

Introduction

Scaling Up the Educational Change Process

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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