

Section A: Managing Transformational Change

Unit 2: Promoting and sustaining change

Presentation notes

Slide 1

This presentation is designed to be used in conjunction with the booklet **Making a difference in your school: some perspectives from the research on curriculum change**. In depth reflection may be structured using the reflective questions in this booklet.

The presentation can be used to support a two hour CPD session or as two shorter sessions. There are two activities and accompanying notes. The initial slides and activity relate to the first section of the booklet, **Rationale for Change**. The latter part of the presentation relates to the rest of the booklet.

For further information about any of the themes in the PowerPoint presentation or the booklet, please contact Mark Priestley (University of Stirling) – mrp3@stir.ac.uk

Session 1 Rationale for change

Slide 2

The aim of this session is to explore the usefulness of the principles of participation, dialogue, engagement and thinking in providing a foundation on which transformational change can occur.

Slide 3

The basic message here is that centrally driven innovation is ubiquitous in education today: 5-14, Higher Still, HGIOS, AifL, Education for Citizenship, A Curriculum for Excellence to name a few examples. Despite this, classrooms are fundamentally the same as they were 20 years ago: single teacher, teacher delivery, subjects organisation, children in rows, individualised learning are all as common now as they were formerly. This is not to say that these approaches are bad; it is simply to stress that the immense reform efforts of recent years have made little fundamental change to classroom practice.

Slide 4

Cuban's hurricane metaphor is apt in many ways, but also misleading as it does not convey the stress and the innovation fatigue experienced by many teachers, as teaching has intensified, as workloads have grown, as accountability has hardened and as teachers have been trusted less as professionals.

It is important to note that this is not an anti-change stance either. Change is important, and successful management of change is also crucial. Society is changing rapidly, and education needs to adapt in response to such changes. **The point is more that staff enacting change initiatives need to be reflective about both change processes as well as about the substantive issues of the innovation in question.** The purpose of this presentation is to reconceptualise change; to place change back in the hands of professionals, and to enable it to be managed in constructive, participative and less stressful ways than has been the case in recent years. This may involve making changes in the light of new initiatives, or it may involve retaining existing practice. Above all it is about enabling practitioners to reflect on why particular changes are important, how they apply to their contexts, and how they can be enacted.

Slide 5

A number of stability factors explain the apparent lack of change in schooling. These include strongly internalised images of teachers' roles and attachment to familiar routines. According to Eisner, 'teaching is the only profession I know in which professional socialization begins at age five' (Eisner 1996: 6).

Other factors include: the professional isolation of teachers (who often work behind closed doors); poor quality in-service training, often run by people who are removed from the real world of teaching, and who fail to appreciate the complexities of the teaching context;

conservative attitudes on the part of parents and pupils; the distance between policymakers and practitioners; and unhelpful top-down notions of change that position teachers as technicians carrying out someone else's policy.

Eisner also identifies the organisation of schools and learning as an issue that prevents change; 'one of the most problematic factors in the organisation of schools is the fact that they are structurally fragmented' (Eisner 1992: 618)

Slide 6

Many writers have warned of the power of teachers to subvert policy that is over-prescriptive. For example, Osborn et al (1997) documented the creative mediation of national policy in primary schools in England in response to the prescriptive National Curriculum. They noted the tendency of teachers to filter changes through the lenses provided by their own values and existing practices, leading in many ways to a major subversion of policy. The point is that, not only is rigidly prescription ineffective in bringing about change, but responses to it can lead to distorted teaching and learning as teachers act creatively to fulfil the demands placed on them by it. It is thus better to provide enabling guidelines, supported by decent resources and good CPD, than a straitjacket that constrains creative action, creates burdens and risks for teachers, and devalues the professionals who have to carry out the reforms.

Writing in the context of Scotland's 5-14 curriculum guidelines, Swann and Brown have drawn attention to the persistent failure of reform initiatives: "Past records for curriculum initiatives show extraordinarily modest levels of pedagogical implementation, in part because curriculum innovators have failed to start 'where the teachers are'. The extent to which curriculum initiatives have an impact on teachers' thinking at classroom level is profoundly important given a world-wide trend towards the introduction

of national curricula." (Swann and Brown 1997: 91).

Slide 7

As in other situations involving change processes, success (or lack of it) needs to be evaluated. The criteria set out in this slide have often been used in the past, with mixed results.

Slide 8

Now may be the time for a different set of criteria to be used.

Slide 9

Change should be considered reflectively in the light of the underlying principles and purposes of education. We should consider carefully why we are embarking on an innovation, and not just see change just in terms of satisfying external imperatives such as pleasing the inspectors (although clearly these can be important too). New procedures and other innovations can tend to be viewed in terms of narrow outcomes, encouraging a tick-box mentality. For instance, the AiFL strategies (e.g. traffic lighting) have tended in some classrooms to become ends in themselves rather than means of achieving broader educational aims. A Curriculum for Excellence articulates 4 purposes of education, but while these are worthy aspirations, they are fairly broad. An alternative, and complementary approach is provided by the 4 principles outlined in the slide.

- **Engagement.** To what extent do the strategies encourage young people, especially reluctant learners, to engage with the lesson material, activities and concepts?
- **Participation.** What opportunities exist for pupils to actively participate? To make decisions about their own learning that in turn help make it relevant to them? Are there opportunities for young people to practise citizenship in the classroom?
- **Dialogue.** It is widely accepted that people learn through dialogue with other learners, and yet in many classrooms dialogue is limited. We learn through listening to the ideas of

others, and through having to defend our own ideas, which are modified in the process. Such learning is often deeper than the learning that takes place through memorization.

According to Howard Gardner (1992) a great deal of classroom activity is ineffective because it does not challenge deeper underlying intuitive notions of what is right (even where these are plainly incorrect); learners quickly forget their 'official' school learning once the exam is past, falling back on more atavistic explanations.

- **Thinking.** How does the activity promote the development of creative and critical thinking? What opportunities are there for problem-solving?

When considering whether to innovate, or whether to retain existing practice, these principles should be considered. They focus on student learning and the mechanisms by which this is achieved.

Slide 10

Activity 1

PMI is an Edward de Bono method for analysing situations:

- Plus – what is good about the innovation?
- Minus – what has been negative about it?
- Interesting – what is difficult to categorise either way, but is worth mentioning?

The purpose of this activity is to get people to engage with the 4 principles in the context of an initiative that is currently affecting them. The powerpoint slide can be amended to reflect this initiative (e.g. by substituting 'formative assessment' for 'a particular initiative'). Half an hour would be adequate for this activity, including feedback and group discussion,

Session 2

Successful change

Slide 11

This session encourages teachers to examine their own circumstances in order to identify what is likely to hinder and to

help them in establishing an initiative. In doing so, it presents successful change not as a managed process, but as organic growth that emerges from and through the engagement of the people involved.

Slide 12

Practical day-to-day teaching is about balancing priorities. Often this battle becomes skewed in the direction of demands that impinge on day to day teaching. Few people would argue that good teaching is about enabling young people to develop lifelong skills and dispositions to enable them to become effective and active citizens with enriching and rewarding careers. Whether schooling achieves these aims is much more contentious; hence we have debates about achievement vs attainment, and bodies such as the CBI criticise the outcomes of the education system. Exams, accountability and structures of schooling such as timetabling exert a powerful effect on how we teach. Added to this is what American writers Tyack and Cuban have called the grammar of schooling. This refers to those powerful unwritten assumptions about schooling that are deeply engrained in all of us – subjects, periods, classroom layout are aspects of this. According to Tyack and Cuban, many reforms initiatives fail because they are unable to challenge this sort of thinking.

And yet in a new century, there is a need for more 'out of the box' thinking

Slide 13

An alternative way of looking at the problem is to employ the Doyle and Ponder practicality ethic. According to these writers, reforms in schools succeed or fail according to whether they address the practicality ethic. In simple terms, what makes them work, and what impedes them. There are three aspects to this:

1. **Congruence** – is the innovation in tune with teacher values and belief? Reforms can fail if they clash with these. Most teachers would agree that education should be about motivating children, and encouraging learning, but would often disagree on the

methods. For example, recent attempts to integrate the social subjects curriculum have succeeded in some schools with staff support, but have foundered elsewhere because the teachers are sceptical.

2. **Instrumentality** – put simply, how difficult is the reform? This relates to issues such as the amount of time needed for planning and implementation, the availability of resources (including cultural resources such as clear instructions), school structures such as timetabling (e.g. 40 minute periods may discourage the use of formative assessment, because such pedagogies take time to set up and run). Many reforms have failed even where there is substantial support amongst teachers, because they are simply too difficult.
3. **Cost/benefit** - this is about making a judgement or cost/benefit analysis. Where costs are seen to outweigh benefits, a reform is unlikely to be successful. For instance, where formative assessment did not embed in pilot project schools, the reasons usually involved a perception (whether true or not) of costs – negative HMIE feedback, lack of SMT support, worries that exam results may be affected. Again, failed initiatives may be congruent with teacher values.

Instrumentality and cost/benefit are both factors that can be changed to an extent within school by well planned action. Teacher values are more enduring. For instance, instrumentality can be improved through structural changes (e.g. to the timetable) and through the allocation of time and resources. The cost/benefit balance can be altered by explicit SMT support for an initiative, or via the development of a collegial environment where risks are shared.

Slide 14

There is a huge volume of research in the field of education change. These are described in more detail in the booklet.

The next two slides summarise some key findings:

- **Central impetus** does not imply central direction. The National Curriculum in England has been unsuccessful because it was over-prescriptive. However, a lack of central impetus and support can also be problematic. Good impetus consists of clear guidance and a coherent rationale for innovation, including a clear statement of underlying principles. It acknowledges and deals with tensions and inconsistencies between and within policies. It adds resourcing and support to the pot. Of course such impetus is often beyond the control of practitioners, so it is important that people at a local level are reflective about central guidance, and clearly communicate back any concerns
- Support and **leadership** at a local level are also important. Research suggests that a common cause of innovation failure is a lack of systematic and constructive support at the school level. One of the AifL pilot schools abandoned its pilot following lack of SMT support, accompanied by inconsistent messages about priorities.
- Related to leadership is the notion of **distributed leadership**. Many successful innovations succeeded because they were driven by classroom teachers rather than being a top-down initiative. In one school, the SMT set the broad parameters for AifL, then delegated the job of enactment to a couple of classroom teachers, who led an assessment working group. This group formulated policy and encouraged teachers to participate; it was a major factor behind the success of the innovation.
- Related to this is the notion of **classroom autonomy**. Teachers are well qualified professionals but are often treated more as technicians, simply employed to carry out instructions issued from the centre. The new professionalism described

by Reeves (2006) is not a licence for 'anything goes'. It involves, instead, collaborative practice, shared responsibility and accountability, and an agreement by staff to get behind agreed initiatives. However it also recognises the contribution that teachers can make to decision making, the differences between (and even within) local contexts, and relies on managers trusting teachers to be professionals. Again research suggests that where such professional trust is the norm, change is often managed more effectively.

Slide 15

- **Collaboration.** Genuine collaboration (as opposed to groupthink) generates ideas, enables full discussion of issues, pros and cons, and facilitates fuller ownership of innovation by participating teachers. It can take time, and it is important for school managers to create spaces for collaboration and dialogue. Collaboration should extend to peer observation of teaching, not to check up on colleagues, but to assist in the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Research suggests that this latter ingredient is an important element in spreading good teaching practice.
- **Professional enquiry.** This is represented in the diagram on slide 9. Innovations work best when carefully planned in a collegial way, followed by a systematic approach to implementation. For example formative assessment strategies could be worked out in a team meeting, then put into place in several classes. The results of such an intervention could then be systematically recorded, with recall meetings scheduled to discuss the results. Such discussions then inform the reformulation of the original strategies. At every point strategies should be considered in the context of the 4 principles outlined earlier.
- **Research.** There is a tendency to either treat research findings as received dogmas, or to reject them completely if they fail to match preconceptions. This is a fallacious view of what research is about. Research findings are often very specific to a particular context, and are not easily transferable to other schools. They often conflict with other findings. It is best to treat findings as cognitive resources; a useful approach is to look at what has been reported as working elsewhere then carefully and reflectively considered (in the light of the 4 principles) how these might be adapted to work in your school/department.
- **Teacher learning.** Spillane (1999) talks about developing capacity and will to enact change. Both elements are important, and are inextricably linked. Good CPD develops capacity. Chartered teacher courses have been successful at enabling teachers to look with fresh eyes at their practice and the education environment. Increased knowledge and understanding of learning processes may then result in a new willingness to engage with different practices; alternatively it may prompt teachers to look anew at and refine existing practices. Either way the result is often improved learning experiences for students.
- **Time.** May reforms founder because they are rushed through, leaving inadequate time for planning, professional dialogue and reflection. It important to set challenging, but realistic timescales for innovation.

Slide 16

This diagram represents the development cycle. This should be an ongoing cycle in the enactment of any reform. Impetus (i.e. the action plan for classroom implementation) should be accompanied by appropriate scaffolding (e.g. materials and resources for teachers students) and systematic evaluation of the intervention (recording results, team meetings etc). This process then feeds back into the initiative which may be tweaked in the

light of experience, then reintroduced into the classroom. And so on....

Slide 17

This is not a top down or bottom up approach. Both have been shown to be problematic in isolation. It is a combination of the two, which recognises the important role to be played by classroom teachers, school managers and policymakers. All parties should accept that the outcomes of innovation may be very different than the original intentions, as this is an organic process. Again reference needs to be made to the 4 underlying principles. If one loses sight of these, then there is a real danger that the strategies become the ends of the innovation, rather than the means.

Slide 18

Activity 2

This second activity helps people to focus on the factors that promote or impede change. These are often very specific to schools and departments, and a clear identification of them can act as a major catalyst to promote an innovation. The activity also enables people to start thinking about strategies which may be adopted to facilitate change.

The activity can be a paper carousel, if working with multiple groups. Groups get a set time to set out their ideas on flipchart paper, then the papers are circulated between groups, who can then identify ideas that have not previously occurred to them. This activity can provide the basis for the first stage of a development cycle.

As with activity one, this slide can be modified to take account of local circumstances.

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