RECENTERING TEACHERS' RESPONSE TO EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to explore the factors that influence teachers' responseto educational change. The interest of this study lies in the fact that 'educational change, is inevitably a deeply emotional sense-making experience for teachers' (Zembylas, 2010, p.231). At the same time, teachers should be at the center of our concerns as they influence student learning (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). A qualitative research was undertaken and a descriptive data collection method was used to consider the research questions. Data was collected using a focus group discussion with a purposive sample of 8 teachers who are following a course on Innovation, Change and Conflict. Findings hint at the dilemma that teachers face at time of educational change. Teachers revealed that there is a tug of war between duty and willingness and ability to implement the change. They also complained about the lack of consideration for teachers by policy makers. They explained that their role in implementing change is most of the time ignored and changes are imposed on them. Hence the authors recommend that teachers be included in the frontline of educational change.

Key words: educational change, teachers

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Introduction:

Faber (1991) explained that teachers have ' a sense that their work is socially meaningful and will yield personal satisfactions (p.36). The performance in a school is largely determined by how teachers behave.This behavior is of primary interest in educational change.Teachers have a central role in educational change. Schmidt and Datnow (2005, p.949) describe the role of teachers as the 'centerpiece of educational change'.Hence this puts teachers at the center of attention as we explore how they react to educational change.This issue of educational change is current because as far as education is concerned, 'no change is not an option' (Bush & Coleman, 2000, p.77).This is because of the pressures that are put on the educational sector.These pressures are related to the fact that it is essential to ensure achievement from all students and the fact that the ever growth needs and changes that are occurring in society (Bently, 2008).Lumby (1998, p.191) explains that changes emanate from 'new legislation, inspection, pressure from staff, parents and students, new technology development'.Hence according to Bently (2008, p.207) ' the major challenge therefore is to build systems able to reflect the heterogeneity and diversity of the societies they serve, without sacrificing the quality of learning outcomes'.In fact change emanates from various sources.When we try to relate change to teachers and consider the role of teachers as agents of change, then we need to consider that 'change is about altering both practice an organisation and individual's perceptions about their roles and responsibilities' (Bennett et al., 1992, p.10) and that teachers find themselves at the ' sharp end of change' (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000, p.20).Campos (2005) claims that 'without the participation of teachers, changes in education are impossible' (p.10).Fullan (1982, p.107) sums up the role of teachers in educational change by saying that ' educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it's as simple and as complex as that'. Furthermore, it is claimed that in the 21st century, teachers will face many challenges and will find themselves working more and more as agents of change (Delors et al, 1996). Also,teacher efficacy is linked to their ability to overcome the challenges which they have to face and to their willingness to change (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, Hoy, 2001)

Levin and Riffel (1997) found that one of the roles of schools is to take into consideration the changes which are occurring in society. Fullan (1993) claims that education has a strong social justice purpose thereby it should help to make a difference in the lives of students. This view is

supported by Schlechty (1997) who claims that education should prepare students to face the various challenges of 21ˢᵗ century living.Change has been defined differently in different studies. Various authors have claimed that change is so complex that it encompasses a whole series of elements (Carnall 1999; Wendall, 2009). Many definitions of change are proposed in the literature on change.Law and Glover, (2000, p.128) claim that 'the idea that change is essentially rational, technocratic activity which can be mandated is clearly thought through and leads to measurable outcomes is one that has been increasingly challenged and found to be misleading'. Change is described by Altricher (2000, p.1) as 'ubiquitous'.Various studies have claimed that teachers are agents of change (Fullan, 1993, Hanson, 1996).A change agent is 'a professional whose role is to influence his client's behavior in a desired direction' (Hanson, 1996, p.307). Hence in their role of change agent, teachers find themselves as a vital component on the success of educational change (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994).This idea is further developed by Goodson (1992) who claims that it is crucial to understand 'the singer, not the song' (p.112). Hence the centrality of teachers in the success of educational change is further reinforced. Ravitch (2001) nicely concludes that 'it does suggest, though, that any planned reform effort is filtered through the experiences, intentions and purposes of those who implement it' (p.81).The attention given to teachers is further reinforced by the fact that 'real, sustained change, however, does not occur unless basic beliefs and assumptions also change'.It seems therefore that whenever there are educational changes, it is essential to consider the teachers, that is, the human element in the change process (Wendell, 2009; Fullan & Levin, 2009).

Focus of the study:

The focus of this study is to explore the factors that influence teachers' response to educational change

Research question:

   i)   What factors influence the response of teachers to educational change?

Conceptual framework:

There are various factors affecting teachers' reactions to educational change.

(i)   Teacher involvement in the change process.

Campos (2005) claims that 'without the participation of teachers, changes in education are impossible' (p.7). In many situations, the role of the teacher is still limited to educational activities. Campos further explains that there are various ways to define the role of the teachers. Traditionally, the role of teachers can be 'limiting teachers to classroom work and not to the larger area of the school and education system management and seeing the work of teachers as essentially pedagogical' (Campos, 2005, p.10). The way of defining the role of the teacher is narrow and focuses only on teaching in classrooms. Yet it is found that there is a tug of war between what is expected of teachers and the new pressures which exist today. If teachers are isolated to their classroom then they are not involved in educational change. Bush (2003) claims that 'if teachers do not 'own' innovations but are simply required to implement externally imposed changes, they are likely to do so without enthusiasm, leading to possible failure (p.46). Furthermore, Fullan (2007) warns that teachers can adopt an attitude of false clarity, thereby they pretend to accept the change but it does not inform their practice. Ravitch (2001) describes this emphasis by highlighting the fact that irrespective what educational authorities say, 'classroom teachers have a considerable degree of control over what and how they teach; even when a new curriculum is put in their hands, the way they use it may alter it beyond recognition' (p.81). Other studies have also described the vital role of teachers in educational change. Hargreaves and Evans (1997, p.3) have pointed out that 'where educational change is concerned, if a teacher can't or won't do it, it simply can't be done'. This is because 'after all, they do the work' (Lumby, 1998, p.193).

(ii)   Teacher development for change

Emphasis is also laid on the fact that teacher development for change affects teachers' response to change (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Hopkins et al. (1994, p.113) writes 'staff development is inextricably linked to school development'. This idea is further supported by other studies (Dalin, 2005; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Oliver, 1996; Mohammad, 2004; Key, 2007).Hence if teachers are to implement educational change, then attention should be given to their development.Hoban (2002) claims that 'improvement in teaching and learning requires teachers' change and this in turn can be equated with teacher learning' (p.90).

(iii)   Teacher professionalism

Here attention is devoted on developing a culture of continuous learning and collaborative culture. Hence when teachers collaborate they develop their professionalism (Datnow, 2011).This type of culture empowers teachers and avoids isolation (Fullan, 1993;Evans, 1996).There is collegiality which can facilitate change (Hargreaves, 1994). This is also related to how teachers feel they are perceived by the other stakeholders. If they have professional confidence they tend to implement change more easily (Helsby, 1999). Sometimes change imposes a 'new professionalism' whereby teachers are required to teach in ways that are different from the way they were taught (Talbert &McLughlin, 1994). At the same time, Day, Elliot and Kington (2005) claim that educational change can leave teachers with a sense of professional identity crisis which can influence how they respond to the change.

(iv)　Teacher recognition

Recognition for the work done is a powerful motivator (Evans, 1996). It must be acknowledged that for a successful change to occur teachers must have agreed to change their practice (Levin &Riffel, 1997). Therefore recognizing the effort they made might influence their willingness to continue working. There is encouraging evidence that when teachers feel more effective and values, it improves students learning (Bandura, 1993).Hargreaves (2002) claims that 'recognition reinforces teachers' sense of purpose and is a source of positive and energizing emotion for them (p.14).Heikkinen (2003) claims that recognition is an important emotional need for people's self-esteem and sense of pride.

(v) Teacher resistance to change

According to Fink and Stoll (1998, p299) 'resistance is a natural and predictable response'. Smit (2003) writes that 'In the educational field, resistance comes mostly from teachers for whom the change has the greatest impact' (p.1). A review of the literature shows that there are various reasons why teachers resist change. One main reason is that they have not been included in the change (Sergiovanni 1990; Hargreaves, 1994). They might resist as they perceive the change to imply more work (Evans, 1996). Change can also be seen as getting out of their comfort zone (Sergiovanni, 1990). They can resist by not implanting the change since 'it is one thing to embrace a doctrine of instruction, and quite another to weave it into one's practice' (Cohen, 1990, p.455).

(vi) Life cycle and career cycle position

Stoll and Fink (1996) claim that the life and career experiences of teachers influence their response to change. There are various elements which interact in teachers' environment to determine how they respond to change (Liberman & Miller, 1999) Goodson (1992) explains that the point where teachers have reached in their career is also important. In teacher career cycle trajectories there are varying needs at different stages (Steffy & Wolfe, 2001; Hammerness et al, 2005). If teachers have reached mid-career and they are disappointed or dissatisfied, their motivation towards their career falls and so does their willingness to implement change (Huberman, 1995). Faber (1991) explains that ' as the inevitable difficulties of teaching… interact with personal issues and vulnerabilities, as well as social pressure and values, to engender a sense of frustration and force a reassessment of the possibilities of the job and the investment one wants to make in it' (p.36). Indeed, Hargreaves (1991, p.239) concurs that half-way in their career teachers are 'unlikely to invest fashionable innovations with unmitigated enthusiasm, especially when they have seen so many come and go in the past'.

Methodology:

A qualitative research was undertaken and a descriptive data collection method was used to consider the research questions. Data was collected using a focus group discussion with a purposive sample of 8 teachers who are following a course on Innovation, Change and Conflict. Hence they were chosen because of their knowledge of the topic under consideration (Kendall, 1997) and they were comfortable to talk to the researchers. A small group shows greater potential (Krugger & Casey, 2000) and there is greater ability to generate data based on the synergy of group interaction (Green et al. 2003). Data has been analysed using constant comparison analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence data was gathered into small units and a code was ascribed to each unit. Then the codes were gathered into categories and lastly one or more themes that denote the content of each of the group were established.

Emergent themes:

(i) **The manner in which the change was introduced**.

The participants explained that the manner in which the change is introduced greatly impacts on their response. Participant A explained that ' *usually we get directives from above. They do not explain why they are bringing the change. They just impose it on us'* . Participant C mentioned that ' *sometimes we are informed about the change whilst reading the newspapers'*. All the participants mentioned this element as a factor which affects their response to educational change.They explained that not being involved in the change leads to their not being interested to implement it. Hence we see that teachers are kept away from the educational process, it negatively influences their response. This is in line with the findings from Bush (2003).

(ii) Our voice

All of the eight participants vehemently expressed their dissatisfaction to the fact that most of the time their voice is not included in the discussion about the change. Participant D explained that ' the authorities do not know our realities'. This is also what Participant B said ' *they consider only some perspectives, while they ignore others that according to me is important'*. Participant C strongly explained that ' *we are the ones going to implement the change, but it's as if we are machines and we function as robots'*. The participants felt that they do not contribute to the educational change process and their participation is excluded. Hence they do not feel '*concerned'* to implement the change which they feel is '*inappropriate most of the time'*. Again it fits what Campos (2005) claimed.

(iii)Not well thought through

Four of the eight focus group members believed that many times the impression they get is that the change has not been well thought through, with the remaining four members not providing any response on this issue. Participant H felt that '*they do not give enough time and training'* . Participant D mentioned the fact that for the last educational change, a teacher per school was trained and he became the trainer for the whole staff in this school. He found this ' *amateurish'*. They made it very clear that few teachers are involved when the change impacts on all teachers. Consequently, it is felt that if teachers are not taken on board, the educational change will not be a success (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997).

(iv)Collaboration as against competition

All of the eight focus group members agreed that if they were to collaborate, they might find change easier to handle. However, as mentioned by Participant C, '*we don't know what it means to collaborate. We are always in competition*'. Participant E explained that since they work in isolation, they are at times '*overwhelmed*' by the amount of the change. Hence more teacher professionalism would help but this does not seem to be the way things are done among those teachers. They tend to work '*alone*' as described by Fullan (1993).

(v) Contribution of teachers' to students' success

All the participants unanimously agreed that the other stakeholders in the education field do not recognize their contribution to students' success. They felt that all the efforts they make to adapt to the various changes that are thrown their way go unnoticed. Participant D explained that 'when *students succeed it's because they are intelligent, but when they fail, it's because of the teachers. What about the other factors*?.Hence it seems that not recognizing the efforts teachers make influence their response to educational change. Consequently more teacher recognition could positively sway teachers in favour of the educational change (Evans, 1996).

(vi) Resistance

Participants also expressed their doubts about the success of the change. Participant D explained that it's important to know '*where the change has already been implemented and how successful it was*'. All the eight participants explained that they tend to resist change because they do not find what they have to gain in it. They do not see how it will improve their teaching and the learning of the students. Consequently, it is in line with Evans (1996) and Sergiovanni (1990).

(vii) Timing

Participants also talked about the timing of the change. They feel that at times the timing is not good. All the participants agreed that at times changes are spun on them without taking into consideration the timing. Participant B talked about '*losing faith in the system*' while participant F talked about '*hidden agenda*'. Participants do not see the value of the change and are doubtful about the timing of the change. Again they explained that they could have provided judicious advice to the educational authorities had they been consulted. Teachers explained that they usually implement change voluntarily when they feel that it benefits their students but having

change forced on them is felt differently. Hence this element is important because as Lumby (1998) claimed, 'they do the work'.

(viii)   Homeostasis

Participants explained that they see change as a '*shock*' and that it creates an '*imbalance*'. This is because as explained by Participant F, who sees change as '*a challenge to our competence*'. They wonder whether they will be able to perform as they used to under the new system. There is a feeling of '*loss*' as described by Participant H. Participant B talked about feeling '*confused*' and this leads to '*internal and external conflicts*' as they find themselves opposed to those people who like change. Participant D explained that as human beings they are '*conservative*' and there is the '*fear of the unknown*' and a '*fear of failure*'. Hence a great imbalance and this puts a lot of strain on their homeostasis impulses. It seems that not much attention is provided to see that teachers are prepared to implement educational change. More professional development would positively influence their response (Levin & Fullan, 2008).

(ix) Business as usual

Five of the participants explained that when they started their career, their aim was to be very good teachers. They have worked hard to develop their '*goodwill*' and felt that as described by Participant E '*sit back and relax*' and do '*business as usual*'. Participant F described the situation as '*awkward*' and explained that once teachers have reached a 'plateau' they disengage and work tend to become a routine. Hence it seems that more attention be given to what Stoll and Fink (1996) had described as life and career experiences of teacher. Also the advice of Goodson (1992) needed to be examined as it reflected how the point where they have reached in their career is important in influencing their response to educational change.

Recommendations and future directions

We find that the responses of these teachers to educational change is rather dim. They do not show much enthusiasm. It looks as though teachers see educational change as a complicated burden, which matches what Levin (2001, pp.144) . We are of the opinion that this response can be worked upon so that teachers show more positive response to educational change. It is thus recommended that :

Teachers must be encouraged to adopt professional standards which help them better define their roles and the expectations that the professional have on them. This can also help them reflect on their practices as professional.

Better communication and collegiality could be developed amongst teachers, between teachers and heads of departments, school leaders and educational authority as that the voice of teachers could be heard and given due consideration. At the same time more opportunities for collegial meetings could be organized so that teachers could meet and thrash out their problems, worries and share best practices in education.

Teachers could also be provided with effective and efficient professional development. In fact it is felt that teachers need support in their practice. They also need to keep abreast of changes, innovations and research in their teaching practice. They could attend professional development on a regular basis in order to up date their skills and knowledge. At the same time they could help frame professional development programmes which will meet their learning needs and help them adapt to new changes that are implemented.

There is also need to address the issue of teachers who are not so engaged in their profession. Their disengagement may result in unsatisfactory teaching which affects students and colleagues. Hence support must be provided to these teachers so that they would be willing to implement the educational change. One way could be to encourage these teachers to engage in the training or development of new teachers. This could lead to career development and could boost their engagement. They could even be called up to mentor and support new teachers.

We also recommend that schemes be set up to recognize the work of teachers and their contribution to educational change. Special events could be organized on teachers' day – 5th October which is already a day off for teachers. Events could focused on providing recognition to teachers. This could help trigger further enthusiasm for change.

Another initiative to influence teachers' response to educational change could be to provide teachers with regular feedback to help them improve and promote the use of innovative strategies which could foster greater adhesion to educational change.

Counselling could also be provided to teachers to help them come to terms with the various feelings that they undergo when they have to face change. Change tends to make teachers

uncomfortable. Hence counselling may help them overcome the reasons for resisting change. They could be provided with reassurance and will have the opportunity to release emotional tension and reorient their focus on voluntarily implement the change.

Teachers could also be encouraged to develop personal vision-building on the part of teachers. They could be encouraged to examine why they came into teaching in order to develop their will to implement change. They could learn to question their current outlook and explore their propensity to review their personal purpose in order to achieve deeper understanding.

The recommendations above are very comprehensive and would if implemented go a long way toward recentering teachers' response to educational change.

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