

Resistance to Change among Veteran Teachers: Providing Voice for More Effective Engagement

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Effective implementation of change remains a crucial concern for educational leaders in the 21st Century. One of the factors affecting effective implementation of reform is resistance to change. Veteran teachers in particular present unique challenges, and stereotypically the greatest resistance, for effective implementation of change. This study provided voice to veteran teachers to help educational leaders gain insight for more effective engagement with resistance. Veteran teachers frequently act in ways that protect their “psychic rewards” (Lortie, 1975). Veteran teachers also strive to protect social nostalgia and political nostalgia (Goodson, Moore, & Hargreaves, 2006). Understanding the complexity of resistance among veteran teachers validates their mission and memory (Goodson et al., 2006) while strengthening the implementation of initiatives at the local level (Fullan, 2016; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Keywords: resistance, change, psychic rewards, veteran, nostalgia, engagement

Resistance to change among *any* teacher slows the implementation of educational reform. In spite of hopeful prescriptions from researchers, policymakers, and educational leaders, effective implementation of educational reform remains inconsistent (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Payne & Kaba, 2007; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This research focused on front-line individuals who seem to provide a particularly unique challenge to the implementation of change: veteran teachers. Gaining insight from their specific reasons for resistance provides opportunities for meaningful conversations and deeper engagement from these seasoned educators.

At the outset, it is important to note that the goal of this work is learning from veteran teachers for insight and understanding rather than manipulation. Change agents – those initiating change – frequently assume an objective, position of superiority when initiating change (Ford et al., 2008). Rather than adding to the illusion of objectivity on the part of change agents, the goal here is to set the stage for meaningful conversations and engagement (Ford & Ford, 2009a; Ford & Ford, 2009b). Educational leaders need to realize the extent to which *their approach toward* resistance can play an inhibitory role in effectively engaging change recipients.

Through semi-structured interviews, this phenomenological, qualitative research provided voice for veteran teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Implications of this research suggest that effective engagement with resistant teachers might strengthen ownership of initiatives among those working directly with students (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves, 2005). Understanding the complexity of resistance among veteran teachers validates their mission and memory (Goodson et al., 2006) while strengthening the implementation of initiatives at the local level (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to clarify reasons for resistance to change among later career teachers in order that educational leaders might respond in more meaningful and effective ways. Since veteran teachers may resist change for a variety of systemic or individual reasons, understanding those reasons for resistance may provide educational leaders with more effective strategies for implementing change.

Educational leaders can greatly benefit from growing in their understanding of two aspects of resistance to change. First, educational leaders can benefit from learning teachers' reasons for resistance. The overwhelming schedule of educational leaders (Fitzwater, 1996; Hall & Hord, 2011) makes it difficult to inquire, understand, and integrate reasons why veteran teachers may resist prescribed reforms. In addition, the ability of early career teachers and administrators to comprehend the reality of later career teachers is challenging (Hargreaves, 2005). Providing insights to later career teachers frames of thinking and frustration can lead to more effective interaction. Also, contemporary business theorists highlight the interaction between change agents and change recipients (Ford, 2009b; Ford et al, 2008). Educational leaders do well to consider the role those interactions play in the response from teachers. While business paradigms certainly do not apply to education in all contexts, the work done by organizational theorists as well as resistance to change theorists provide helpful paradigms from which educational leaders might approach resistance in their context.

Definition of Terms

Veteran: While Huberman (1988) identified veteran teachers as those with six or more years of experience, he also recognized that distinguishing characteristics arose among teachers who neared retirement. Hargreaves (2005) expanded upon the distinct characteristics that develop among “later career” teachers who have more than 20 years of experience. Use of the term “veteran” in this work refers to those later career teachers with 20 or more years of experience who are also more than 50 years old.

Resistance: This researcher’s interest and reading in the area of resistance began with the traditional view of “willful opposition which must be overcome” (Dent & Powley, 2002, p. 60). Also in mind was Rogers’ (1983) use of the term “laggards” referring to those individuals slowest to adopt innovations. However, resistance can take on numerous meanings based upon one’s theoretical framework. An important goal of this work is for veteran teachers and administrators to clarify their own thinking about how each defines resistance.

A Review of the Literature

Resistance to Change

Contemporary business theorists acknowledge that the traditional approach to resistance presents several concerns. Resistance is typically defined as a “willful opposition which must be overcome” (Dent & Powley, 2002, p. 60). Yet this definition assumes a position of objectivity on the part of the change agent. Change agents wrongly see resistance as an objective reality in the mind of the change recipient – a reality that is “in them” or “over there” (Ford et al., 2008). This “change-agent centric” view of resistance misses the fact that resistance is an interpretation assigned to behaviors of the change recipient.

Ford and Ford (2010) conducted an intriguing project at Ohio State University that illustrated the subjective nature of resistance. The project focused on managers as they explained a new initiative to students. During discussion following their respective presentations, some participants viewed inquiries as resistance while other participants viewed the same questions as thoughtful and productive. Change agents assuming an objective assessment of the situation missed the opportunity to step back, learn from, and work through perceived resistance with greater meaning and effectiveness (Ford & Ford, 2010).

The reasons, thinking and emotions that accompany resistance are complex. Behaviors leaders perceive to be resistance may not, in fact, be resistance (Ford & Ford, 2009b). Workers may see their actions as a legitimate effort to maintain the goals of the organization. Long-time employees have a tremendous amount of personal commitment and psychological ownership in the organization. Individuals perceived to be resistant may see their actions as supporting the organization’s goals rather than resistance (Ford & Ford, 2009b).

Due to the subjective nature and the complexity of resistance, Ford and Ford (2009a) prescribed a “conversational” approach when encountering perceived resistance. In the conversational view, change agents are encouraged to ask the question, “Why do we call this resistance?” Change recipients then become active and interested participants with whom one can learn and work (Ford et al., 2008). Built upon the constructivist model, this view of resistance sees resistance as an opportunity for learning, understanding and improving the change process. Ford and Ford (2009a) approach resistance as a sense-making process through which change agents and change recipients can learn, grow and improve. These conversations

remove the objective, moral high ground of the change agent while rightly seeing resistance as a product of the agent-recipient relationship (Ford et al., 2008).

Later Career Teachers

While it might seem obvious, it is important to emphasize that all later career teachers do not resist change. Huberman (1988) initially proposed, then Hargreaves (2005) elaborated, various responses to change by later career teachers: continuing renewal, positive focusers, disenchanted, and negative focusers. Continuing renewal teachers identify ways to stay current and relevant, adopting new strategies throughout their career. Positive focusers will accept change, but predominantly within the confines of their own classroom. In their wisdom and later in life, positive focusers conserve their energy while focusing upon the students who cross their threshold every day. Disenchanted later career teachers are those who invested themselves in several school reform efforts, only to be let down. Skepticism exists toward new initiatives due to the tabling of previous efforts as well as the repetition of change initiatives (Abrahamson, 2004; Hargreaves, 2005; Huberman, 1988). Though passive in their resistance to change, disenchanted veteran teachers feel marginalized by enthusiastic young administrators with little memory or respect for the experiences of these teachers. Disenchanted veterans can easily be confused with, but should be kept distinct from, negative focusers (Hargreaves, 2005).

Negative focusers are those veterans who work aggressively to undermine change, thwart any improvements that may threaten them, and use their political power to keep their life easy. They are the most outspoken, and the stereotypical resistant veteran teacher – “the bane of administrators’ lives” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 974). The prominence of these vocal cynics inclines administrators to see many later career teachers as equally resistant. However, Hargreaves (2005) and Huberman (1988) highlight the importance of avoiding universal stereotypes for all later career teachers.

Psychic Rewards and Nostalgia

Lortie (1975) identified various types of “rewards” associated with the selection of careers. Extrinsic rewards focus on income, level of prestige, and potential power that comes with a position. Ancillary rewards include the work schedule and conditions associated with a particular job. Psychic rewards are the internal feelings of fulfillment for which one enters the profession. Lortie (1975) found that teachers predominantly chose education based upon psychic rewards. Though research since Lortie identified distinct motivational aspects for “Xers” and Millennials compared to Boomers, all three generations still articulate the importance of the personally rewarding service associated with making an impact in students’ lives (Stone-Johnson, 2011; Troman, 2008).

While psychic rewards vary from teacher to teacher, each educator is certain to protect those elements of the profession she or he values. If administrators add responsibilities, teachers will accomplish their own priorities first, and then address any additional expectations (Lortie, 1975). It follows then, that teachers are inclined to resist changes and initiatives that threaten what they deem to be their primary reason they entered the profession.

Goodson et al. (2006) emphasized a final characteristic central to the later career teacher experience: teacher nostalgia. Nostalgia is “the major form of memory among a demographically dominant cohort of experienced older teachers” (Goodson et al., 2006, p. 42).

Two types of teacher nostalgia reflect different aspects of resistance from teachers and present differing challenges for educational leaders. “Social nostalgia” is the sense of family – a school’s community of staff and students – that teachers knew and experienced earlier in their career. Social nostalgia accompanies changes that take time away from, or change relationships with, colleagues and students. “Political nostalgia,” on the other hand, arises from a loss of autonomy stemming from mandated, top-down initiatives. These initiatives particularly result in the loss of independence, creativity and status that veteran teachers once knew. Taking time to understand these concerns of later career teachers can validate their experience and set the stage for positive engagement (Goodson, et al., 2006).

Methodology

The nine veteran teachers in this qualitative study were all over 50 years old, taught for at least 20 years, and averaged 31 years of experience. They taught in a range of small rural and large urban districts, and worked with students from kindergarten to high school. They represented Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA) as well as schools recognized for academic achievement. One participant taught in the same district for over 35 years, while others spent portions of their teaching careers in other states and even overseas. Six of the nine attained their masters’ degrees as a reflection of their desire to continue growing intellectually and professionally. All participants clearly remained vested in their labor of love: making a lifelong impact on students.

Semi-structured, responsive interviews provided insight into the phenomenological experience of each teacher (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Merriam, 2009). Responsive interviews provided the opportunity to build rapport with the participants and capture their own words and thoughts about societal change, attitudes toward change, and specific experiences with resistance in their settings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were digitally recorded, and then personally transcribed in order to maintain confidentiality and provide hard-copy records for coding and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Initial coding focused upon the a priori codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) of resistance theory and veteran teacher career issues. Axial coding also identified topics and themes outside the conceptual framework.

Findings

Reasons for Resistance: Social Nostalgia

Goodson et al. (2006) argued that later career teachers resist changes that negatively impact relationships (social nostalgia) or decrease their autonomy (political nostalgia). The interviews reflected the participants’ frustration with decreasing instructional and relational time due to added curricular expectations, the increased use of technology, and the increased emphasis on testing and data collection. Mr. Booker (all teacher names are pseudonyms) expressed frustration with the schedule changes affecting instructional time, which threatened his relational, intellectual discourse with his students.

I felt rushed this year. It wasn’t as much fun for me... to compare to the kind of things we used to be able to do with longer class periods, we miss a lot of what I think is special

and important; those intangible things that kind of allow kids to see that intellectual discourse can be fun, and important.

In fact, Mr. Booker – a social studies teacher with over 30 years of experience – acknowledged giving “lip service” to numerous initiatives, then returning to his own classroom intent on accomplishing intellectual discourse through interactive lecture.

Several participants noted their frustration with growing curricular expectations affecting their instructional time with students. Mr. Schmidt noted, “Uh, I, I just felt rushed all the time. I didn’t like the Common Core.” Mrs. Klinger similarly stated, “Well, because not all students are the same. You know? ...it [the Common Core] doesn’t take into account our knowledge and our expertise of how to reach our students. And um, it’s kind of a cookie cutter education, and I worry about that.” Ms. Johnson also expressed, “Well I think with the Common Core, what has happened is there’s more and more. When you think that I have a 6-page report card, if I want to get all the Common Core, that there’s just so much more.”

Veteran teachers also recognized the changing nature of relationships with students due to the increased presence of technology. High school teacher Mr. Stauffer noted,

...of course the technology has just been incredible as far as how that’s changed. Um, I, I think uh, as far as the technology, the good and bad I guess. It uh, I’m thinking how to word this, um, I just think we’ve gotten in a huge hurry. I feel so much more rushed than I did before....there’s so many things we can gather off technology and the Internet and so on, and I think our kids growing up in that element as well, it’s just everything is now, now, now. I just, I want it now, I want it now.

Ms. Johnson expressed her frustrations with decreased instructional time due to the increased expectations for assessment.

I think because some of it you’re just putting it on paper so that somebody else can look at it and see that that student needs help. Where you, after you’ve taught awhile yourself, you know which kids need help. And you can just go and help them. So are we wasting some of our time looking at data when we should be looking at what the students need?

An early elementary teacher with over 30 years of experience, Mrs. Rittmeyer similarly stated, “Because we’re, there’s so much of this that we have to do, and then we have to customize according to our FAST [The Formative Assessment System for Teachers] assessments what more we need to do, it has become less engaging and less fun. We feel like we don’t have time for that.”

While Goodson et al. (2006) suggested that teachers work to preserve those past memories and experiences, this author found that the participants focused much more on preserving current student relationships. Teachers did not work toward preserving past conditions, but rather the student relationships they once knew and enjoyed. Middle level literacy teacher Mrs. Smith illustrated this difference when asked if she was nostalgic for the good old days,

Well I don’t know that things were better, they were certainly different. And I may have alluded to the fact my first classroom ... they all lived at home with their biological

parents. It was different. For some of those kids it wasn't better than what they have now. But the change has caused them to come to us differently abled. They are more skeptical. Um, it takes them much longer to trust the adults that are present in the building, and some never do trust the adults that are present in the building. And all of that is the foundation for good learning.

Mrs. Smith's focal point was not returning to the past, but her intent to "come here every day trying to do what's best for kids...I know that kids need this and that's the reason that I do."

Mr. Booker similarly highlighted the centrality of daily interaction with students amidst educational changes. "The part that hasn't changed is that teaching is a one-to-one proposition. One, you know, a teacher connecting with a student. Uh, and that's the part I've always loved about it." Moreover, when working with students, Mr. Booker's goal was to help his students experience, "Those intangible things that kind of allow kids to see that intellectual discourse can be fun, and important."

In spite of changes in curricular expectations, Mrs. Klinger committed several days at the beginning of the year to develop relationships with her students. When asked about her reasons for doing so, she replied,

But then I always think, you know I think my first job is to help these children be good people. And "good people" to me means that they're wanting to continue to learn, that I don't turn off that curiosity. And um, I think having a caring and enriched environment helps to achieve that.

Most participants expressed frustrations with the changing nature of their relationships with students due to various initiatives. Increased expectations frequently threatened their primary psychic reward of meaningful relationships with their students through which effective instruction might take place.

Reasons for Resistance: Political Nostalgia

The participants similarly provided numerous examples of decreasing autonomy indicative of political nostalgia (Goodson et al., 2006). Loss of local autonomy due to the state's Core Curriculum, the increased presence of Area Education Agency (AEA) consultants in Schools in Need of Assistance, and the loss of creativity associated with repetitive change all threatened the relative freedom each teacher experienced earlier in their careers.

Elementary teacher Mrs. Klinger noted the decrease in local control throughout her career when she said, "...when I started you know, it was standards and benchmarks – very much local control. And we've seen that local control dissipate throughout my 27 years here. And the Common Core just kind of hones that in. That it's more top-down and not local control."

Mrs. Rittmeyer expressed a similar loss of autonomy with the increasing presence of AEA consultants.

So now the AEA is teaching us how to teach because we don't know how to teach kids how to read, and learn letters and sounds, things like that... never have darkened the

doors of our classroom, but they can meet with us once a week and tell us what to do. That's very frustrating.

Mrs. Rittmeyer noted how the presence of AEA consultants now curtailed her creativity and professional independence. She said, "...we all have to teach the same way. We all have to teach the exact same thing, and it has to be so scripted, so to-the-test."

Repetitive change (Abrahamson, 2004) was a frequent source of frustration that threatened veteran teacher experience and creativity. Mr. Stauffer said, "But yeah, I, yeah I would say I've become more frustrated, especially when I started hearing things I've heard before and spun as new." He continued, "Um, I mean with something successful there's nothing wrong with tweaking it and using it again. Um, I don't like the way we, we put brand new wrappers on things and it's the, and I sit through a pile of meetings and hear the same things I heard 15 years ago." These repetitive, often top-down, changes frequently marginalize teacher experience, creativity and ownership (Bailey, 2000; Fullan, 2016). Mrs. Smith captured these sentiments when she said,

You know I've been in education long enough to see the different curriculum cycles come and go. OK, let's write this curriculum and we call it standards and benchmarks, and then we call it something else like critical objectives. It's never new...And this time [the] Core is just kind of being jammed down everybody's throat instead of the other way around.

Themes identified throughout the coding process pointed toward a loss of autonomy and increased marginalization stemming from top-down initiatives and the presence of AEA personnel. Numerous veteran teachers reflected the concept of political nostalgia (Goodson et al., 2006), which included the loss of creativity through repetitive change syndrome (Abrahamson, 2004) and the marginalization of teachers due to top-down initiatives (Fullan, 2016; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Later Career Teachers

While insights from the interviews supported Huberman's (1988) and Hargreaves' (2005) varying responses to change by later career teachers, data also suggested that participants responded differently depending on the initiative. Two participants consistently reflected continuing renewal toward their work and change. Mrs. Smith expressed these continuing renewal sentiments when she said, "I like the change. I always grow when I change, when I have these new opportunities. And, and it's just more exciting. I like coming to school every day and figuring out the next thing." Mrs. Klinger illustrated similar sentiments when she stated, "...if administration would be consistent at my school, and they were able to watch me, you know, from a young 20-some to now a 54-year-old, and that growth and that passion, you know, hasn't wavered."

Other participants reflected the positive focuser's reluctance toward systemic change, yet an ongoing desire to make an impact on the students in their classrooms. Mr. Stauffer, a social studies teacher and coach, expressed this tendency when he said,

Give me the objective and if I have some flexibility how I get there. Are you more concerned about how I do it? Or that we get it? You know, do the test scores go up? Is that what you're, you know, you're wondering about? Um, give me the objective, let me close my door...

Other participants reflected characteristics of disenchanted later career teachers. A kindergarten teacher with over 30 years of experience, Ms. Johnson noted her willingness to change for the welfare of her students, though being more mindful of the effects of an initiative.

I think we're [veteran teachers] more critical of change. When you're first beginning, I mean I was always taught what your boss said you did. But now I think I'm looking at what's best for kids. I don't mind change if it's going to improve what we do for the students. But I think we get critical because we know, we've done this before. We've tried this before. It doesn't work. In about five years we're going to swing back and go the other way. So I think we've become more critical about is it really a good change or not. Rather than just saying, "Oh, I don't want to change," if you can show me that it's going to make a difference for my students, then I will go at it whole hog.

A special education instructor with over 20 years of experience, Mr. Clauson expressed similar skepticism toward initiatives when he said,

As an early-career teacher I was always trying to find, I was always trying to be that person finding the next change, and building that better mousetrap. Now I'm more set in my ways. Maybe I've got more experience of things that I know work or won't work.

While Hargreaves' (2005) and Huberman's (1988) classifications supported the reality that later career teachers respond to change differently, the interviews illustrated that teachers may not fit consistently into one category. Continuing renewal and positive focusing later career teachers may become reluctant to embrace change if they deem the initiative to work against the best interest of students. The continuing renewal Mrs. Smith reflected this reluctance when she said,

I am that one who says, "But wait a minute – that's not good for kids." So am I resistant to change? No. Are there times that I have resisted it? Absolutely. And when I see that a kid, or a group of students is going to lose because of the change, then I fight for that.

Mr. Booker expressed his reluctance toward building initiatives in spite of his willingness to make changes in his classroom to increase the effectiveness of instruction. He stated, "Most of my resistance is passive resistance. I do the minimum to meet whatever guideline it is and then I go in my room and I teach. You hear that from a lot of veteran teachers."

Conversations with the nine later career teachers reflected various responses to change. While some participants related their passion to make a positive impact in the lives of their students, they simultaneously expressed a willingness to resist changes that negatively affected their students. These later career teachers also reflected the tendency to look at initiatives more skeptically based upon their experience and the perceived success of more effective interaction

with their students. Yet none of the nine teachers interviewed portrayed the cynicism of the negative focuser, intent to undermine or publicly criticize school initiatives.

Psychic Rewards

After getting to know each participant, one could easily discern the psychic rewards motivating her or his long-term commitment to the profession. As noted above, Mr. Booker expressed his fulfilment with student interaction that fostered intellectual growth. Mrs. Klinger dedicated her efforts to developing “good people” at the expense of curricular expectations. Mr. Stauffer similarly worked hard to teach life skills to students for success beyond high school.

I, I think when I get called for references for jobs and I get a lot of those, um, they never ask about their grade point. Um, and you’ve probably had the same experience but it’s always, “Are the courteous? Are they on time?” Um, you know, “Can they solve problems?” Um, you know, a lot of those are just being a good person.

Mr. Schmidt recalled one school setting with a minimalist Science curriculum that provided great freedom and encouraged creativity. He explained, “I just loved that when I walked in there and saw that 4-page document... It gave me what I needed to do. But it also gave me leverage to get into areas that were not necessarily a definite part of that curriculum.” With that professional freedom, Mr. Schmidt noted, “And I felt I sent kids on that went on and were successful at the college level.”

Building an inclusive environment, developing skills their students would need long after their time in the classroom, and the simple joy of learning motivated these participants through their decades of service. When additional curricular and professional expectations threatened their primary objectives, as Lortie (1975) suggested, these veteran teachers expressed their commitment to their psychic rewards. When facing resistant teachers then, it might be helpful for educational leaders to consider, “What foundational psychic reward is being threatened for this teacher perceived to be resistant?” The following section will elaborate on how these psychic rewards corresponded to specific reasons for resistance.

Engaging Resistance through Clarifying Conversations

Resistance to change theorists emphasize the importance of clarifying the perception of resistance through conversations with those deemed to be resistant (Ford & Ford, 2010; Ford, et al., 2008; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Goodson et al., 2006). Teacher participants consistently expressed their desire to have open conversations about reform initiatives. Mrs. Rittmeyer said, “So, let’s be real. And you know, look at the kids for who they really are.” Middle level teacher Ms. Nelson echoed this desire to look at concerns more deeply when she said, “You know, I, I think sometimes there’s a tendency to look at things too simply. And I, I would much rather get into things deeply. Let’s look at the mess.”

Mr. Booker said that he wished building meetings would include, “...willingness on the part of the administration to really engage in issues rather than avoid them.” He contrasted this desire with the reality, “But the fact that nobody wanted to talk about the issues that teachers raised in good faith in the survey is troublesome. It hurts morale. Again, it doesn’t lead to the kind of teamwork that everybody says is important.”

Mrs. Klinger expressed her desire to sit down and talk about the specific implications of reform for her district in order to tailor those changes to the students in her district.

You know, “What’s wrong? How are we going to fix it?” You know, “Where do we go from here?” I think that, we seldom talk about that, just on a local level... it’s more about, alright this is what the state is telling us today and so we need to learn about this. This is what, and it’s not just, well look at our student base. We don’t sit down and reflect on our student base very often and say, “What are we doing right? What can we improve on?” And, “Where should we go from there?”

Clarifying conversations that identify the meaning of any initiative at the local level may be time-consuming and messy, but they strengthen the ownership and implementation of change through shared leadership (Fullan, 2016; Leithwood & Seashore Lewis, 2012). These conversations validate the mission and memory of veteran teachers (Goodson et al., 2006) while legitimizing their psychic rewards (Lortie, 1975). In the words of Ms. Nelson, “It’s messier, it’s harder, it’s more time-consuming. But I think you get a stronger product if, if we work together.”

The participants supported the belief that taking the time to think critically about new initiatives reflected the school’s long-term goals rather than resistance to those goals. Engaging these seemingly resistant individuals in clarifying conversations may strengthen the initiative, while recognizing the legitimate mission and memory of the change recipients (Ford & Ford, 2010; Goodson, et al., 2006).

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The literature, as well as the interview data from this research, supported the reality that later career teachers respond to change differently. Within the context of this study, some later career teachers reflected enthusiasm for new opportunities and more effective strategies for working with their students. Other participants acknowledged a more critical attitude toward initiatives. Those interviewed admitted they would maintain strategies they deemed “best for kids.” Hargreaves (2005) and Huberman (1988), as well as the interview data, emphasized the importance of recognizing the different responses later career teachers might have toward change.

This research also indicated that later career teachers may resist change for a variety of reasons. Since individual reasons for frustration and resistance vary, educational leaders benefit from being cognizant of changes that negatively affect relationships (social nostalgia) and changes that decrease teacher autonomy (political nostalgia; Goodson et al., 2006). At the heart of these frustrations lies a core psychic reward which relates to the primary reason the teacher entered the profession (Lortie, 1975). Clarifying conversations provide insight to educational leaders about the individual reasons later career teachers respond to initiatives (Ford & Ford, 2009a).

Last, later career teachers desire meaningful conversations with educational leaders about the implementation of initiatives. Several participants acknowledged they may be more critical of change, but they were also willing to dialogue about meaningful implementation of initiatives in their local context. A greater willingness on the part of educational leaders to provide a context for these conversations validates the experience of these teachers, clarifies their concerns

about potential initiatives, and sets the stage for more effective engagement from all teachers (Goodson et al., 2006; Hargreaves, 2005).

Implications for educational leader practice center on greater awareness of psychic rewards, social and political nostalgia, later-career teacher experience, and engaging teachers in clarifying conversations. A key place to begin clarifying conversations is to identify the foundational psychic rewards that might be threatened by the proposed initiative. The educational leader would then benefit from addressing the autonomy (political nostalgia) or relationships (social nostalgia) perceived to be in jeopardy in the mind of the change recipient.

Providing arenas for professional conversations prior to change implementation validates teacher concerns while potentially strengthening any initiative. Being mindful of how educational leaders play a role in the change agent – recipient relationship, has a greater potential to engage all teachers in meaningful ways for more effective implementation of change.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

Several limitations existed with this research. The first limitation stemmed from the relatively small sample size. Time and money limited the “do-ability” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of numerous interviews across a variety of contexts and grade levels. Yet hopefully this work provided a model for educational leaders to seek information from veteran teachers in their own context.

Second, this researcher’s identity as a veteran teacher provided potential bias in this research. While my 20 years of experience as a teacher provided helpful rapport with which to conduct interviews with fellow veterans, this researcher’s values, emotions, and perspectives may have played a role in the analysis of interview results. Being a veteran teacher held benefits, as well as limitations for this research project.

The interaction of teachers and educational leaders needs ongoing research regarding the interaction of those individuals. The increasing presence of teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and other new roles for teachers and administrators only heightens the challenge of effective interaction for school improvement. Interviews, surveys, and ongoing research with educational leaders, as well as ongoing interviews with teachers on the frontlines of change implementation, is greatly needed. Continuous improvement can only occur as teachers and educational leaders strive toward that goal together.

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