Planned Educational Change and Models of Professional Communication

What kind of change in the structures of special education will emerge out of the process of review currently under way? Will change proceed from the top down or evolve out of a planned system of communication between teachers and decision makers which acknowledges the concerns and expertise of the practitioners?

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INTRODUCTION

"Change...is likely to happen...and the imperative at this point is that it be coordinated or in the basic meaning of the word, integrated." (McGee, 1990). McGee, makes the case that educational change in Ireland, particularly in the area of Special Needs, should have a planned approach. It might be of interest, then, to consider the process of planned change, and some models of professional communication which may be involved in its achievement.

THE REALITY OF CHANGE

Change implies a difference, or at least a modification or variation of what is there before change occurs. It is not concerned with a *desire* for change or with *intention* to change. It is not found in *talk* about change. It may be the outcome of these things, but until something becomes different or at least modified, change cannot be said to have taken place. Change can also be understood as bringing something new to what is already there. In this sense of modification, we call change innovation.

Change can be the desire of principals, or it can emerge from the dissatisfaction of pawns. It can occur spontaneously or it can be planned.

In the field of education, planned change is linked with power and control. Power

can be seen to rest where control of public funds rests, with Government. If you pay the piper, you can call the tune. But between Government and classroom stretches a hierarchy of individuals and groups, each eager to defend their own small share of power, each anxious to justify their existence. Planned change must filter through these channels, arriving often in a modified and ineffective form to those people who were its target and to those who were to implement it.

CHANGE AS PROCESS

Change is never sudden, though sometimes it may appear so. It results from a build-up of forces, opinions, demands that can occur in a structure as seemingly static as an inactive volcano. The day comes when these pressures are too much for the structure, and then they change it. The longer they have been suppressed and the stronger they are, the more violent will be the resulting change. Every volcano is not a Krakatoa. When the pressure is less, change can occur quietly, with minimal disturbance to the structure.

So change is not an event or happening. It is a process. In education there must be dynamism if for no better reason than that stasis is impossible. So change is continual as further improvements or modifications are pursued. What is needed for this process to take place is dissemination of information. At professional level such dissemination can take many directions.

Winn states, (1987, p.10), "Planned dissemination is the delivery to a target group of people by other members of a field (often their superiors) of information relating to and intended to bring about a certain kind of innovation." So those who plan change must also plan for dissemination of information. Winn makes a distinction between "planned dissemination," and "the normal everyday process of dissemination." But where change is planned, dissemination of information must also be planned.
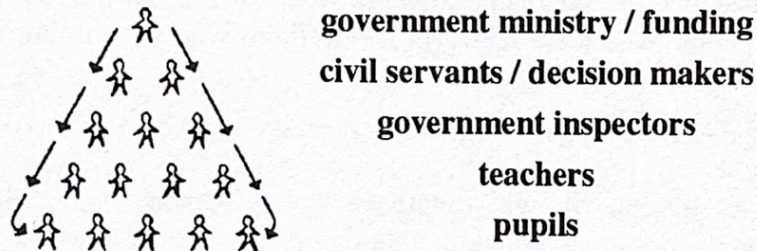
MODELS OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATION FOR PLANNED CHANGE

Without communication there can be no planned change, or much change at all beyond change at a personal level. That is why models of dissemination of information have been the object of study and research. Havelock, (1971, cited by Dawtrey, 1987, p.7), examines the research, development and diffusion model of dissemination, to which Dawtrey adds a fourth stage, that of adoption. This model presupposes expertise in the researcher and passive acceptance in the user/practitioner. It is a top-down or "cascade" model, and is seen in such

planned changes as the Education Reform Act 1988 (Britain) or the National Curriculum (Britain).

TOP DOWN OR CASCADE MODEL

government ministry / funding

civil servants / decision makers

government inspectors

teachers

pupils

Havelock (Ibid, p.7), also describes a social-interaction model of information dissemination, in which he sees personal contact as essential, within a social network.

SOCIAL INTERACTION MODELS

OR
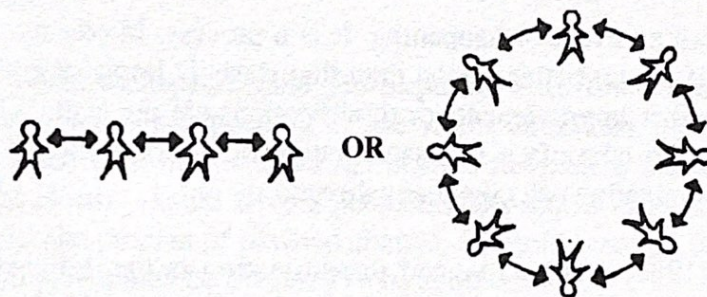
Dawtrey (1987, p.7) comments, "The social network that is supposed to help implementation can easily collapse and, as a result, very little change may occur." These models, and Havelock's other idea of a problem-solving model, all rely on outside "experts" providing information and solutions.

Havelock's fourth model, the linking-agent or facilitator, provides coordination to widespread change, and may be implemented by such intermediaries as Government inspectors, advisers, or other area supervisors.

Schon's (1971, cited Dawtrey, 1987, p.8) concern with diffusion of innovation prompted the model he calls the centre-periphery model. This model again sees power at the source.

CENTRE PERIPHERY MODEL
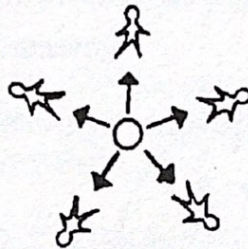
Dawtrey cites him as isolating four factors "critical to the effectiveness" of this model:
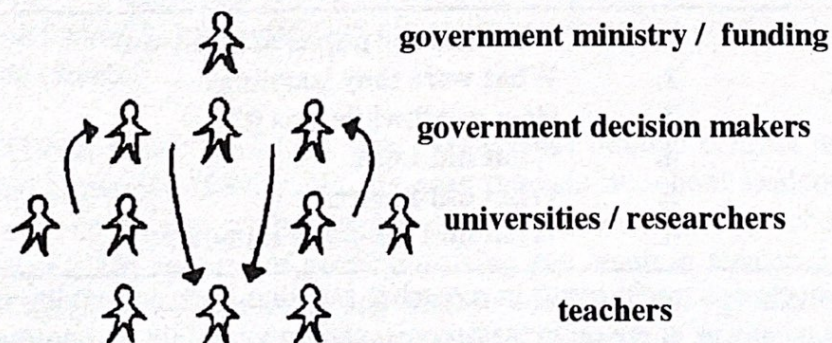
1. "level of resources and energy at centre
2. number of points at periphery
3. length of radii along which diffusion travels
4. energy required to gain new adoption."

WHAT OF THE PLANNERS?

Who plans change? What triggers the planning? How are decisions arrived at as to the what and the how of this change?
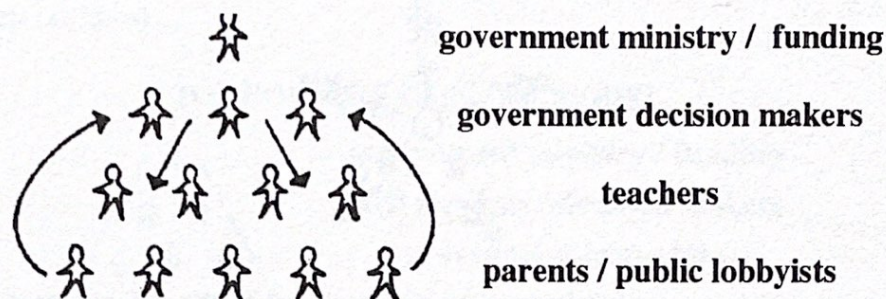
Weiss and Bucuvalas, (1980, cited Winn, 1987, p.11), describe those who decide change as "interpreting and integrating all the various information they acquire into their existing stock of knowledge, this stock forming the intellectual capital on which they subsequently draw in the regular course of their work." In describing decision-makers as acquiring information, Weiss and Bucuvalas seem to suggest that in either the cascade model of Havelock or the centre-periphery model of Schon, there must be more than a one-way traffic of information.
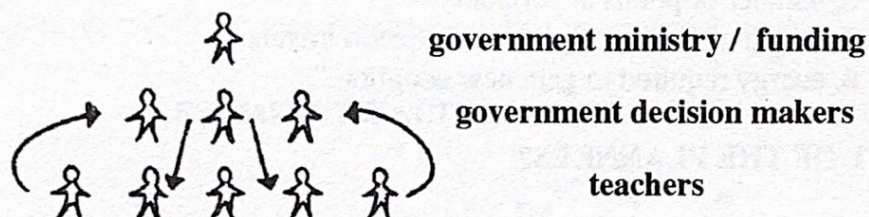
THE ACADEMIC EXPERT MODEL

government ministry / funding

government decision makers

universities / researchers

teachers

THE VOX POPULI MODEL

government ministry / funding

government decision makers

teachers

parents / public lobbyists

THE PREFERRED, OR 'STENHOUSE' MODEL

government ministry / funding

government decision makers

teachers

"Decision-makers" are those who sit on committees to produce reports, or those, for example, concerned recently with the formulation of the British National Curriculum. Where does the information come from in the light of which decisions for change are made? It would seem that in the classroom the teacher *is* the professional, and that input from "experts" who are not school teachers is merely the interference of one group in the affairs of another. "Curriculum in Action," (1981, cited by Dawtrey, 1987, p.15), suggests a research technique for teachers based on the following questions:

QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM EVALUATION

1.	What did the pupils actually do?
2.	What were they learning?
3.	How worthwhile was it?
4.	What did I do?
5.	What did I learn?
6.	What do I intend to do now?

These questions might result in a teacher standing back and taking an objective look at what was going on in classrooms, and how it might be improved. Perhaps

what is needed to determine what change is *best*, is a committee of teachers to receive and analyse data from teachers working in classrooms.

Stenhouse (1987, p.451), states, "In an age of accountability, educational research will be held accountable for its relevance to practice and that relevance can only be validated by practitioners".

INEFFECTIVE/EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE

Lee (1987, p.12 ff), cites the Newbolt Report and the Bullock Report as documents that either failed to produce intended change or produced only marginal modifications.

Lee (Ibid p.11) cites Baldick 1983, p.94, as arguing that the Newbolt Report became a "guiding influence in the development of English in schools and ...in the universities." However, Lee remarks that there was "no dramatic and immediate change". He says, "The Newbolt Report had recommended the integration of reading and literature, for example, but many schools still kept them separate."

The Bullock Report, though praiseworthy in its aims, does not appear to have achieved greater success. Lee (Ibid p.11) says: "It does not appear to have been read and acted on by teachers ás fully as it deserves."

Another example of unsuccessful dissemination resulting in minimal change was the Haringey Reading Project (Tizard and Hewison 1981, cited Dawtrey, 1987). The remarkable results of reading scores being raised from well below average to well above it, published when government ministers were under attack about falling standards of literacy, did not bring about more than local, spasmodic change. Dawtrey (Ibid p.11) cites Bennett and Desforges 1985, "...those to whom the information is addressed are unwilling to give it their full attention," and Dawtrey concludes, "...even effective dissemination does not necessarily mean adoption and change."

Stenhouse (1984) states, "...change most often comes through conflict within a staff." (cited Dawtrey, 1987, p.31). He sees the role of school leadership as managing such conflict to produce improved performance. Dawtrey echoes this when she says, "The process of problem-solving can result in tension, conflict and stress." (p.23). She sees curricular change occurring with greater success when all concerned "use group problem-solving" to resolve issues "that have

been negotiated and agreed upon as important to that particular school." (Ibid).

Fullan states, (cited Dawtrey, 1987, p.19), "Successful educational change involves two components: a theory of education relating to *what* should change and a theory of change concerning *how* to bring about change." Fullan outlines four phases, through which he sees change occurring:

    1. initiation: period when decisions are made to go ahead, and plans formulated and developed,

    2. implementation: plans must be translated into practice,

    3. continuation: evaluation is necessary during this phase,

    4. outcome: this is gauged through immediate and long-term effects, and these too must be evaluated,

Perhaps Dawtrey's idea of group problem-solving as an instrument of change is the one which is best suited to combat what Handy, 1984, (cited Dawtrey, 1987, p.19), calls "the privacy of the classroom." Educational change need not stop at

curriculum change. An effective modus operandi occurring in one classroom or one school is surely worthy of broadcast to others.

The British National Curriculum, unlike the Newbolt, Bullock and other reports, is to be backed up by testing and assessments. Schools producing poor results may fail to attract pupils. Teachers whose pupils' results are poor may find themselves under pressure. These measures should ensure that all teachers and all schools become aware of the dictates of the National Curriculum. They can be seen as a spur or an incentive, in either case resulting in better uptake of information by those for whom it is intended. It remains to be seen how far this uptake translates into change.

CHANGE AND PROGRESS

Change can be for the worse as well as for the better. It must not be confused with progress. Fullan does not see change for the sake of change as desirable. "Educational innovations are not ends in themselves." (Dawtrey, 1987, p.19). As Dawtrey points out, "...resisting change can sometimes be more progressive than accepting it." (Ibid).

SUMMARY

Change has to *happen* before it is change. It can be instigated from above or below. Planned change usually comes from above and is linked with power and control.

Change is a process kept alive by constantly building pressures. It is essential in education, which cannot remain static.

Modes of information dissemination necessary to change, show different directions of information flow. In planned change it seems to flow downwards.

Those who plan and design change also need information. Suggested sources are from academic experts, parents and lobbyists, and from teachers themselves. Stenhouse sees this last as the most desirable.

Attempts at change can produce very little of it, as seen in the Newbolt and the Bullock Reports. Greater success can be achieved by group-work in or between schools. Change is a social process.

The British National Curriculum, a top-down model, calls for testing and assessment, which may provide teachers/schools with the motivation to seek information in the curriculum and to implement it.

FINAL QUESTIONS

1. If planned change occurs in Ireland in the Special Needs area, will the decision-makers, perhaps those forming the commission envisaged by McGee, seek information via the "Stenhouse Model" shown above, or will they be content with the academic model which has so often prevailed in the past?

2. Will Special Educational change ever be planned? The danger that change will continue with a high degree of ad hoc-ism is all too real. As McGee (1990) states, "If we simply stumble into substantial change, we are not likely to do well".

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