Inclusive and exclusive educational change: emotional responses of teachers and implications for leadership

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This article reports research results concerning one of the most important areas of leadership theory and practice, educational change and its impact upon teachers. Drawing on individual interviews with 50 varied teachers in 15 Canadian elementary and secondary schools, as well as supplementary focus groups, the article analyses teacher’s emotional responses to educational change. The paper finds that while teachers report having largely positive emotional experiences of self-initiated change and predominantly negative ones concerning mandated change, almost half the examples of self-initiated change that are cited actually have a legislated, mandated origin. More important for the experience and management of change, therefore, is not so much whether change is external or internal in its source, but whether it is inclusive or exclusive in its design and conduct. Implications of this analysis are drawn for educational leadership at the school and system levels.

Introduction

Change and emotion are inseparable. Each implicates the other. Both involve movement. Change is defined as ‘movement from one state to another’, while emotion comes from the Latin *emovere*, meaning ‘to arouse or stir up’. There is no human change without emotion and there is no emotion that does not embody a momentary or momentous process of change.

Over the course of their careers, teachers encounter endless change. Some changes are embedded in the very nature of teachers’ work. Others are imposed upon it. The endings and beginnings of school life, like the close of a school year and of relationships with particular groups of children that are then followed by a new educational season with fresh relationships, are a routine, but nonetheless emotional part of the teaching life (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1983). Other changes, while more

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episodic, are often just as emotional, if not more so. Few teachers find that a change of principal, building, job, role or class does not impact on their feelings in some fundamental way.

Whatever the excitement of new opportunities, many changes that teachers and other adults encounter are accompanied by profound feelings of loss (Marris, 1974). Just as marriage means the loss of single-hood and the arrival of a new child heralds the suspension of many adult freedoms, so too does a new job or role entail abandoning all the familiar routines and relationships of an old one. The loss of a well-loved leader to promotion, retirement or death, for example, can lead to feelings of anxiety, insecurity and even abandonment, especially if the tie between leader and follower has cultivated excessive dependency (Fink & Brayman, in press; Loader, 1997; Hargreaves, in press). Equally, frequent and repeated rotations of leadership and the constant swings of emphasis in change and innovation that result can create such high levels of endemic insecurity in a staff, that teachers cynically learn to ‘harden’ themselves against all change and its champions (MacMillan, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, in press).

Psychologist Kurt Lewin said that there can be no change without pain (cited in Abrahamson, 2004, p.19). This is why support systems of training, mentoring, time and dialogue are so essential to successful change management, for they alleviate and make bearable the unavoidable pain and anxieties of change (Fullan & Stiegbauer, 1991; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). However, while most organizational and personal change involves some measure of pain, poorly conceived and badly managed change can inflict excessive and unnecessary emotional suffering. Writing from his experience of corporate consultancy, Abrahamson (2004) speaks of the frequency of repetitive-change syndrome. This involves two things:

- **initiative overload**: ‘the tendency ... to launch more change initiatives than anyone could ever reasonably handle’;

- **change-related chaos**: ‘the continuous state of upheaval that results when so many waves of initiatives have washed through the organization that hardly anyone knows which change they’re implementing and why’, and no-one remains to keep the organizational memory of how things get done. (Abrahamson, 2004, p. 3)

The resulting pain, says Abrahamson, is administratively unnecessary, organizationally disruptive and personally demoralizing. Most change may involve some pain, but the large-scale disruptions of organizational restructuring and re-engineering create far too much of it, to the organization’s and its employees’ cost. Large-scale educational reform has been a prime and tragic example of this.

When educators think about educational change, the first thing that comes to mind is usually external rather than internal change (Goodson, 2001), the change of legislated or mandated reform, rather than self-generated or professionally (rather than governmentally) initiated innovation. Despite their many advocates and defenders (e.g. Elmore & Burney, 1997; Fullan, 2000; Barber, 2001), in the period of large-scale educational reform that began in the 1990s legislated educational change initiatives have had largely emotionally negative and painful effects on teachers. In
the UK large-scale curriculum reform coupled with standardized testing and market competitive forms of accountability have led to feelings of demoralization (Nias, 1991) and senses of lost confidence (Helsby, 1999) among many teachers. Woods and his colleagues identified a range of teacher responses to reform, but it was the more emotionally negative ones of retreatism and resignation that increasingly prevailed over time (Woods et al., 1997; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Troman & Woods, 2000). Reform strategies in Australia in the 1990s similarly created disabling degrees of teacher stress (Dinham & Scott, 1997) and also pressed many women leaders to engage in the draining emotional labour of modelling optimism and motivating their staff to change when deteriorating work conditions pushed them in the opposite direction (Blackmore, 1996). In New York State and Ontario, Canada, Hargreaves (2003) and his colleagues found that standardized reform policies led to teachers losing their confidence, having less time to meet and converse with their colleagues or the community, feeling abused and degraded by the derogatory tones of government reformers, becoming increasingly mistrustful of politicians and administrators and their professed purposes for change and being more inclined to resign and take early retirement as a result.

Emotional disappointment with reform (Little, 1996) arises not just because of the unwanted imposition of reform demands, but also because of the cumulative effects of their repetitive, contradictory and evanescent nature. These patterns of repetitive change syndrome are particularly felt by an ageing and maturing workforce where later career teachers are more likely to respond to repetitive change through disengagement from, disenchantment with or cynicism about educational change in general (Riseborough, 1980; Huberman, 1993; Bailey, 2000). Many of these teachers also compensate for increasingly embittered senses of the present by indulging nostalgically in idealized recollections of their more mission-driven pasts (Goodson et al., in press).

The emotional aspects of change, therefore, often surface in studies of large-scale reform, but these are largely incidental findings rather than integral to the design of the studies themselves. This is true of writing on the emotional aspects of teaching and leading generally (for a full review see Hargreaves, 2000, 2001). Most work in this area is either theoretically reflective or speculative (e.g. Elbaz, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Clark, 1995; van Manen, 1995), grounded in autobiography or advocacy (e.g. Fried, 1995; Fullan, 1997; Loader, 1997), a by-product of a differently focused research programme (e.g. Nias, 1991; Blackmore, 1996; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Little, 1996), a synthesis of examples drawn from secondary data sets (e.g. Day, 2004) or a concentrated analysis of specific aspects of emotionality such as caring (Acker, 1992), sacrifice (Grumet, 1998), vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996; Laskey, 2000), guilt (Hargreaves, 1994) or stress (Dinham & Scott, 1997). Among the very few studies explicitly designed to investigate the emotional life of teachers are Beatty's investigations of teachers' emotional experiences of their leaders and both teachers' and leaders' emotional epistemologies (Beatty, 2002), Hargreaves and his colleagues' analysis of the emotional practice of teaching and of the emotional geographies of closeness and distance that characterize teachers'
relations with those around them (Hargreaves, 1998, 2000, 2001]; Lasky, 2000; Schmidt, 2000) and Sleegers’ (2001) exploratory studies in The Netherlands of how teachers’ emotions are shaped by their capacity to achieve their goals (see also Lazarus, 1991).

This article reports some of the results of a study which had the explicit purpose of investigating the emotional aspects of teaching. It concentrates in particular on those parts of the study that addressed teachers’ emotional experiences of educational change.

Design and methodology

The data on which the article is based are drawn from a study of the emotions of teaching and educational change which comprised interviews with 50 teachers in a range of elementary and secondary schools in the province of Ontario in Canada. The sample was distributed across 15 varied schools of different levels, sizes and serving different kinds of communities (i.e. urban, rural, suburban). In each school we asked principals to identify a sample of up to four teachers that included the oldest and youngest teachers in the school, was gender mixed, contained teachers with different orientations to change, represented a range of subject specializations (within secondary schools) and (where possible) included at least one teacher from an ethnocultural minority.

The interviews lasted for 60 to 90 minutes and concentrated on eliciting teachers’ reports of their emotional relationships to their work, their professional development and educational change. A substantial part of the interview posed specific questions to teachers about their experiences of educational change. Teachers were asked what they understood by the term ‘educational change’, they were asked to describe educational changes to which they had felt positive and negative emotional responses, respectively, and they were invited to describe instances of self-initiated and mandated change along with their emotional reactions to them.

While one-time interviews have limitations as ways of getting others to access and disclose their own emotions (and we therefore complemented our methodology with a longer term discussion group), they do bring to light new topics and themes in previously unexplored areas and they enable initial patterns and variations in teachers’ emotions to be identified across different school contexts and different kinds of teachers. Also, while reliance on critical episodes and general perceptions cannot verify overall frequencies of emotional reactions and experiences, they do highlight what teachers find emotionally significant and compelling in their work. Interviews were supplemented with a series of four focus group discussions with one small group of teachers to explore some emotional issues in educational change in greater depth.

Because the interviews were semi-structured, questions were not put to participants in identical order and were sometimes embedded in or dealt with within interviewers’ responses to other questions. For these reasons, when results are
presented in quantified form, the total number of interviewees sometimes varies between questions.

The interviews were analysed inductively with the assistance of the computer program Folio Views. Data were extracted electronically, then marked, coded and grouped into increasingly larger themes, ensuring that all identified pieces of data were accounted for and included in the framework.

The policy and reform context at the time of our study was one in which a transition had occurred between two starkly contrasting government agendas. Until the mid 1990s a broadly socialist government in Ontario had developed a wide-ranging, criteria-based common curriculum, new reporting initiatives and benchmark testing in the elementary years, along with a mandated Common Curriculum with integrated elements, alternative assessment and legislated destreaming in Grade 9. This had been followed by a conservative government with an agenda that abolished destreaming, made severe cutbacks in the educational budget, merged school boards, extended and tightened testing and started to replace broad-based outcomes with tightly prescribed standards.

The theoretical framework for this social and organizational analysis of teachers' emotions in a context of reform is broadly social constructionist (Denzin, 1984), where the emotions that people experience are understood as integral to the interactions between them and to the organizational, social and cultural contexts in which emotion occurs (for further details see Hargreaves, 2001).

The analysis presented here is organized according to one of the most significant emerging themes, teachers' differing emotional experiences of educational change in terms of whether change is mandated or self-initiated. The analysis has direct and indirect implications for educational leadership in schools and in governments, which are discussed in the concluding section of the article.

The meaning of change

Educational change is not a self-evident, commonly agreed or technically straightforward process:

Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. (Fullan, 1982, p. 4)

One of the first concerns that people have about any change is its effect on themselves (Hall & Hord, 1987). As one of our teachers said, 'You kind of worry and think, how's this going to affect me?' Therefore, before we examined how teachers responded to others' constructions of change, we set out to understand what 'educational change' meant to them first.

Sixty per cent of the teachers we interviewed associated educational change overwhelmingly with external, legislated, government-imposed change. Only two did so in a positive, approving manner. Eight other teachers outside this group of 30 defined their meaning of educational change in terms of contrasts between un-
wanted external change, on the one hand, and desired and approved of internal or self-initiated change, on the other. External change was associated with ‘politics’, ‘political games’ and being a ‘political football’. It was initiated by governments, bureaucrats, the Minister and an ominous, Orwellian ‘they’ who, as ‘crazy whackos’, did ‘crazy things’, such as imposing non-viable programmes, reducing resources and filling up time with ‘administrative crap’.

Through references to proverbial pendulums, bandwagons and things that ‘go around and come around’ as a ‘whole sweeping new thing’, a dozen teachers (virtually a quarter of the sample), associated change with the dysfunctions of repetitive change syndrome (Abrahamson, 2004) with its elements of change-related chaos and initiative overload. A mature entrant to elementary teaching who had been in the profession just 2 years and was otherwise optimistic about the future of technologically driven change nevertheless reflected that

As I talk to teachers who have been teaching a long time, they say, ‘in the 20 years that I have been teaching, I have done eight educational changes that were going to revolutionize teaching’. I think that the concept of educational change has worn teachers down to expect something that is going to be very temporary and that something else is going to be coming down the road, so we shouldn’t get too enthused about it: we should continue to do what we really do and we will just sort of outlast this change. (T4)

Other corroborated this perception. A high school teacher confessed to ‘a bit of eye-rolling sometimes’. ‘You just seem to get a program going’ he said ‘and ... things change’ (T17). Another high school teacher felt that educational change meant ‘a new benchmark, a new thrust, something new every year (which) ... doesn’t go down well with me’ (T10). A third teacher complained that ‘you just kind of get a handle on it and then it changes and it’s not really new. It’s something that’s already been done’ (T15).

One of our focus group discussions highlighted how repetitive change could create profound senses of professional anxiety about and disenchantment with change among teachers.

If a person is a really gung ho person, if they really try and go out of their way to find resources for their classroom, to develop really neat experiences for the kids to the best of their ability ... then the next year they are told one way or another that everything that they’ve developed is now obsolete. It’s hard to build new units with those experiences. There comes a point ... you are starting to feel kind of cynical.

While many change theorists argue that change is part of a general movement in society towards chaos, complexity and conditions of constant change (see, for example, Fullan, 1997), our respondents saw change as an external force whose agency and authority rested in governments and bureaucracies. Change happened when ‘the government’ was at it again ... trying to do the latest ...’ (T51).

Well, when I hear educational change, I think, ‘again?’ Because it’s constantly changing. With every government, it’s like starting fresh, and that’s really frustrating because nothing gets done, and people stop getting excited about it because they think, in
another four years another change is going to happen which will totally be different. (T9)

You know what? I think it’s all the crazy things that they’re trying to do at this level ... (in Grades 7/8). Another five years down the road, it’s going to change again’. And we never saw anything that was that positive that it needed to be changed. This is the worst thing about it. Why change it ... unless you know it’s going to be successful, it’s going to get more students learning better. (T52)

All but two of these 12 teachers who defined change in terms of repetitive reform movements were over 40 years old, in mid or late career. Their understandings of change had been formed through recurrent experiences of disjointed and disappointing external reform initiatives over the years. These accumulated, career-long experiences made them into the always circumspect and sometimes cynical later career teachers described by Huberman (1993).

Repetitive change was not the only negative attribution attached to the meaning of educational change. Seven teachers identified two starkly contrasting meanings of educational change where change was seen as

‘keeping up with the times and changing your teaching routines and techniques’ versus ‘having a political side to it all ... (where) there’s a game going on and ... politicians just seem to change like the wind’; (T7)

‘things that you actually do yourself’ versus ‘people doing (it) to you’; (T32)

‘change that is driven by myself and classroom teachers in collaboration to develop curriculum and better meet the needs of students’ versus ‘change that is driven by people who have never been in the classroom’; (T20)

‘more emphasis on teacher as facilitator rather than as educator’ versus ‘(the Minister) and cuts’; (T42)

‘if we are talking classroom practices—it depends on the issue’ versus ‘if we are talking politics—slash and burn’. (T48)

Positive change in these cases was self-driven, connected to teaching and learning and professionally current. Conversely, negative change was seen to be driven by governments and bureaucracies who not only failed to understand classroom practice but also actively withdrew support from it in order to implement other non-educational agendas. In two cases these contrasting conceptualizations of change were not only ones of good and bad, but also of past and present.

In the past, I would have described (educational change) as something good ... that we are moving forward; we are implementing new and refreshing ideas. Nowadays, I would probably say we’re heading in the wrong direction ... (doing) what government wants us to do. (T11)

Normally, you felt (educational change) was probably going to be a curriculum change that was designed to promote learning. Now educational change may be more a financially driven constraint (T6).

If worthwhile change patterns and good change intentions belonged in the past for these teachers, they still persisted in the present for a few colleagues who cast the
meaning of educational change in a more positive light. Eleven teachers (22% of the sample) assigned unequivocally positive meanings to their understandings of educational change. Change for these teachers was about having ‘a real opportunity to grow’, to learn new knowledge and skills that was ‘really exciting’ (T31). Change offered ‘growth’, ‘a learning experience’, even in adverse circumstances (T37). Change meant ‘an evolution’, involving ‘growth and development’ by looking at ‘the big picture’ of where society was going (T18). Change gave educators ‘an opportunity … to sit down as a group and collaboratively make changes themselves without being forced’ (T43) and to get ‘a little more help’ (as one relatively inexperienced teacher reflected) with standards frameworks and a Common Curriculum (T44).

In addition to the benefits for teachers of self-initiation, collaborative engagement and outside support, the most commonly cited positive meanings of change were those associated with benefits for students. Here, teachers could focus on ‘how I can change my practice in the classroom … (and) help students to learn’ (T33), on ‘looking at what the students need and altering what we’re doing to meet those needs’ (T40) and on ‘maximizing the opportunity for students to learn’ (T4).

A teacher in an innovative high school expressed these sentiments in the most optimistic terms.

For me it’s exciting because I see these kids and … I can see how they’ve changed through the years. And I like this (Government) change. It’s not a frightening change for me. It’s a good change. So, you know, I’m not frightened by it because I know that we as teachers can influence that change anyway. (T25)

Interestingly, of those who attached uniformly positive connotations to the meaning of educational change, all five elementary teachers were female. Among the six high school teachers (who had a greater gender mix), only one teacher taught a mainstream subject—the rest being distributed across guidance, physical education, business studies and integrated programmes.

Educational change for today’s teacher, it seems, is largely conceived of as external change that is unwanted, imposed, repetitious and sometimes repellent, compared with more professionally positive, self-directed change realities in the past.

**Mandated and self-initiated change**

**Mandated change**

After asking teachers about their understandings of educational change in general, we asked them more specifically to talk about an example of mandated change and another of self-initiated change in which they had been involved.

Only five teachers (two elementary school and three high school teachers early in their career or in innovative schools) were unreservedly positive about the mandated change examples they provided. Among the 26 high school teacher interviewees, the remaining responses were predominantly critical, even when concessions were acknowledged, although five teachers (none in the oldest age group and all but one
of them women) did blame their colleagues for not giving the socialist government’s previous reforms a try. While recognizing that teachers had not been consulted by the reformers and had been overwhelmed by the workload, a vocational teacher reflected that ‘everybody’s a little bit afraid of change’ and that ‘people were saying right from the outset that this isn’t going to work: of course, therefore, it didn’t work’. Consequently, he was ‘disappointed that we hadn’t given it more of a positive try’ (T50). A guidance teacher who normally felt ‘very comfortable with change’ and who would ‘buy into it, then feel like it’s not required’, complained that he had problems with ‘stubborn people who refuse to realize it’s here, we might as well make it work—and who fight against it and sabotage it’ by teaching destreamed courses as if they were advanced ones (T19). Meanwhile, a younger teacher who identified herself as Generation X and part of ‘a generation that is used to change’ felt she ‘cannot make people do something that they don’t want to ... I can’t do more than simply set an example and encourage them’ (T48). Another young colleague who was willing to try destreaming felt she ‘trying to do something no-one else in my department is doing, which was ‘frustrating’. ‘There has to be change’ she said ‘and it’s not coming fast enough’ (T49).

Nineteen out of the 26 high school teachers (73%) cited Government reform, and particularly the socialist government’s Grades 7–9 reform, as their example of mandated change. Teachers who were unreservedly opposed to these reforms most often taught mainstream subjects such as mathematics, science and history. Nine of the 11 teachers (88%) who offered at least some praise for these policies and their impact were women, five of the 11 (44%) came from the three non-traditional schools in the sample and all but three taught in minority subject areas as counselors, family studies teachers or teacher librarians, for example.

The major causes of negative emotions among the high school teachers who were critical of the mandated change instances they described were being forced to change without consultation (four teachers, a surprisingly small number), not being able to teach all students effectively because of the poor design of the changes (eight teachers), but, mainly, working in a reform environment characterized by too much pressure and insufficient support, in terms of work overload, excessive marking, intolerable pace, shortage of time, poor implementation or weak leadership (10 teachers).

This constellation of criticisms and complaints was crystallized in teachers’ emotional responses to change. Twelve out of 41 instances of emotions that teachers in the full sample named when they were discussing mandated change were emotions of frustration. One of the key factors (some theorists argue the only factor) that shapes and drives people’s emotions is the extent to which they can fulfil or are prevented from fulfilling their goals (Lazarus, 1991; Sleegers, 2001). Although this claim has been exaggerated, in that it does not deal well with a number of other emotions, such as disgust, for example (Oatley, 1991), achievement of or failure to achieve purposes is one of the three prime social-psychological determinants of human emotion, the other two being the exercise or effects of power and the strength or weakness of communication and relationships (Oatley, 1991; Hargreaves
While fulfilled and fulfilling purposes lead to experiences of satisfaction, pride and pleasure, purposes impeded by poor support, inadequate resources, insufficient time or obstructive power can and do lead to immense frustration. In the Emotions of Teaching study, the greatest frustrations were encountered in being required to teach destreamed classes in Grade 9.

It's frustrating. I've taught it and because of that I don't like it because I don't think it's fair to all students ... It was a change that we had to do. I find that very frustrating because you know what the guidelines are and you want to follow them—at least I do—and yet you can't follow them or give these kids what they need. (T16)

I didn't agree with de-streaming because it was a nightmare. We were mandated that this was going to happen. We knew that the program as it currently existed wouldn't work in a de-streamed sense (so) we spent hours and hours, and days and days, rewriting the program. If I don't agree with the philosophy then I find it really difficult because I am being asked to do something that I don't think works fundamentally even though I am making an effort to make it work. There has got to be some reason that they are introducing it. Trying to make it work and still seeing that it is not is very frustrating. (T2)

Emotions of frustration with unwanted or unclear purposes and poor implementation can quickly spiral into other, even more intense emotional responses. Among high school teachers these negative emotions were other-directed. They were targeted at the sources of teachers' reform frustrations. After frustration, anger and annoyance were the most commonly named negative emotions (5) in this respect, along with fear and hate (5). For some teachers it was educational change in general that would 'send shivers down (the) spine' (T20). Others felt 'anger and annoyance with the Ministry of Education' (T50) and were 'horrified' about their policies (T2) and experienced 'a lot of anger and disappointment' because of how the Ministry had imposed policies upon them. 'I try desperately to do something for these kids' one teacher exclaimed, 'but my hands are tied' by government policy. 'I hate it, I hate it' (T51).

If inexperienced or inappropriate school leaders could not help teachers weave a path through the mosaic of mandated change, it was they who became the target of teachers' internalized negative emotions. Thus, in a vocational school whose leaders had very little experience teaching vocational students, one teacher observed that

The stress and the pain of teaching is really about the pain of dealing with the adults. It's not the pain of dealing with kids ... it's the pain of dealing with the colleagues. It's the pain of dealing with a removed, detached and sometimes ... subjective ... administration. (T28)

Like their high school colleagues, elementary teachers also selected examples of mandated change that originated in the Government, in terms of changes in curriculum, assessment and reporting strategies and implementation of computer plans. Only two elementary teachers, both women, expressed no criticisms in their descriptions of mandated change. The emotional responses of nine of the elementary teachers were wholly negative, most of them (six) being late in their careers.
Another nine teachers had mixed feelings about mandated change, the majority of these (five) being in mid career. However, just one teacher affirmed the common administrative justification that while forced change created initial resistance, teachers eventually accepted and even appreciated it. This teacher described how she and her colleagues had been ‘forced’ by her principal to adopt a new literacy programme on a strict timescale. ‘They really had to push us to get it started’ she said ‘and he had to set deadlines to make it begin’.

But when we realized he was serious, he wasn’t going to back down, and was setting those dates to have the kids all plotted on the charts, then we were forced to get into it. And I think that now that we’ve been into it for a couple of years, we realize the benefit, and it is a good program. It was the transition of starting something new .... (T7)

In most other cases teachers deeply resented being forced to adopt questionable changes, for which they were given little support in an overloaded change environment. One mid career teacher spoke for many others when he commented:

I made a whole list here of changes in the past couple of years: the Common Curriculum, the new report card, the piloting of it, the new work ‘rubrics’ (I can’t stand that word anymore), portfolio assessment, writing scales, reading scales, scaled success of this school. A new math approach, the grade three assessments—these are all changes in the past couple of years. To me those are so-called educational changes. Not only do the teachers in this school have to deal with that but we have also had to deal with a new administrator who is new to administration. There has been a tremendous amount of change. (T5)

Another teacher in mid career commented that his literacy programme, which they were ‘required to do’, was ‘just another thing’ in a context where ‘every year there’s something different’ (T10). Report card checklists imposed by a district ‘that jumps on the bandwagon early’ and that were then superseded by provincial mandates presented a similar problem of repetitive change for another colleague who noted that ‘we’ve forced it on them and now there could be something totally different. It’s not good (and) it’s kind of, like, I knew it’ (T11). Other teachers described these and similar changes as ones that were ‘something else piled on that you had to learn about and you had to fit in somewhere in a day plan that already has so many different constraints’ (T32), as one of ‘so many initiatives’ (T30) that teachers often found were ‘already something you’ve been doing’ (T53).

In addition to emotions of frustration, which they shared with their high school colleagues as a reaction to mandated changes, elementary teachers’ other emotional responses were inner-directed, rather than other-directed, where anger and frustration were turned in upon the self and its relationships through feelings of upset, confusion, disappointment, discomfort and shame. The three most striking expressions of these emotions were from women in mid to late career (reflecting an observed tendency in gender and emotion, where men tend to turn anger and frustration outwards and blame others, while women turn negative emotions inwards and blame themselves) (Lupton, 1998)

A teacher close to retirement described how, after trying to get to grips with the
new framework of Learning Outcomes, ‘about Christmas, I was completely devast-
tated’. ‘I’m upset by this change after thirty years of teaching’ she continued (and) I feel a little bit out of control’ (T26). A colleague described how implementing a sexual abuse curriculum raised questions about the ‘comfortability factor’ for her (T32). A third teacher was exasperated by a new computer record card system that repeatedly crashed and often defeated her.

I ended up really around the bend, a basket case. I cried. I swore. I said, ‘that’s it’. I finally, believe it or not, went to the secretary and said, ‘I will pay you money to do my report cards’... I handed them over to her and she typed them... I was mad at myself. I felt I was stupid. (T39)

What then can we conclude about teachers’ emotional responses to specific examples of external mandated change? Emotional responses to mandated change are predominantly negative, occasionally mixed and seldom favourable. Mandated change is largely associated with legislated government reforms and reform processes. Mandated reforms are disliked and resented because they are either vague or wrong-headed and/or because they are forced upon teachers without their involve-
ment and are implemented poorly in excessively compressed timescales with insuffi-
cient resources and other support. Moreover, specific mandated changes are im-
posed and interpreted within a wider reform environment of excessive and repeti-
tive external change. Emotionally negative interpretations of mandated change are most likely to occur among teachers in mid to late career, who, when they work in high schools, are more likely to teach mainstream subjects and to work in more conventional organizational environments. Teachers who react negatively to mandated change are most likely to say they experience emotions of frustration that accompany and express their difficulty in achieving their own purposes and other people's agendas. In high schools teachers’ negative emotional responses tend to be expressed in anger and annoyance directed outwards towards government, bureau-
crats and school leaders they hold responsible for imposing and implementing reform. In elementary schools teachers, especially women, are more likely to turn their negative emotional reactions upon themselves through feelings of discomfort and upset (Lupton, 1998).

Positive emotional responses to mandated change are few and far between and even then are not at all effusive. They are most likely to be experienced and expressed by female teachers, by teachers who are sometimes in the early stages of their career and, in high schools, by non-mainstream teachers who work outside the core and most tightly tested and scrutinized subject areas or in more innovative organizational settings.

Self-initiated change

Before inviting teachers to talk about mandated change, we asked them to describe a significant change that they alone, or with colleagues, had decided to introduce over the previous 2 years. In contrast to their subsequent descriptions of mandated
change, teachers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic and animated about their experiences of self-initiated change. Out of 49 instances of named emotions associated with self-initiated change, 34 (80%) referred to experiences of pride, satisfaction and 'liking', as well as feelings of accomplishment, trust and excitement. Most of the positive emotional associations with self-initiated change were, as teachers saw it, related to the benefits of change for students and to how the change connected teachers to and led to recognition from their colleagues. Out of 49 cited benefits of self-initiated change in total, 24 of these (49%) referred to benefits for students and 15 (31%) referred to collegial benefits, with the small remainder being evenly divided between benefits for parents and for individual teachers themselves. High school teachers were more likely to cite benefits for students (16 out of 24, or two thirds of high school citations, compared with 32% of elementary teachers' citations), whereas elementary teachers were slightly more inclined to mention benefits for their relationships with and for recognition received from colleagues (10 out of 25 or 40% of citations, compared with 32% among high school teachers).

Paradoxically, while high school teachers were more likely to describe self-initiated change in terms of benefits for students, all but one of the examples they mentioned did not take place in direct relation to teaching and learning in the classroom. Thirteen out of 32 high school examples (46%) were concerned with curriculum issues such as new modules and programmes, seven (22%) were concerned with developing and applying new computer skills and eight (25%) involved initiatives in small group counselling, commitment to extracurricular activities, building a new basketball court or developing new behaviour codes and attendance procedures. In contrast, while elementary teachers were more inclined to talk about the positive impact of self-initiated change on their relationships with their colleagues, the focus of the changes was usually more explicitly instructional. Eight out of 21 elementary school examples (39%) had an instructional focus in areas such as cross-grade instruction for a Halloween project, implementing writing scales and other literacy strategies or developing students as researchers in kindergarten classes. The other areas of self-initiated change were evenly distributed among initiatives in curriculum and assessment development, creating new report cards, computer applications and student behavioural programmes.

These seemingly paradoxical patterns reinforce another part of the emotions of teaching database: that concerning teachers' emotional engagement with students. In high schools we found that teachers tend to derive satisfaction from their interactions and achievements with students outside the classroom in relation to behavioural, social and extracurricular activities. In contrast, elementary teachers seem to gain pride and satisfaction from working with their colleagues for their students in relation to learning and instructional improvement within the classroom (Hargreaves, 2000).

Whoever benefits, the satisfactions of self-initiated change for teachers themselves are not the pleasures of easy victories. Out of 43 teachers who felt able to discuss examples of self-initiated change, 15 (well over one-third) were pleased and proud to have overcome inherent difficulties, inner doubts and external suspicion and
resistance as they struggled to make their initiatives succeed. Interestingly, all but two of these teachers worked in high schools.

These experiences of positive emotion came from feelings of accomplishment, of achieving challenging goals and purposes (Lazarus, 1991) and from recognition and relationships that resulted from improved interactions with others (Oatley, 1991); all in the face of obstacles and adversity. For example, a young English teacher described how

T: When I first started teaching I designed the curriculum for a grade 10 basic and a grade 12 basic class that up to that point had been very inconsequential and not very concrete. I was very proud and confident of what I had done. When I had actually designed the program and implemented it into the classroom there were problems and I needed fine-tuning in it. I was able to implement those changes and I was even more proud of what I had done. I was able to look at the solutions to some of the problems that had come up and problem solve.

I: How do you feel about the change now?

T: I am very proud of it now because now I have given that to other teachers that are teaching the course and they have found it very key in the response that they have got from the students. (T18)

Similarly, a teacher who had introduced a programme for students to serve as student technicians described how the initiative had made him ‘excited’.

I knew that there would be challenges to overcome, that there would be training to make sure it happened, concerns about the maturity level of the students. Could they resist temptation once they were given supervisory passwords? So excitement but maybe trepidation (too). (T19)

Occasionally, teachers’ accomplishments were physical and visible; a new basketball court that teachers initially feared students might not use or a wetland project developed through a community service project where ‘there wasn’t a boardwalk yesterday and now there is’ (T21). More often, the accomplishments were more psychological, creating success for students and satisfaction for the teachers’ selves. A high school teacher who moved from individual to group counselling, for example, worried at first that there was ‘going to be an incredible amount of work’ and feared that ‘this might not work’. However, once students were ‘hurrying into this’, were ‘interested’ and ‘engaged’, then his emotions turned to a ‘feeling of excitement’ where he became ‘pumped up about the whole thing’ (T40). Similarly, a high school mathematics teacher who introduced more computer-based instruction into her classes felt ‘helter-skelter’ emotions when students froze the system or used incorrect protocols, but now she was able to enjoy responding to their learning questions instead of talking from the front (T34).

Senses of accomplishment also arise when teachers are able to convince and convert their colleagues about change and gain their respect as a result. Thus, an elementary teacher in her early 30s described how her work on implementing computer-based report cards not only ‘made my life so much easier’ but also enabled her ‘to encourage more (skeptical) people to do it’ (T11). Similarly, a
teacher in an innovative high school reflected that working with other teachers across curriculum boundaries to solve particular student learning problems meant ‘talking to teachers you don’t usually talk to ... so it felt forced, you know. (But) now it feels like ‘why hasn’t it always been like this?’ (T25).

Amid the evidence of success, satisfaction and triumph over adversity that characterized teachers’ largely positive emotional recollections of self-initiated change, a curious finding emerged concerning the commonly asserted contrast between self-initiated and mandated change. Goodson (2001) has compared the ‘strength of internal change agents to develop their own internal and personal visions of change’ to ‘externally initiated change’ in which ‘the committed internal change agent has become the (often) reluctant change exponent of externally generated plans’ (p. 48). This distinction has already been supported in the parts of our data set discussed earlier, where general statements about unwanted mandated change are counterposed against enthusiastic support for self-initiated change. However, when teachers were asked to describe specific and recent instances of self-initiated change in which they had been involved (and of which they subsequently seemed to approve), 39% (17 out of 44) so-called self-initiated changes actually had their origins in government and/or school district reform movements; in district and provisional literacy initiatives mediated by committees and consultants or in curriculum planning and pilot project opportunities accompanying the government’s common curriculum reform in learning outcomes, assessment and reporting strategies and destreamed classes.

Perhaps these patterns reflect the increasing encroachment of mandated change agendas on teachers’ choices, so that even their selections of self-initiated change are now contaminated by external elements. Perhaps they point to some teachers’ capacity to make change their own in the adaptation phase of dealing with it (Hall & Hord, 1987). Equally likely, though, is that the internal/external distinction may not be the most useful for understanding teachers’ change reactions. Few changes, especially in teaching and learning, do not have their original inspiration or instigation in a conference, a committee or an administrative policy. Government policies and district edicts do contain many of the threats listed earlier to teachers’ workload, purposes and priorities. However, where such policies are aligned with the interests and purposes of particular groups of teachers or create opportunities for them through pilot project grants, resource allocations or membership of programme writing committees, then they can lead teachers to internalize external changes. What seems to matter, therefore, is not so much whether changes are external or internal, but whether they exclude or include teachers’ purposes, commitments and capacities to change within reallocated timelines and resource allocations. While, unfortunately, as previous parts of the data set show, most external change has become equivalent to exclusionary change, this need not always be the case. External change can lead to positive and productive teacher emotions if it is inclusive of teachers’ purposes, respectful of their priorities and sensitive to their working and implementation conditions. In all this, the importance of teachers’ feeling that, whatever the obstacles or the difficulties, they are still driving the change
themselves cannot be overstated if change is to secure positive emotional engagement from them. Thus, after creating a reading center in her class, a relatively new elementary teacher reflected how she 'felt proud that I understood and appreciated the individual needs of the children in the classroom, that their needs were more important than any needs as a teacher' (T4). And an experienced high school English teacher who was developing standards with the district for reading and writing in Grade 9 'liked it very much because it was a far superior standard from the provincial one. I am quite glad to see it ... working in the school' (T42).

What, then, can we conclude about the emotional dimensions of self-initiated change and its distinctions from mandated change? Emotional responses to self-initiated change are predominantly positive. This does not mean they are easily achieved, since pride and satisfaction for almost 40% of teachers came from surmounting initial obstacles, doubts and difficulties.

Self-initiated change is not change that feels forced or is educationally questionable. It is change that creates positive emotions by fulfilling teachers' purposes (through compatible goals and supportive conditions) and by connecting them to and granting them recognition from their colleagues. Self-initiated change is embraced by all teachers, high school and elementary, male and female, young and old, although high school teachers are more likely to become involved in changes that benefit their students outside the classroom, while elementary teachers derive satisfaction from becoming more involved with their colleagues on changes that improve teaching and learning within the classroom.

Compared with the contemporary tides of mandated large-scale reform, the emotional satisfactions of self-initiated change are considerable. Yet this does not necessarily outlaw the value of external change altogether. On close inspection many self-initiated changes have their origin in external reform initiatives. In other areas of our protocol this is what we also found when we asked teachers to describe incidences of educational change that were emotionally positive and negative for them, respectively. The examples of emotionally negative change that teachers described were, in all cases but one, examples of mandated change. Yet many of the emotionally positive examples of change also had a mandated origin. Sixty-one per cent of high school teachers' emotionally positive incidents had their origin in Government reforms, for example. What seems to matter most for teachers' emotional investment and reward, therefore, is not whether changes are external or internal, but whether they include or exclude their professional purposes and considerations of the realities of their working lives.

Discussion

The paradox of mandated government change is that it is a significant source of both negative and positive emotion among high school teachers, as well as a stimulus for what many teachers regard as being self-initiated change. High school teachers, we saw earlier, resent such change because it is experienced as alien, imposed,
over-pressurizing and under-supported. Yet, it can also be valued when it is seen to have benefits for students and teachers alike. When specifically asked about mandated change, the few teachers who were more inclined to support it tended to be in non-traditional schools or low status subject areas. Similarly, several of the teachers who associated positive emotional experiences of educational change with mandated reform also worked in these settings. The reforms they supported aligned with their own inclinations and interests. Thus, two teachers in a vocational school appreciated legislated destreaming in Grade 9 because it was ‘giving these kids more of a chance’ (T9). They also welcomed a new emphasis on work education, because treating ‘school as university preparation’ had rarely benefited their students (T40). Teachers in business studies, guidance, family studies and technology also approved of the government’s reforms because they validated their own skills, beliefs and practices in terms of promoting collaboration with other teachers and finding ways to motivate less academic students.

In a number of other areas, though, the positive emotions shown towards instances that originated in government-mandated change were far less animated and effusive than in teachers’ earlier descriptions of their experiences of self-initiated change. Some teachers really had to cast around to identify any example of emotionally positive change at all. One dredged up an example of mandated change from many years previously. Others confessed at first that they couldn’t ‘really think of one off the top of my head’ or eventually returned to examples described earlier in the interviews. It is worth recalling that four high school teachers did not feel any change had been positive for them and that two others felt it was too early in their career to comment.

All in all, then, it is not so much the presence of mandated reform as a source of positive change that is most striking, but the absence of its alter ego, self-initiated change. Earlier we saw that almost 40% of the examples of self-initiated change cited by high school teachers were actually mandatory in origin. Perhaps this is a sign that there is less purely self-initiated change than many might imagine, that, historically, many seemingly self-initiated changes have always had their origins in external reform movements and initiatives. Perhaps too, the scope for self-initiation is shrinking as teachers find themselves overwhelmed and restricted by the increasingly mandated imperatives of large-scale reform. Certainly, a number of teachers who reflected on the meaning of educational change at the outset contrasted a positive and self-initiating past with a negative, mandated present (see Goodson et al., in press). This is, in a sense, also the thrust of the last data set on positive and negative emotional experiences of change. More important than whether the source of the change is external or internal is whether it is implemented in a way that is professionally inclusive and supportive and demonstrably beneficial for students or not. Internal change in education may therefore be less important and valuable as an ultimate or pure source point of change initiatives than inclusive change as a mode of developing change initiatives with professional flexibility and proper support, wherever these initiatives might happen to originate.
Conclusions

This paper has looked at teachers' emotional responses to educational change. It has done so across a range of teachers, not just those in innovative schools. It has explored teachers' reactions to many kinds of change, not just those of particular initiatives and reforms. Last, it has probed teachers' understandings of and responses to change through a range of questions and requests for concrete examples, to ensure a sophisticated understanding of the impact of change processes by cross-checking or triangulating teachers' answers. Four issues have emerged that are important for how we understand, manage and should reconsider leading change processes in education.

First, mandated change gets repeated (although not completely universal) bad reviews from teachers. Despite the enthusiasm of educational change converts for the benefits of large-scale reform (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Fullan, 2000, 2001) (even when years of prior research had previously and repeatedly demonstrated the limited success of mandated strategies), large-scale legislated change continues to fail to win credibility from and commitment among most teachers responsible for implementing it. Large-scale change grinds most teachers into the dust; they suspect its motives, resent how it is forced upon them without consultation and criticize the excessive pressure and weak support that accompanies it. Micromanagement and excessively pressurized change lead teachers to direct their emotional energies away from their students through anger and hate towards the architects and administrators of change and through the upset and anxiety that is associated with their own sense of inflicted insecurity. Frustration marks the overwhelming emotional response of teachers to mandated change, due to their inability to achieve their own purposes, to fulfil their own missions and to have them heard and respected.

After years of seeing many capricious shifts in reform agendas that were turning over at an accelerating rate, a quarter of all teachers (most in mid to late career) had become worn down and cynical about repetitive change syndrome that now inured them to and inoculated them against all change, even when it might help them and their students within the classroom.

Second, self-initiated change, in contrast, evokes enthusiastic and effusive emotional responses from teachers who become energized and motivated by the benefit of fulfillment and accomplishment they see in their students and themselves. Yet, depending on the questioning strategy, what turns out to be self-initiated change, particularly in high school, often has its origin in mandated reform movements. The same is true for instances of positive change cited by high school teachers. This may mean that, after a decade or so of large-scale reform, the existence and opportunities for self-initiated change are objectively shrinking, that the self of the teacher has been subdued by the demands of the system. Equally, the distinction between mandated and self-initiated change, or what Goodson (2001) calls external and internal change as the source of change initiatives, may be less important than the distinction between exclusive and inclusive change in terms of how it is handled and who is involved in its development and management.
Third, the teachers who are most likely to associate mandated change with positive emotional experience and opportunity for their own initiative and investment are of particular kinds. These change-oriented teachers (in terms of legislated agendas) are more likely to be female, younger, in minority rather than mainstream subjects and in innovative rather than traditional schools.

Last, in teachers' experiences positive change in high schools tends to focus on benefits for students, but outside the regular classroom setting of teaching and learning, whereas positive change in elementary schools is associated with the benefits of collegiality that come from working together to improve teaching and learning for students within the classroom.

House and McQuillan (1998) have delineated three ways of understanding teachers' responses to educational change and reform: technical, cultural and political.

Technical perspectives concentrate on universal, logistical aspects of the 'change process' that apply to all cultures, times and teachers. Here, moving change along through stages of initiation, implementation and institutionalization (Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994) or through stages of concern that teachers experience in relation to how change affects them (Hall & Hord, 1987) lead eventually to universal prescriptions, 'lessons' or guidelines for change (see, for example, Fullan, 1993) that help administrators 'manage' the change process and teachers' adaptation to it.

The cultural perspective draws attention to how teachers respond differently to change experiences depending on their identities, age and career stages and contexts of work (see, for example, Huberman, 1993; Woods et al., 1997). Here, change and its successful implementation depend not only on universal, developmental ways of dealing with loss or improving an organization, but on variable conditions, circumstances, places and times that affect teachers differently. The challenge of change here is to connect it to the meaning it holds for different types of people, not just different stages of development.

The political perspective points to conditions of power and influence that affect the credibility and desirability of change initiatives, as well as the empowerment or disempowerment of those they affect.

Inclusive educational change is important in all perspectives. In the technical perspective it matters because involvement of teachers in the change process helps them deal with experiences of loss and stages of concern that are implicated in almost all human change processes. It is important in the cultural perspective in order to engage the meanings and motivations of teachers of different genders, ages and school circumstances, so that the change is moulded according to the meanings that matter for all these different groups. Involvement matters especially in the systemic, political perspective, because exclusionary mandated change creates disengagement from and disillusionment with large-scale change efforts that undermine their ultimate sustainability. If the oxymoron of sustainable change is to be secured, mandated change must therefore leave scope and flexibility for modification of and engagement with the change itself. Securing involvement only of technical and cultural kinds in the management of change leaves untouched the feelings of
resentment and repugnance that teachers often have concerning the origins, intentions and imposition of mandated change efforts.

Leadership implications

This analysis of the emotional impact of educational change on teachers has important implications for leadership at the national or state/provincial and individual school levels.

In national and state/provincial terms the limits of large-scale and tightly legislated reform are already being appreciated and acted on in a number of places. A decade and more of repetitive change syndrome has made teachers disillusioned by and led them to become disinvested from reform and reforms of any and every kind. The implication, though, is not necessarily now to abandon large-scale reform, to beat a government retreat from the professionally secret garden of the curriculum. For, as the evidence of this study shows, it is less important whether change is external or internal in its point of origin than whether the change process is inclusive or exclusive of teachers' purposes, passions and professional classroom judgement. Inclusive change and reform processes that engage teachers' knowledge and commitments are more likely to increase teachers' professional involvement in school improvement and reduce the anger and anxiety that divert their emotional energies into attacking others and protecting the self.

National and state/provincial level leadership must therefore work to create new and refurbish lost and old architectures of change that leave more space and scope for teachers to invest their own purposes and exercise their own professional judgement in the change process. In a world of fast food, speed dating and quick fix change, educational reform leaders would do well to join with the new and growing social movements which promote 'slow food' (naturally grown, locally sold and seasonably eaten) (Honore, 2004), environmental sustainability (Carson, 1994; McKibben, 1989; Suzuki, 1997; Hawken et al., 1999) and economic initiatives that are 'built to last' (Collins, 2001; Batstone, 2003; Greider, 2003; Nadeau, 2003; Jackson & Nelson, 2004), in order to ensure that change and reform are patient and sustainable, inclusive and engaging, rather than faddish, forced and fast (Hargreaves & Fink, in press).

This will require visionary educational and political leadership that stands above and aside from political grandstanding, that disconnects the long-term cycles of sustainable educational change from the short-term cycles of political electioneering, so that there can be all-party support for and agreement on solid and reliable educational reform strategies and inclusive change processes that can and should shape the generations of the future.

At the school level, the challenge for principals is how to create an inclusive environment for developing and implementing educational change even and especially within a context of mandatory reform. To regain the credibility and commitment of their staff, principals will need to become less like unquestioning managers of often questionable large-scale reform agendas and more like leaders
who exercise moral purpose and personal courage to promote what is best for their students and achievable by their staffs, even and especially when that means challenging the prescriptions of government. Principals already have the power to manipulate and intervene in the working lives of their teachers in order to manage mandated reform (Blase & Blase, 2002). Their greater challenge is to develop positive power with others to focus on the deep learning that all members of a dynamic learning community can experience and enjoy. Large-scale educational change has been driven by task-centred managers seeking quick change on the backs of their teachers; sustainable improvement now calls for leaders who can build and defend improvement that lasts by drawing on and developing commitment and community among those teachers.

Note on contributor


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