FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

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Fundamental Change

International Handbook of Educational Change

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International Handbook of Educational Change - Introduction

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This set of four volumes on *Educational Change* brings together evidence and insights on educational change issues from leading writers and researchers in the field from across the world. Many of these writers, whose chapters have been specially written for these books, have been investigating, helping initiate and implementing educational change, for most or all of their lengthy careers. Others are working on the cutting edge of theory and practice in educational change, taking the field in new or even more challenging directions. And some are more skeptical about the literature of educational change and the assumptions on which it rests. They help us to approach projects of understanding or initiating educational change more deeply, reflectively and realistically.

Educational change and reform have rarely had so much prominence within public policy, in so many different places. Educational change is ubiquitous. It figures large in Presidential and Prime Ministerial speeches. It is at or near the top of many National policy agendas. Everywhere, educational change is not only a policy priority but also major public news. Yet action to bring about educational change usually exceeds people's understanding of how to do so effectively.

The sheer number and range of changes which schools are now confronting is staggering.

Educators have always had to engage with educational changes of one sort or another. But other than in the last three decades or so, these changes were infrequent and episodic and they never really affected or even addressed the core of how teachers taught (Cuban, 1984). The changes were in things like how subjects were organized, how grade levels were clustered together into different school types, or how groups of students were divided between different schools or integrated within them according to ability, gender or race. Thus when educational

historians chastise contemporary change advocates for ignoring the existence of educational change in the past and for exaggerating current crises and change demands "as a marketing device to promote the new possibilities of education in a new century, designed to appeal to consumers of different kinds who are grown weary of the old familiar product" (McCulloch, 1997), they are only partially right. While educational change has always been with us in some sense or other (as also, of course, has educational continuity), many of the changes are very different now, in both their substance and their form.

Since the 1960s, educational change has became a familiar part of teachers' work, and has more directly addressed issues of what teachers teach and how they should teach it. Following the launch of Sputnik and the emergence of post-war egalitarian ideals, public education has been treated as a crucible of technological and economic advancement and as a creator of greater social justice. In the 1960s and 70s, teachers in many countries had to deal with the rhetoric and sometimes the reality of curriculum innovation in mathematics, science and the humanities. They saw students stay in school longer, the ability ranges of their classes grow wider and the walls of their classrooms come down and then go up again just a few years later. Successive waves of different approaches to reading or mathematical learning swept through their classrooms, each one washing away the marks left by its predecessors.

It was in these times of educational expansion and optimism that educational change really began in earnest - as also did the study of it. From the late 1960s and early 1970s, researchers like Matt Miles, Per Dalin, Lou Smith, Neil Gross, Lawrence Stenhouse and Seymour Sarason studied the growing phenomenon of educational innovation - whether in the shape of large-scale curriculum projects and packages, or in the form of newly-created innovative schools. They showed how and why large-scale curriculum innovations rarely progressed beyond the phase of having their packages purchased or "adopted" to the point where they were implemented fully and faithfully, and could bring about real changes in classroom practice. At the same time, they also revealed how the promise of exceptional innovative schools usually faded over time as their staffs grew older, their charismatic leaders left, and the system withdrew permission for them to break the rules.

As the limitations of large-scale curriculum innovations became apparent, educators began to treat the individual school as the centre or focal point of educational change efforts. School-based curriculum development, and school-based staff development initiatives proliferated in many places, instead of development being imposed or initiated from faraway.

Research on what made teachers effective in their classrooms also expanded to address what made schools effective or ineffective as a whole, and as lists of effective schools characteristics were discovered (such as creating a safe and orderly environment for learning, or setting and checking homework regularly), these were sometimes then used as administrative blueprints to try and make particular schools

become more effective over time. Many districts or other administrative authorities initiated "effective schools" projects on this basis. Some schools and districts supplemented and sometimes supplanted this science of school effectiveness with a more loosely defined and humanistically interpreted art of school improvement - the process of how to help schools and their staffs become more effective through setting clear goals, creating staff involvement, measuring progress over time and so forth.

Ironically, this approach to school improvement was then translated back into a rational science by many educational systems. It was treated as a process of planned or managed change that schools could be moved through step-by-step, stage-by-stage, guided by the school's improvement team that its region or district mandated it to have.

When these various school-centred changes and improvements didn't work well enough or fast enough (and sometimes even when they did), impatient educational administrators (and American urban school superintendents with an average job tenure of less than two years can be very impatient indeed), imposed their own reform requirements instead. So too did ideologically driven politicians, whose agendas of educational reform have often been shaped by the desire to create public indignation (which they promise their measures will then answer), or by the private idiosyncrasies of their own educational pasts, (which their reforms are meant to cherish or purge).

This quarter century or more of educational change processes and initiatives that have been meant to alter learning and teaching in our schools, has left us with a mixed legacy. On the one hand, studies of what works and what doesn't across all the different change strategies have created a truly powerful knowledge base about the processes, practices and consequences of educational change. During this period, research studies have shown, for example, how educational change moves through distinctive stages of initiation, implementation and institutionalization; how people who encounter changes go through successive "stages of concern" about how those changes will affect them; and how people respond very differently to educational change initiatives depending on what point they have reached in their own lives and careers.

Some of the research findings on educational change have even been accorded the status of generalizable rules or 'lessons' of change. These include the maxims that practice changes before beliefs, that successful change is a product of both pressure and support, that evolutionary planning works better than linear planning and so forth (these 'lessons' have been synthesized especially effectively by Michael Fullan, 1991, 1993).

So extensive is the current knowledge base of educational change that it has come to constitute a field of study in its own right - drawing on and transcending the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and philosophy, as well as the fields of curriculum and educational administration. In a way, educational change has now really come of age - but while this is a significant academic achievement, it is also where the problems of the field - the second part of its legacy - also begin.

Our experience of educational change today is stretching far beyond our experience, knowledge and investigations of it in times gone by. While the existing

knowledge-base of educational change is impressive, it is no longer really sufficient to address the unique change problems and challenges that educators confront today.

Contemporary patterns of educational change present educators with changes that are multiple, complex and sometimes contradictory. And the change demands with which educators have to deal, seem to follow one another at an increasingly frenetic speed. A typical primary or elementary school these days may be considering a new reading program, developing cooperative learning strategies, thinking about how to implement new computers, designing a better parent newsletter, and trialling portfolio assessments all at the same time. The portfolio assessments favoured by the region or the district may have to be reconciled with imposed standardized test requirements by the nation or the state. A push to develop a more integrated curriculum and to recognize children's multiple intelligences may be reversed by a newly elected government's commitments to more conventionally defined learning standards within existing academic subjects.

All this can make teachers and administrators feel that the systems in which they are working aren't just complex but downright chaotic. This chaos is partly inherent in societies and organizations where information circulates and decisions are made with increasing speed. It is also the result of educational policy constantly being shaped and altered by different and competing interest groups in an ideological battle for the minds of the young. And sometimes it even results from a kind of *manufactured uncertainty* that more than a few governments wilfully create to arouse panic, to set pretexts for their policy interventions and to keep educators and everyone else off-balance.

Few of the existing theories and strategies of educational change equip educators to cope effectively with these complex, chaotic and contradictory environments

- Rational theories of planned change that move through predictable stages of implementation or 'growth' are poorly suited to schools where unexpected twists and turns are the norm rather than the exception in the ways they operate.
- The conventional academic and behavioural outcomes that defined the core of what an effective school should produce in the past are outdated in an age where many people now clamour for schools to develop higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving capacities, and the habits of collaboration and teamwork. Complex as the world of education is, people expect more and more from it, and the effective schools of the past cannot deliver what many expect of schools today.
- Theories and models that helped educators know how (and how not) to implement single curriculum innovations are of little use to schools where innovations are multiple and priorities compete.
  While we have learned a lot about how to improve individual schools or small clusters of schools with additional resources, exceptional leaders, the ability to attract or shed particular kinds of staff members, and discretion to break the

rules; we are only just beginning to understand the challenges of scaling reform up from small samples of improving schools, to entire school systems. The existing knowledge base of school improvement has shown us how to create islands of improvement, but has been less helpful in assisting people to make archipelagoes from islands, and still less in showing them how to build entire continents of change.

It is time, therefore, to reflect at some length about what we already know and have learned about educational change and to explore how the field can and should be pushed further, to help educators understand and deal effectively with the immensely complex change problems that are customary today. Each of the four volumes on *Educational Change* addresses these fundamental issues in its own distinctive way.

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Introduction

Scaling Up the Educational Change Process

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The chapters in this section are divided into three broad categories: (1) those dealing with macro educational change at the societal level (2) those relating to large scale initiatives based on particular reform strategies (3) those pertaining to fundamental transformations of professional development strategies, indeed to fundamental reform in the profession of teaching itself.

There has been a growing dissatisfaction over the past two decades about the slow pace of educational reform. Whatever successes that have been obtained have been confined to individual schools which succeeded here and there. Missing was any sense that educational change could be accomplished on a large scale sustained basis.

The chapters that follow attempt to push forward on the agenda of fundamental change. In the first section the revolution in human development and the learning society is analyzed resulting in the recognition that macro strategies must focus on transformations in how learning occurs. Revolutions in cognitive science have enabled us to understand how learners construct their own deep understanding of knowledge. Suddenly, new technologies have made possible networks of information and people that directly compare the learning of students and teachers alike. These developments are occurring in all countries reflected in the chapters in section one: Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In addition to comprehensive reforms relating to education policy, there are a number of large scale change initiatives underway which are based on particular models. These chapters focus on Levin's Accelerated Schools, Comer's School Development Program in the United States, and the National Schools Project in Australia. At the same time, we raise new questions about the roles of communities and community service agencies in school reform. Fundamental change eventually will require radical rethinking of the relationship between schools and communities.

In the third section, professional development is examined in new and more fundamental ways. Professional development, in-service location, staff development and the like have always been identified as important components of any change strategy. Yet the impact of professional development has been limited. The chapters in section three essentially claim that this limited impact is related to

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superficial or partial conceptions of development. The new conceptions include the development of teaching standards as foundations for reform, the role of teachers throughout their careers as "change agents" concerned with equity, social justice and academic excellence for all, new unionism as teachers' organizations help lead educational reform and restructuring schools for improving teaching in dramatic ways. All of these involve the reconceptualization of professional development for teachers and administrators recognizing their key roles in bringing about large scale educational reform.

Educational reform has proceeded through at least four broad phases over the last third of the 20th century. The 1960s involved large scale aspirations for reform in most Western countries. At the time, there was little appreciation of the complexities of implementation and most of these ambitious efforts failed to bear fruit. Second, the 1970s was a period of downturn and recession with limited attention to fundamental reform. At the same time there was growing dissatisfaction with the role and performance of public schools. This led in the 1980s to stronger central intervention and more demands and mechanisms for accountability. We are at the early stage of a fourth phase in which there is a growing realization that accountability per se is not the answer, and that the "capacity" of the school system and its communities is the key to reform. Fundamental change, then means basic transformation of educational institutions.

As we move to the 21st century, the interest of Western countries, and those around the world, whether they be Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa or Latin America are beginning to coincide. All now appear to agree that transformation of societies – individually and interdependently – is essential, and that educational reform is the critical strategic intervention that will achieve these goals.

Accomplishing educational and societal reform in today's world is a challenge of enormous complexity. The good news is that we know much more, after forty years of research and development, about the educational change process and the strategies required for success. In many ways, the next period of reform could be the defining decade for focusing on fundamental educational reforms. The chapters in this section help set the stage for the next phase of ambitious work on the educational reform agenda.