervention (Sarason, 1990). Instead, Deal and Peterson proposed that leaders *shape* their school culture in a process whereby "valuable aspects of the school's existing culture can be reinforced, problematic ones revitalized, and toxic ones given strong antidotes" (p. 87). Schein (1996) described the process as an evolution. He stated, "Leaders cannot arbitrarily *change* culture in the sense of eliminating dysfunctional elements, but they can *evolve* culture by building on its strengths while letting its weaknesses atrophy over time" (p. 64). Finnian (1996) warned against ignoring the strengths of the existing culture:

Change in schools also comes more easily when the existing school culture is viewed as a strength rather than a barrier. To ignore the strengths of the existing culture robs people of their past and denigrates earlier efforts to better serve children. (p. 113)

In addition, Schein (1996) cautioned about the psychological effect of cultural change on the people of the organization when he stated, “The destruction of culture is extremely costly on a human level. Large numbers of people have to face the fact that the way they have been thinking and feeling is no longer functional” (p. 66). Coming to grips with the awareness that those thoughts, feelings, and practices that are in one’s comfort zone are no longer effective can be quite disconcerting.

Educational leaders are called to reculture the school by changing the practices and thought processes there, building on strengths and reducing areas of weakness in the existing culture. This will result in new perceptions and new role conceptions. In essence, a cultural makeover is tedious work that can prove to be painful to those involved as they leave outdated understandings and ineffective practices behind.

Implementing Change

Hall and Hord (2001b) defined change as a “process through which people and organizations move as they gradually come to understand, and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways” (pp. 4–5). They, along with Fullan (2001) clearly indicated, “Change is a process, not an event” (p. 4). Finnan (1996) warned that the process of change takes time—“significant change does not come quickly” (p. 116). She stated, “Time is usually required for two critical elements to take hold: trust and communication, and acceptance of responsibility for decisions” (p. 116).

Communication and trust

The importance of communication in bringing about change is clear. Horn (2001a) stated, “All change, reform, or progress must start with conversation. The status quo can be changed when conversation occurs” (p. 360). He added, “When conversation occurs, the forces affecting change are activated, and become agents attempting to influence the outcomes of the conversation” (pp. 360–361). Moreover, the intended result of the change must be clearly expressed. Schlechty (2001) stated, “Most of all, structural and cultural change requires that leaders communicate clearly and effectively a *picture* of what the new system will look like and the reasons why the organization needs to create such a system” (p. 163). He suggested that leaders “must learn to express beliefs in clear and compelling ways as well as to hear and understand others’ expressions of beliefs” (p. 167).

Jenlink and Carr (1996) outlined the importance of conversation as a medium for change in education. They defined four types of communication: dialectic, discussion, dialogue, and design and suggested that the more “disciplined orientations to conversation” (p. 32) of dialogue and design are uncommon in school change efforts. Jenlink and Carr further proposed that design and dialogue conversations are necessary to “begin engaging communities in the sort of hard work that systemic change must entail if it is to transcend the political debates of the day” (p. 37). Horn (2001a) underscored the importance of communication:

Conversation can range from an informal exchange of ideas and opinions to a structured dialectical engagement of discourses, from a casual communication between two people to a system-wide discussion or dialogue. The important consideration is that without written or oral conversation, nothing happens. Change of any kind is predicated on communication. (p. 361)

This type of direct and honest communication leads to trust in the midst of the change. Finnan (1996) proposed, “Open communication among all members of the school community is essential for trust to develop and for change to be welcomed” (p. 117). The building of trusting relationships is critical to the success of change efforts (Fullan, 2001). Kouzes and Posner (1996) investigated qualities that were most admired in leaders and found that, more than anything else, people wanted leaders who were credible. They found that people needed to believe that the leader’s word could be trusted. When people were asked how they knew if someone was credible, the most frequent response was, “They do what they say they will do” (Kouzes & Posner, p. 107). In further explanation, Kouzes and Posner stated, “When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words and then watch the actions” (p. 108). Kouzes and Posner have termed it the “*first law of leadership*: ‘If you don’t believe in the messenger, you won’t believe the message’” (p. 103).

Responsible decision making

With decision making comes responsibility. As time passes, both the leaders and those being led begin to “realize that they can be decision makers, but that as decision makers they must assume responsibility for their decisions” (Finnan, 1996, p. 118). Most people enjoy “the empowerment, the right to make decisions and be in on the process . . . [but they] fail to realize that rights also carry their burden of responsibility” (Finnan, p. 118). However, as these decision makers, over time, begin to be empowered through participative decision making and begin to see the positive results of their decisions, a “growing sense of personal and group efficacy” (Finnan, p. 118) develops and they accept responsibility for the decisions they have made.

Managing Transitions

Leading change is tricky business. Fullan (2001) goes so far as to state, “Change cannot be managed” (p. 33). He says, “It can be understood and perhaps led, but it cannot be controlled” (p. 33). Bridges (2003) underscored this thought by stating, “Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable” (p. 7). Fullan (1991) added, “Even when voluntarily engaged in, change is threatening and confusing” (p. 36). Hall and Hord (2001a) indicated that “individuals may suffer to some degree during change—experiencing anger, uncertainty, disorientation, and various other forms of stress and trauma” (p. 193). Sometimes, dealing with the resulting anxiety and depression during transition and change is more difficult and requires more developed leadership skills than building an organization from the ground up (Schein, 1996).

Whereas many people view the change process as beginning with the implementation of a new procedure and the enactment of a new directive, Bridges (2003) proposed that the change process actually begins with an ending. He stated, “Because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning” (p. 5). In fact, according to Bridges, people in transition actually pass through three distinct phases: (1) Ending, Losing, Letting Go, (2) The Neutral Zone, (3) The New Beginning (p. 5). In explanation, he stated: Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome *but the ending that you’ll have to make to leave the old situation behind*. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity you had before the change took place. (p. 7)

Furthermore, Hall and Hord (2001b) suggested, “The press to make change quickly means that there is no time to learn about and come to understand the new way, nor time to grieve the loss of the old way” (p. 5). In addition, they explained: “When people must change, they have to stop doing some things that they know how to do well and in fact like doing, which creates a sense of sadness” (p. 5). Besides the psychological aspect of letting go and the trauma of beginning something new, there is a process of *unlearning* involved as well. Schein (1996) explained that the “problem is not only how to acquire new concepts and skills, but also how to *unlearn* things that are no longer serving the organization well. Unlearning is an entirely different process involving anxiety, defensiveness, and resistance to change” (pp. 63–64).

Change is more than a new beginning involving the implementation of new ways of doing things. It also involves an ending and the unlearning of the old way of doing things. Often, the unlearning process is characterized by discomfort and

anxiety. Change leaders must be aware of this process and the possible feelings that result so that they might effectively manage the transition period.

Resistance By Another Name

Letting go of the old way is a stage that is often overlooked in the transition process, and this oversight leads to great discomfort for people in transition. Bridges (2003) suggested that “the failure to provide help with endings and losses leads to more problems for organizations in transition than anything else” (p. 8). Bridges identified the reason for the hesitancy in dealing with this stage of transition when he stated, “The problem is people don’t like endings” (p. 23). Most leaders see people in transition who are exhibiting signs of anxiety, depression, or anger, and they assume that the person is resisting the change because they do not like the “new” that is being implemented. Bridges has another explanation. He suggested, “It isn’t the *changes* themselves that the people in these cases resist. It’s the losses and endings that they have experienced and the *transition* that they are resisting” (p. 24). In further explanation, Bridges stated:

When endings take place, people get angry, sad, frightened, depressed, and confused. These emotional states can be mistaken for bad morale, but they aren’t. They are the *signs of grieving*, the natural sequence of emotions people go through when they lose something that matters to them. (p. 28)

Bridges (2003) encouraged leaders to “learn to look for the loss behind the loss and deal with that underlying issue” (p. 27). He suggested that the leader should help the grieving person bring his feelings out in the open to be discussed and explored. Bridges stated that it is “self-defeating to try to overcome people’s resistance to change without addressing the threat the change poses to their [psychological] world” (p. x). Schein (1996) proposed that leaders as change agents must “have the emotional strength to be supportive of the organization while it deals with the anxieties attendant upon unlearning processes that were previously successful, that is, the ability to create for the organization a sense of ‘psychological safety’” (p. 64). If the leaders are able to accomplish this, a positive outcome is possible. Fullan (1991) stated, “Real change, then, whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; . . . if the change works out it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and professional growth” (p. 32).

What many might misinterpret as resistance to the new way of doing things, is actually grief over the ending of the old way of doing things. The change leader who is aware of this stage of transition will seek to discuss and work through those uncomfortable aspects of grief with the hurting follower. To ignore the feelings of grief is to compound the problem. Working through the feelings of loss can result in positive growth and understanding.

Sustaining Change

Schlechty (2001) clearly outlined the difficulties of sustaining change when he stated, “Compared to sustaining change, starting change is relatively easy” (p. 39). Finnan (1996) also pointed out the complexity of sustaining change when he stated, “The challenge for all schools is to maintain momentum” (p. 119). Schlechty (2001) listed two things needed to sustain change: “One is a leader or leadership group that acts as a change agent; the other is a system, or group of systems, that supports change” (p. 40). Many educational reform initiatives fall prey to difficulties during the change process and the efforts at reform are abandoned.

Implementation dip

Part of the difficulty in maintaining momentum in the change process, according to Schlechty (2001), is “creating systems that will sustain changes long enough to reap the benefits that are promised” (p. 49). Sometimes, things get worse before they get better. Fullan (2001) warned about the *implementation dip* which is “literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings” (p. 40). The sensitive leader will realize that “people are experiencing two kinds of problems when they are in the dip—the social-psychological fear of change, and the lack of technical know-how or skills to make the change work” (Fullan, 2001, p. 41). It is during this time of doubt, Fullan (2001) suggested, that the “affiliative leader pays attention to people, focuses on building emotional bonds, builds relationships, and heals rifts” (p. 41). In addition, “enthusiasm, self-confidence, optimism, and clarity of vision can all inspire people to keep going” (Fullan, 2001, p. 41).

Reverting to old habits

Another difficulty in sustaining change occurs because “systems tend to perpetuate themselves as they are” (Carr, 1996, p. 18). The people within the system prefer to stay within their own comfort zone. They prefer to remain with what is comfortable and familiar. Carr explained, “When a part of a system is changed, . . . we see the system trying to put that part back the way it was so that the system itself doesn’t have to change” (p. 18). In essence, the system seeks to return to a homeostatic balance. Schlechty (2001) described this self-perpetuating tendency:

Systemic change interrupts habitual ways of doing things. When habits are interrupted, confusion and uncertainty are the result. In times of uncertainty, people tend to revert to habitual ways of doing things and to seek out leaders who value these ways above the ways of the new order. (p. 171)

The alert leader will be sensitive to this tendency and will seek to maintain forward momentum in the change process. Kouzes and Posner (1996) suggested having “visible signs that change was taking place in order to keep up the

momentum, and in order to restore confidence in the people that [the leaders] *could* provide quality education” (p. 101).

A common vision

Commitment to a common vision is critical in sustaining change (Fullan, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 1996; Schlechty, 2001). Kouzes and Posner advocated shared values and stated, “consensus about long- and short-term values creates commitment to where the organization is going and how it’s going to get there” (p. 105). Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner warned, “If leaders advocate values that are not representative of the collective will, they will not be able to mobilize people to act as one” (p. 105). Evans (2000) stated, “Change must be linked to the enduring values that have bound people together and that lie at the heart of the school” (p. 4). Likewise, Schlechty (2001) proposed that change leaders “must communicate a clear vision of the future that will sustain the program even in the face of adversity” (p. 49). In addition, he stated, “Most of all, structural and cultural change requires that leaders communicate clearly and effectively a *picture* of what the new system will look like and the reasons why the organization needs to create such a system” (Schlechty, 2001, p. 163). The effective leader of change will build commitment to a common vision by providing a clear understanding of the good the change can bring.

Commitment Rather Than Compliance

Sustaining change requires more than simple compliance on the part of the followers. It requires commitment. Senge (1996) suggested that there is a very real difference between commitment and compliance. According to Senge, “Hierarchical authority, as it has been used traditionally in Western management, tends to evoke compliance, not foster commitment” (p. 43). Additionally, Senge stated, “There is no substitute for commitment in bringing about deep change” (p. 43). Schlechty (2001) strongly advocated the need for commitment as well. He suggested that leaders must overcome resistance while also creating commitment to change by providing positive incentives for change. Evans (2000) added, “Making change meaningful is the best way to sustain morale and generate commitment” (p. 4). Furthermore, Schlechty (2001) stated:

In the difficult task of bringing about systemic change, it is commitment rather than compliance that is required. Commitment is volunteered and must be earned. Commitment cannot be commanded or demanded. Generating commitment is the task of the change leader. (p. 165)

Without widespread commitment among those involved in the change effort, reform is likely to meet with eventual failure (Datnow, 2000; Schlechty, 2001). Datnow reported on a change initiative in her study: “Yet, after adoption, teachers

behaved in a variety of ways toward the reform: some resisted, some complied, and some were enthusiastic. Certainly, the commitment among teachers, even those that supported the reform was not enough to sustain reform” (p. 168). This danger just underscores the need for strong commitment among constituents.

The Scholar–Practitioner Leader

The term *scholar* applies to the individual who is knowledgeable with regards to theory and who utilizes research and critical inquiry to construct knowledge. The term *practitioner* refers to someone who makes practical application of theories in his everyday profession and practice. Combined, these words form the term *scholar–practitioner*, which takes on an enhanced meaning in describing a type of educational leader. A scholar–practitioner is one who demonstrates the “best qualities of a scholar along with the performance of an accomplished practitioner” (McGee, Wavering, & Imbeau, 2001, p. 5). The scholar–practitioner is in a unique position to initiate change and bring about educational reform.

Opening the avenue for change

Foster (1994) writes of an “intellectual leader” as one who can “challenge the traditions that bind and who can create new avenues of meaning” (p. 45). He further describes this leader as one who “puts into practice the generative ideas, who opens up new avenues of possibility for accomplishing change” (p. 45). This description can be applied to the scholar–practitioner leader as one whose function is “to generate new knowledge at the local and practical level, and to critique the effect of systemic cultural and political epistemologies on what is known on the local and practical level” (Jenlink, 2001, p. 10).

The relationship between theory and practice

Horn (2001b) suggested that the relationship between theory and practice in education is not always a healthy one that produces the desired results for schools and the children who attend them. He stated:

Currently there is a breakdown between intellectualizing and acting upon what is wrong with education. Often educators see the fallacies in the story-myths but these are so deeply entrenched in educational cultures that they prove to be intractable. Postmodern deconstruction of these myths is intellectually effective but seldom translates into action. (pp. 53–54)

The scholar–practitioner “seeks to transform practice through examination and generation of knowledge” (Jenlink, 2001, p. 9) for “scholarly inquiry, with the purpose of self-reflective, critical and intentional inquiry of practice, is a distinctive and important way of knowing about practice that simultaneously informs practice” (Jenlink, p. 11). It is critical that the scholar–practitioner leader allow

theory to inform practice and practice to inform theory so that those areas of education that need reform are addressed. As Horn (2001a) indicated, "The relationship between theory and practice is a determining factor in the success of reform" (p. 358).

Teachers' roles in change

Teachers are the central agents in bringing about educational change (Cole & Schlechty, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Horn, 2001b). In support of this view, Horn (2001b) stated, "The position of the teacher in the school hierarchy creates the possibility that the teacher is the critical agent in the transformation of school culture and change" (p. 62). The teachers' position in the hierarchical order "allows them to appropriate power from those above them, and facilitate the transformation of those below them" (Horn, 2001b, p. 62). Therefore, the teacher as practitioner has tremendous power to effect change.

Trapped in practice

Teachers are perfectly positioned in the hierarchical order to bring about change. Horn (2001a) felt, however, that teachers were not taking advantage of their position to the benefit of the field of education because they remained basically uninformed with regards to theory. Horn (2001a) stated, "Teachers are trapped in practice. Rarely do they work with theory or inform their practice with theory. Without theory as a referent, the necessary dialectical reflection on practice cannot effectively take place" (p. 358). In considering a change effort, the "problem for implementation is not only one of teachers 'learning how to do it,' but of teachers learning the theoretical precepts upon which participant structures and activity structures are based" (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001, p. 307).

The need for scholarly teachers

Much more is possible for the practitioner who also seeks to be scholarly. Cole and Schlechty (1993) proposed that the conception of teachers' primary role as that of information-giver should be changed to that of leader and inventor. Horn (2001a) suggested, "Assuming that teachers know how to post-formally think and converse, the change process would involve the dynamic and constant interplay of teacher research, critical reflection, and decision-making" (p. 373). Furthermore, "teachers can post-formally deconstruct their own current situation, history, experience, place, and future. This examination of their practice will generate authentic theory which, in combination with best practice theory, can be developed into innovation that can be implemented with confidence and passion" (Horn, 2001a, p. 372).

Theory is necessary for lasting change

Without the benefit of a scholarly foundation of theory, teachers are not likely to understand or commit to change efforts (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001).

McLaughlin and Mitra stated, “Without understanding the theory upon which their new practice is based, teachers lack the capacity for self-critique or for providing reflective feedback for colleagues, so practice likely will stagnate” (p. 307). In addition, McLaughlin and Mitra suggested, “Absent knowledge about *why* they are doing what they’re doing, implementation will be superficial only, and teachers will lack the understanding they will need to deepen their current practice or to sustain new practices in the face of changing contexts” (p. 307).

Mutually beneficial discourse

Dialogue between scholars and practitioners can be mutually beneficial. McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) suggested that reformers can learn much from working with teachers in real-life classroom settings as they bring theory and invention into the real world. They stated, “Working with teachers in real-life classroom settings affords reformers opportunity to learn more about the reform itself and build a repertoire of context-sensitive theory-into-practice that can inform implementation and future invention” (p. 306). In a look at earlier school reforms, Fullan (1991) proposed that the reason they failed was because university authorities and education experts had:

. . . faulty and overly abstract theories not related or relatable to practice, limited or no contact with and understanding of the school, ignorance of the lessons of experiences of the reformers in the 1920s and 1930s, and above all the failure to consider explicitly the relationship between the nature of the proposed innovations and the purposes of schools. (pp. 22–23)

These kinds of problems could be avoided by assuming the perspective of a scholar–practitioner. Hargreaves (1994) spoke to how practitioners can inform theory. He stated:

If we can understand teachers’ own desires for change *and* for conversation, along with the conditions that strengthen or weaken such desires, we will get valuable insights from the grassroots of the profession, from those who work in the frontlines of our classrooms, about *how* change can be made most effectively, as well as *what* we should change and *what* we should preserve. (p. 11)

Practitioners can be scholars

Horn (2001a) suggested that teachers can benefit from informing themselves regarding theory as well. When teachers are not involved in the decision-making process related to pedagogical matters, Horn (2001a) proposed, they fail to gain self-confidence in their ability to understand pedagogical theory. He stated, “Their exclusion from the decision-making process negates their need to entertain theory in any manner. The development and critique of educational theory

are left to the academics, politicians, consultants” (p. 372). By being left out of participative decision making, the message they receive is that “theory is not in the realm of teachers” (Horn, 2001a, p. 372) and that, somehow, theory is above their heads and beyond their understanding. How can teachers move into the realm of theory? Horn (2001a) suggested it is as simple as “engaging in post-formal thinking and conversation” (p. 372).

Conclusion

The scholar–practitioner leader has the best of both worlds when it comes to the successful implementation of educational reform. Being firmly grounded in theory along with having possession of the authentic understanding of practice that comes from working daily in the trenches, the scholar–practitioner leader has insights that neither scholar nor practitioner have as individuals. Schein (1996) stated that a new kind of leadership is required to bring about the changes that can lead schools into the future. He proposed “the leader of the future will be a person . . . who can lead and follow, be central and marginal, be hierarchically above and below, be individualistic and a team player, and, above all, be a perpetual learner” (p. 69). Furthermore, “as the rate of change itself increases, learning ability will not consist of the one-time learning of a new system; *perpetual* learning and change will be the only constant” (p. 67). Nieto (1998) suggested, “A profound shift at the ideological level is needed if educational reform is to work” (p. 433). Today’s leaders must do more than implement canned directives in their efforts at educational reform. They must be creative, think for themselves, persevere, self-reflect and be critically pragmatic while never losing touch with the ethic of care. As Bridges (2003) said, “People have to bring their hearts and their minds to work” (p. xi). With just the right mix of theory and practice, the scholar–practitioner leader is prepared to do so.

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