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A Guide to the Change Process

Vignette: It's What We Do That Counts

Veteran Teacher: According to Sarason, "Educational change is what teachers do and think—it's as simple and as complex as that."

Novice: What do you mean? Aren't the learning standards evidence that significant curricular change has to occur?

Veteran: Mandates come and go, dictums are sent down, and well-intentioned proclamations are made. Yet, at the end of the day, it's a matter of what the teachers do differently in their classrooms that determines whether or not change actually occurs.

THE CHANGE PROCESS ■

The Change Process—A Quiet Revolution

The perfect example of the phenomenon described in the vignette is what the authors refer to as the "Quiet Revolution" of the American teacher. This dates back to the 1970s when American educational policymakers declared a commitment to the teaching of the metric system of measurement in the K–12 school environment. Publishers eagerly joined ranks and provided a sampling, although sparse, of metric materials in their textbooks and teaching supplements. And teachers—accountable as

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always—made no noticeable objections—although they fussed a bit—before they jumped on board and faithfully addressed the pages in their texts. In effect, they did what was asked: They covered the required material, introduced the metric system to their students . . . and, then, continued on with the traditional curriculum, barely taking a breath in between.

Teachers congratulated themselves on a job well done, and rightly so. Not knowing a lot about the metric system, they were not about to embellish the lessons. Yet they had taught the required new material. They felt good about meeting the goal that had been set for them . . . as they eagerly returned to their own ways of measurement.

Oh, yes, they do now revisit those few pages on the metric system each year and then, religiously proceed with what they consider the important parts of the math curriculum. In essence, this is the quiet revolution of the American teacher. There is no outward rebellion about teaching the metric system. . . . Oh, no, it is much more sinister that.

In spite of the fact that liters of Coke and 10K runs have become commonplace, teachers still—quietly and resolutely—reject the entire metric system as an authentic, relevant model of measurement in America. In fact, their quiet revolution has been so effective, metric measurement is still barely taught today in our schools, with the exception of high-level science classes that require the use of metrics.

Change is what teachers do and think. It's as simple and as complex as that.

This, then, is the power of the teacher that the veteran teacher speaks of when he says, "Change is what teachers do and think. It's as simple and as complex as that" (Fullan, 1982, p. 107). Teachers effect change in their domains. That's why the classroom is the site of change,

why school improvement occurs—first and foremost—in the classroom, and why the research, unequivocally, supports the theory that teachers make the difference in student achievement.

Now, while this story is told with a bit of tongue in cheek, there are critical kernels of truth that ring true here. Teachers do determine to a great degree what goes on in their classrooms. In fact, it has been rumored that Bruce Joyce, an honored guru in staff development, once said that, "Teaching is the second most private behavior . . ." as he went on to say, "and you know what the first one is."

Yet ironically, this remains the greatest challenge of the staff developer—to convince teachers that they do, indeed, make the difference—in the successes and in the failures—of their students. Even more disturbing for professional leadership is that even if, or when, teachers do see the connection between teaching and learning, some tend to focus on the downside, saying, "We'll be blamed if the kids don't achieve," rather than celebrating the upside, saying, "I am responsible when the kids do well. I teach them in ways that they can learn. I am a teacher in every sense of the word."

Then the question becomes, "How do we as professionals in the field convince teachers that they do make the difference, do indeed determine the degrees of learning success for their students, and do have the talent

and tools to ensure the success of every child in their care?" While the research, unequivocally, supports this truth, how do teachers come to believe and embrace the changes that might be needed to accomplish what some of them feel is the "impossible dream"—that every child can and will perform to his highest capabilities?

The Change Game—Myth Versus Reality

To examine the concept of the teaching-learning relationship, it seems appropriate at this point to examine the role of professional development and the process of professional change in attitude, practice, and belief. Guskey (Guskey, 2000) describes the change process within professional learning in this way. From his vast experience in professional learning arenas, Guskey writes about the change that one *expects* to occur in contrast to the actual change process that, paradoxically, *does* occur.

To elaborate the point, there is a story of a young, green staff developer explaining to her supervisor how she thinks this amazing change in teacher practice occurs. She tells how she is going to demonstrate how to teach higher-order thinking skills based on what is known about how the brain learns. Then, as she continues with her hypothesis, "They will be so excited about this emerging research on how teachers can teach to the ways that the brain learns best, that it will change their thinking about how to teach. Armed with this new belief about teaching and learning, they will be eager to go back to their classrooms with new teaching tools, seeing test scores go up and student achievement soar as their students apply more rigorous thinking and reasoning in their work."

Her supervisor, a seasoned staff developer countered, "I understand your theory of change, and I don't want to discourage you or dampen your enthusiasm. Yet that is really not how it happens. Teachers attend the professional learning with a great deal of skepticism. They want to know "it works" before they give up anything they are already doing. So, to change their beliefs, they must be encouraged to go back and try something—to put a new piece into practice. Then, as they see things change with their students, they start to question their long held beliefs and practices. But this process is slow in coming. It requires long-term change models."

Teachers attend the professional learning with a great deal of skepticism.

The freshman staff developer nodded quietly, not really believing what her supervisor had described. She held to her belief that teachers would certainly entertain these new ideas because the research around them was so compelling. New in the field, it would be many years before she thoroughly grasped the complexity of the change process in adult learners.

Yet Guskey documents the very same sequence the supervisor had described. Guskey says that the thinking is often one way, the reality another. As depicted in the chart in Box 1.1, one is the myth, the other the reality.

Guskey's research indicates that when teachers are introduced to ideas and strategies through a professional development experience, they start

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The Change Process in Schools

Change Process: Is It This?

1. Professional development
2. Change in belief
3. Change in practice
4. Change in achievement

Change Process: Or Is It This?

1. Professional development
2. Change in practice
3. Change in achievement
4. Change in belief

Box 1.1

to think or believe differently only after trying some things in the classroom and seeing positive changes in student achievement with their own eyes. They must see the proof in the pudding that change works before they begin to question what they have always done.

Yet the myth prevails that when teachers learn something new, they get excited about it right away and immediately change their long held beliefs. It just isn't so. As adult learners, they must be convinced with evidence of its worth before they are about to abandon their traditional ways.

Cooperative learning is example. Following Guskey's model, teachers receive professional development in the structures and strategies of cooperative learning groups. They then go back to

their classrooms and change their direct instruction practices by adding a cooperative learning task to the lesson. They notice interesting changes in the achievement of some students—kids who had never offered a

response now talk in their groups; others take active leadership roles for their assigned responsibility as part of the team; still others show evidence of understanding the information in authentic ways.

As the teachers note these positive signs, they begin to question their long held beliefs that kids learn best through a direct instruction approach. Slowly over time, as these teachers continue to read and learn about cooperative learning, they gradually shift their beliefs. Eventually they institutionalize change by making cooperative learning a critical component of every lesson. But this alteration in belief systems requires many trials and tribulations, as well as much time and energy. Change—real change in one's beliefs—is just not very easy at all.

In fact, even after many years of working with cooperative learning, teachers quietly confess that they still think they should be in front of the class teaching. That's their idea of what teaching is, and it's so hard to alter that view. Although this idea of change through professional development is revisited in the next section, it is important to understand at this point that change occurs first through changing practices, then eventually through changing beliefs. In other words, practices come first and beliefs follow.

Yet, the myth prevails that when teachers learn something new, they get excited about it right away.

Guskey knows that the initial professional development—whether it be in the form of a book study, workshop, conference, or online course—rarely leaves teachers with any change in their thinking about how to go about their craft. Effecting real change takes a sound professional development plan that includes many well-documented elements—from training design to sustained support.

This Horse Is Not Dead

The idea that staff developers and other leaders in the school are in the role of change agents is not new. In fact, Fullan (1982) writes extensively about educational change over time. One overriding premise is that change is not easy. To bring about meaningful change takes time, energy, and patience—all of which must be accompanied by a well-articulated plan that stretches over stages. Adult learners change slowly. They are set in their ways and do not abandon their comfort zones easily.

As educators think about an event or time of change—such as a science textbook adoption, a move from a junior high school to a middle school model, or a shift from the high school bell timetable to a more flexible block schedule—resistant statements abound.

Several tools serve as catalysts for discussion and insight into the idea of the reluctance of adult learners to change. One of the most powerful versions appears as a picture book titled, *If the Horse You're Riding Dies, Then Get Off!* by Grant and Forsten (1999). Box 1.2 shows 12 humorous statements adult learners could easily say when faced with the fear of substantive and meaningful change in front of them. They don't want to believe that the horse is dead.

Listen and you'll hear the creative reluctance that's all too common in the teachers' lounge or in the faculty meeting. In examining these comments, there is the definite ring of truth, albeit with a touch of gallows humor.

To demonstrate, the anecdote uses the metaphor of switching horses. The first thing the reluctant learner says is, "This horse is not dead! He's already broken in and has a lot of life left." This reluctance is encoded in teacher-talk as, "I have all my lesson plans done for this!" Others say, "Buy a stronger whip," or, "Change riders." But in education code, this means the staff is not using the horse the right way, and it needs more supervision or maybe even new staff members. Still other resisters are heard to lament using the age-old excuse, "We've always done it this way before."

Some are more creative in their resistance and are full of fertile suggestions: "Appoint a committee or a team to study the problem!" or better yet, "Let's visit some other sites and see what they're doing." Others take a more aggressive resistant stance and ask for either an increase in standards or a change in requirements, announcing that, "This horse is not dead!"

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We've always done it this way before.

This Horse Is Not Dead

1. Buy a stronger whip.
2. Change riders.
3. Say, "This is the way we have always done it."
4. Appoint a committee.
5. Visit other sites.
6. Increase standards to ride a dead horse.
7. Appoint a team.
8. Create a training session.
9. Change requirements, declaring, "This horse is not dead."
10. Hire a consultant.
11. Do a cost analysis.
12. Promote horse to a supervisory position.

Box 1.2

Still others protest that more vigorous action is needed. They put a positive spin on their reluctance to change, urging, "Let's do a cost analysis, hire a consultant, and create a training session to help us." And, finally, the ultimate solution reveals itself when protesters suggest—with a straight face and an earnest tone—"Let's promote the horse to a supervisory position."

These are real comments heard from adult resisters. They are both funny and sad. When put in the context of "This horse is not dead" and "There is no need to change horses," they are hilarious. Yet, when translated as refusals to change to an up-to-date and improved science text, to move to a middle school concept for increased self-esteem and academic achievement of the adolescent, or to schedule by blocks of time in high schools to encourage authentic learning, such excuses ring shallow and false.

The Fear of Change

Here is a story that illustrates the depth of resistance that adults harbor, knowingly or unknowingly, to the change process. Some faculty members recommended an author or expert in the areas of curriculum integration. Subsequently, the staff development consultant was hired by their principal to work with school personnel as they created an interdisciplinary curriculum for students in an alternative degree program. While the principal explained the plan, all the teachers seemed very positive: ready, willing, and able to move in new directions. These same people, however, had

been working with the concept of curriculum integration for more than two years, and not one integrated unit had been implemented.

As the consultant began working with the group, the root of the problem started to become all too obvious. The two teachers who, as the cochairs of the committee to integrate curriculum, were supposed to lead the integration effort were, in reality, blocking the team. Each step of the way, at every turn, they would scrutinize the input to the point that all forward progress became immobilized. They questioned, endlessly, the appropriateness of every proposed theme, deliberated about the time frame for teaching the themes, and wondered about the size and makeup of the interdisciplinary structures. Of course, because they were the leaders, others followed their lead.

As the two continually raised thoughtful questions about the various elements of the change effort, others took their objections to heart. Consequently, the group never really made definite decisions about anything. They always left things on the table for further discussion. Well-intentioned as they were, the two leaders were too tentative about actual implementation to move the process forward. Their fear of the unknown prevailed; their ability to accept the ideas, even if imperfect, kept any prospects for change from ever seeing the light of day. Theirs was the power of fear for the adult learner.

Who Moved My Cheese?

Spencer Johnson offers another view of change through his groundbreaking book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998). In this delightful allegory, four memorable characters illustrate how different people approach change with very different attitudes and actions. In Johnson's story, two mice, Sniff and Scurry, and two little human beings, Hem and Haw, each react differently as they discover that a wedge of cheese that has always been in exactly the same place has, suddenly and without explanation, disappeared. Thus, the question each asks himself and others is, naturally, "Who moved my cheese?"

Notice the different paths they take as they deal with the idea of change, as symbolized by the moved cheese. Sniff, the first little mouse, sniffs out the change early and is one of the first to acknowledge its movement and talk about possibilities. Scurry, the second little mouse, scurries immediately into action and starts hunting for the cheese. Then there's Hem, one of the little people, who hems and haws relentlessly about the missing cheese, hangs around, and in the end never totally accepts the reality of his changed circumstances. That leaves Haw, who stays around long enough to embrace the change, even if a bit reluctantly.

Although this story is just an allegory that tells a story about how people react to change, it offers a meaningful platform for further thinking. In fact, readers may want to get their own copy of the book and read the story in its entirety as they track their own reactions to the change process. They may be surprised as they recognize themselves in one of the four imaginary characters.

Notice the different paths they take as they deal with the idea of change.

Go With the Ones Who Are Ready to Go

To illustrate how powerfully accurate this allegory portrays people in the change process, there is a parallel story that actually happened to some real people. It is the story of a small publishing company that was purchased by a large publishing company. As the merger plays out, one employee (Sniff) sniffs out the change early and begins positioning himself for a positive role in the transition. Another employee (Scurry) scurries into action and chooses to leave the company shortly after the merger. A third employee (Hem) hung around, but never really embraces the merger. Hem is on board, yet is not at all happy with the new company. In fact, he complains, resists, and often takes on the role of devil's advocate in company decision-making efforts. A fourth employee (Haw), on the other hand, embraces the inevitable changes and joins the team wholeheartedly. Haw, as it turns out, becomes a valued employee to the merged company as a needed resource, adding insight to decisions through his long history with the company. Each, in very different ways, manages the change.

In the end, the lesson seems to be this: that a change agent must honor each and every reaction to change, as those in the change process are reacting the only way they know how. The change agent must remember that people involved in change are doing the best they can. Some come along quickly and easily, others more slowly, and still others do not come along at all. That is just the way it is.

The best advice for the change agent is, perhaps, to go with the ones who are ready to go. Do not worry too much about the others. And do not let the reluctant ones become a drain on the entire process and zap energy from the project. Allow them to find their own comfort zone and work with them as best you can.

The Tipping Point—Gladwell

In fact, to support the age-old idea of “going with the ones who are ready to go,” Gladwell (2000) discusses three excellent theories in his book *The Tipping Point*: (1) the “power of few” to create the momentum for change, (2) the stickiness factor that gives complex ideas the glue for staying power, and (3) the need for a meaningful context with which to frame the innovation with meaning and joy.

In essence, his theory presents the change phenomena as a tiny spark, generated by one or a few, that is sufficiently fueled to suddenly take on a life of its own as it reaches the tipping point. Using another metaphor, this is the kind of benevolent tsunami that change agents yearn for as they try to build momentum for significant change in schools.

The Three-Tier Change Process

Michael Fullan (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991) has been writing about the meaning of educational change for more than 30 years, particularly the

concept of change. Fullan's writings offer a comprehensive model for facilitating the change process, particularly in the school setting. A professor at the University of Toronto and charter member of the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education, Fullan offers a simple model for understanding a complex process. He also speaks and writes about what does and does not work as schools and institutions attempt to bring about meaningful change.

One of Fullan's most seminal contributions concerns his three-tier process in Box 1.3 for understanding how change occurs: Stage 1: Initiate the innovation; Stage 2: Implement the innovation; and Stage 3: Institutionalize the innovation.

Three-Tier Change Process by Fullan

Stage 1: Initiate the Change—Introduce the innovation to the participants.

Stage 2: Implement the Change—Apply the tools and techniques of the innovation.

Stage 3: Institutionalize the Change—Establish accountability for continued use.

Box 1.3

Sounds simple enough: initiate, implement, and institutionalize, the three I's. Let's take a more detailed look at each of the three stages.

Stage 1: Initiate

First, to initiate innovation requires planning an introductory awareness that establishes the context, goals, process, and timeline for all who are involved. It means bringing in the big guns or developing a video or powerful multimedia presentation. Initiation especially calls for inclusion of all stakeholders: extending invitations for them to participate, question, acknowledge concerns, and—eventually—announce their level of commitment to the change.

In understanding this earliest stage of change, it is important to note the need to for an energizing level of excitement. Some participants will anticipate the best possible scenario, others the worst. Some are eager to see

Some are eager to see the plan unfold; others dread the effort it will take.

the plan unfold; others dread the effort it will take. Some cannot wait for innovation to begin; others cannot wait until it is over. Yet, for both—the one who anticipates and the other who dreads—the initiation stage signals to all concerned that things are going to change.

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Stage 2: Implement

Implementing the innovation takes on another meaning entirely. This is the stage when the plan is put into practice. During implementation, change is applied in real and meaningful ways. Models are introduced through sustained, job-embedded professional development that executes the innovation with integrity and provides the needed input to support the change. It is in this stage that attention is given to the appropriate practice, feedback, and coaching needed to ensure success. In short, this is when the proof is in the pudding. Participants must move past “talk the talk” to “walk the talk” as innovation moves from theory to practice.

Stage 3: Institutionalize

To institutionalize change means that the initial innovation permeates every aspect of the institution, becoming ingrained in its very principles, practices, and policies. Everyone now knows that these innovations have become integral to the overall expectations of all who are involved with the institution—no excuses. This is the way things are done, and everyone is expected to comply.

Of course, to institutionalize an innovation requires persistence and patience. It takes time, rehearsal, repetition, and practice for participants in the innovation to move from novice levels of performance to those of competency and proficiency. It takes financial, emotional, and professional support to adopt an innovation of such magnitude that it is now the essence of the institution. Institutionalizing an idea is usually a long and arduous journey with stops and starts along the way. It is a path characterized by obstacles and challenges, readiness and rewards, faith and fellowship. And when, along the way, levels of achievement are realized, there is some level of satisfaction marked by celebration. These are the celebrations that acknowledge the well-deserved success of the change process and the people who have brought it about.

This brief introduction to the change process is simply the beginning—a testing of the waters. As one might suspect, it is much more complex

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than described here. In fact, although the process may sometimes sound simple, even Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) caution change participants to be aware of the many concerns inherent in the journey. One early concern is that initiating the innovation frequently can take over the entire process. When the initiation process goes overboard, when it becomes

too comprehensive, too complicated, and too complex, participants become overwhelmed. They may become worn out in this first stage, a period that can inadvertently go on for weeks, months, and even years. In this case, by the time the implementation stage begins, people may be burned out, negative, and too resistant to do anything more.

This is just one of the many obstacles that interfere with the change process. Be wary. If new to examining and understanding the process of change, the reader may want to take the time to investigate this process more deeply.

Looking at Fullan's Change Process in Action

To illustrate the three phases of the change process as described by Fullan, one would usually look at the change experience within a single school or district. However, sometimes, one part of change for a single innovation works smoothly and is really a fine example for discussion, while other parts may have issues about effectiveness. For this reason in this discussion, each phase is illuminated by the actions at a school or district that presents the change most effectively. The three examples selected are exemplary models of a particular phase of the process of change.

Example: Initiating the Innovation for Change

When a New Mexico school district planned the change from a seventh and eighth grade junior high to a middle school model, administrators decided they would try to incorporate some of the middle school concepts during the change process to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. That decision led to other discussions about what the middle school concept was all about and how to get information about it to various stakeholders. One idea was to hold a town meeting, of sorts, on a Saturday afternoon.

Invitations were sent to about 50 people—board members, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders—to a town meeting facilitated by an expert on the middle school concept. Those who attended then became familiar with the middle school concept, and this beginning step for initiating change had a positive impact on all involved. The initiation plan included follow-up meetings using members of the original group as members of facilitation teams. This plan more than moved the change process off the ground and on its way toward implementation.

Example: Implementing the Innovation for Change

The staff at an Illinois school was not only planning its transition from a traditional bell schedule to a more robust block schedule model but was also in the midst of a building expansion project. As staff members talked about the impact of the block schedule on instructional designs, each department was given opportunities to hear what other departments were doing. The increase in communication across departments was noted by a number of people as a positive, unintended outcome of transitioning to a block schedule.

Ultimately, one of the faculty members suggested that, as they looked at the additional space, perhaps they might want to include a large teacher planning room that would allow members of the various departments to mingle. The rationale was that a common planning space would encourage

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and facilitate communication across departmental teams. As a result of the suggestion, the staff voted to provide teacher planning space as one large room situated near the teacher workroom where the equipment was housed. Within the large area, a department model for office space was used, with low dividers between the departments allowing easy conversations to take place.

Part of the success of change to a block schedule is attributed to this serendipitous interaction. The planning and teachers' room fostered increased communication among staff, resulting in many integrated curriculum designs and teaming models. The staff not only learned about using the more authentic teaching models recommended for the block schedule but also thrived on the collaborations with knowledgeable colleagues.

Example: Institutionalizing the Innovation for Change

Another Illinois school maintains and supports two professional development building initiatives that have become integral to the valued expectations of both old and new staff members. As part of their new teacher induction and orientation program, professional development offerings are available in the two topics: block scheduling and differentiation. By including specific courses on working with block scheduling and on ways to differentiate teaching, initiatives have become institutionalized and are continuing with their initial and inherent integrity. All are on board and accountable for those processes that are valued in the school's programs.

■ TOOLS TO USE

1. The Change Game

In the change game, Guskey (2000) presents a case for change in schools through professional development. However, the change process he describes may be quite different from the way most people believe change happens. To explore the idea of the change process, readers may want to try a simple exercise. Write the four elements in Box 1.4 on four separate cards or sticky notes.

Elements of the Change Process

- Professional development
- Change in belief
- Change in student achievement
- Change in practice

Box 1.4

Now, move the cards into the appropriate left-to-right sequence to represent how you think change occurs through professional development. If possible, share your thinking with someone else. Next, read what Guskey (2000) says about the complex and elusive process of change.

Note: As discussed previously, Guskey relates that most people believe change within a professional development experience occurs like this: first, participants attend some kind of professional development; next, they change their beliefs about the idea; then, they see changes in student achievement; and finally, they change their practices.

Guskey, however, believes the real sequence is as follows: professional development occurs; teachers change their practices by trying something in their classrooms; they see student achievement increase; and, eventually, they begin to change their belief systems. He claims that teachers change their beliefs only after, not before, seeing evidence of some positive change. Even then, Guskey thinks that change in belief systems occurs over time. It is usually not a sudden "Aha!" moment.

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2. Picture Book

To have a little fun with the idea of how vehemently adults resist change, leaders can use a delightful picture book version of Guskey's statements at a team meeting or a faculty gathering. Look for *If You're Riding a Horse and It Dies, Get Off* by Grant and Forsten (1999) and share in the raucous discussion that ensues.

Quote

As part of a team discussion, team members each respond to the quote, "In professional development, the teacher must use it, not just know about it."