

Chapter 19: Building Innovative Capacity and Leadership

RUDOLF VAN DEN BERG AND PETER SLEEGERS

Catholic University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands

In Western Europe, educational innovations can be characterized as increasingly large scale. Nevertheless, in every innovation one always confronts the question of the appropriate strategy for introducing the innovation. With regard to large-scale innovations, it is also important to search for supplemental support strategies.

Within this perspective, it is also important to consider the shift in Western Europe from a traditional to a transformational policy of innovation. It is exactly such conditions of uncertainty and continual change that call upon the innovative capacities of schools, and this demand has consequences for the form of leadership required by schools. In particular, it is becoming increasingly necessary for schools to call upon their own strategic policies and capacities.

These issues will be considered in the following discussion. First, the demand for new educational designs and concepts will be considered. Second, the generally large-scale nature of the educational innovations undertaken in Western Europe will be described. Third, the limitations inherent in a large-scale approach to innovation will be discussed; the concomitant significance of strategic re-orientation will then be sketched. Fourth, the most important results of three research studies will be described. The results of these studies show transformational leadership to be of particular importance for innovation along with more attention to the concerns of those involved in implementation.

THE DESIRABILITY OF EDUCATIONAL REVIEW IN LARGE-SCALE FRAMEWORKS

Various studies, workshops, and publications concerned with the quality of education have all called for major reviews of educational functioning (Rolff, 1993; Slegers & Wesselingh, 1993). Our society and educational systems are undergoing major changes as a result of –

among other things – new information technologies, demographic shifts, and the changing position of educators in our society. Educational experts have pointed to a number of cultural shifts including an increasing degree of individualization, changing and/or decaying morals, changing relations between parents and children, changing patterns of socialization, changing patterns of youth interaction, increased emancipation, and growing cultural transfer in a variety of forms. In order to respond to these changes adequately, one must develop a tremendous innovative capacity.

Policy institutes tend to talk about an educational crisis and, indeed, one of the major sources of tension in schools is the current clash between pedagogical aims and efficient policy measures. Should the school opt for a mission or a market? Or can these different options perhaps be combined? The needs of society and those involved in the educational system can no longer be met in the old familiar manner; educational innovation is needed. It is time to consider a new and more contemporary educational design.

The following social changes will most certainly confront education on its way to the year 2000: increased economic growth, increased internationalization, continued technological advancement, further emancipation for women, and increased cultural pluralism. The demand for a new and contemporary educational design, moreover, is not exclusively European. School leaders and educational experts all feel that there is a clear need for fundamental educational reform, and this need is fuelled by the many complaints about the quality of education (Elmore, 1988; Timar, 1989). In particular, the possibilities for professional growth need to be expanded. This may involve a fundamental change in the content of the educational curriculum, the greater delegation of authority and decision making, and the development of educational accountability at the level of the school.

The search for new educational designs should also be stimulated by the visible shift from a traditional policy of innovation to a transformational policy of innovation. A transformational policy gives people the room to experience and realize a change (van den Berg, 1992). Various schools and networks of schools have also indicated a need for a transformational approach and *the fundamental change in education represented by a transformational approach* (Mesenburg, 1991; Hallinger, 1992). The notion of transformation has received increasing interest in educational circles because of what Fullan calls an ultimately fruitless uphill battle. The solution is not to keep trying to climb the same old hill of getting more innovations or reforms into the educational system.

We need a different formulation to get at the heart of the problem, a different hill, so to speak. We need, in short, a new mind-set about educational change' (Fullan, 1993, p. 3).

Transformation can be described as a process in which the individual capacities and responsibilities of people to change the context in which they live and work are intensely appealed to and enhanced, as well (i.e., the expertise and energies of different individuals are utilized) (van den Berg, 1992). It is thus assumed that the individual can influence events significantly. The most important starting points for transformation appear to be space to experience and realize the change, a desire for growth, and the capacity to mobilize energy. In much of the literature within this framework, this notion is referred to as *entrepreneurship* (van den Berg, 1992). If one wants to be an entrepreneur, then the richness and dynamics of the daily reality should be kept in mind rather than the planning, standardization, and control of activities. The facilitation of creativity and problem-solving abilities should predominate. The concept of *entrepreneurship* clearly reflects the disillusionment that has grown over the years with the classic methods of innovation (Sundbo, 1992).

In the framework of traditional policies of innovation, schools often appear to function simply as the enacting organization. They enact that which has been externally specified. In the framework of a transformational policy of innovation, schools are considered learning organizations (Mintzberg, 1987; 1989; Senge, 1993). Schools are considered centers of change, and both professional and personal growth should be possible for teachers as well as school leaders. Government initiatives can then be viewed as opportunities for development rather than as threats to a school's own goals. The central concepts in this shift from a constructivist to a transformational policy are *restructuring* and *empowerment*, which are assumed to foster the growth of self-esteem, autonomy, and action. In the USA, school leaders and teachers feel that there is a growing need for the increased autonomy of schools (Chubb & Moe, 1987; Timar & Kirp, 1989). In The Netherlands, deregulation and delegation have also played a major role in current discussions of education. Deregulation means a decrease in the degree of central regulation, and an important consequence of this is that schools will have a greater amount of autonomy and a greater say in policy formation. Delegation involves the transfer of authority, responsibility, and tasks from a higher 'level' (for example, the Department of Education and Science) to a lower 'level' (for example, the local School Board).

The increased autonomy of schools means that schools will – more than ever – have develop their own policies and take on more of the characteristics of a strategic organization. There are also increasing efforts to provide a more bottom-up or school-focused approach to innovation. Improvements are more likely to take root and grow if they are established in the schools themselves. Development occurs best when teachers recognize the need for change and are willing to undertake the work needed to achieve this change. And a great deal of school-focused support is needed for such innovation to succeed.

At the same time, the governments of many countries continue to play a central role in the development of the frameworks for innovation. As a result of this centralized approach, large-scale change continues to be a characteristic of the educational process in a variety of Western European countries (Louis & Loucks – Horsley, 1989). However, the paradox represented by continued centralization and the drive for decentralization creates a high level of insecurity and tension (Caldwell, 1993, p.158).

The large-scale nature of the educational innovation process in Western Europe is a typical product of constructive government policy and has produced a series of national projects (van den Berg & Vandenberghe, 1986). Within these projects, special attention is paid to – among other things – alternative educational structures, major curriculum changes, the changing roles of teachers, the integration of multiple innovations, and radical changes in class practices (Goldwasser, 1992; Murphy & Hallinger, 1993; Sashkin & Egermeier, 1992). The large-scale nature of the innovation projects directed by the government, however, has left the schools to develop their own specific innovation activities. In The Netherlands, innovations are characterized by a unique (and complex) combination of centralized administration/organization and decentralized educational content. Through the active participation of thousands of elementary schools and hundreds of cooperating agencies, the innovations take on a large-scale character.

According to Beare and Boyd (1993), large-scale innovations represent a special type of reform. They are typically justified on the grounds that they will influence the educational curriculum, encourage the adoption of alternative programs, and improve educational results. They do not stem from the teachers or educational advisors, however. The source of such large-scale reforms is external policy with the goal of adequate management of the schools within a national framework. '[The reforms] appear to have been imposed from outside, at least initially. Furthermore, the current efforts seem to aim primarily at

the control and governance of both schools and school systems' (Beare & Boyd, 1993, p.2).

In not only the innovation operations in The Netherlands but also the large-scale innovation projects in other Western European countries, the innovations are system-wide attempts at change. Their justification and influence is often wider than the particular educational system itself. In Great Britain, for example, attention is paid to a national curriculum and program of evaluation for both the elementary – and secondary – school systems. A comparable centralized approach to educational innovation can also be found in the Scandinavian countries.

LARGE-SCALE INNOVATIONS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION

The Larger Point of View

As a consequence of a centralized approach to large-scale educational reform, those in the field of education are confronted by a number of descriptions and plans for the realization of this reform. The options considered by the government in the creation of this policy cannot normally be traced by outsiders. In The Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, for example, there are innovation committees and advisory committees responsible for important preparatory work with regard to policy but the manner in which these committees reach their decisions is not apparent to the outside world.

Long-range policies are usually outlined with the manner of implementation indicated in general terms. Such official descriptions usually emanate from the Ministries of Education. In most cases, however, there are no indications or suggestions for how to achieve the objectives. That is, those concerned with the creation of policy and enactment of legislation *seldom look down the track to the stage of implementation*. The central government appears to assign the task of implementation to others. Others must see to the translation of the general starting-points for implementation at the level of school and classroom practice, which may create a wide gap between the intentions of the policy designers and the perceptions of the implementers.

A large-scale reform may also be a bundle of innovations. The Renewed Secondary School in Belgium, for example, asks the school and teachers to group students in a manner that deviates – sometimes