

TOWARDS 'AFRICAN' EDUCATION FACILITATING EDUCATION CHANGE

Brigitte Smit

University of Pretoria, South Africa

"Change is the law of life.
Those, who look only to the past
or present, are certain
to miss the future."

John F. Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

The South African education system is in a process of far-reaching restructuring and comprehensive transformation. This educational change evolves as a dynamic and complex issue in education and may be threatening, particularly as it challenges the most deeply embedded assumptions. One such reform undertaking is the South African Schools Act, which was passed on 29 October 1996. Moreover, after extensive consultation, the 'Curriculum 2005' is to be implemented in 1998, introducing "a new curriculum to make kids want to learn, shifting the spotlight onto the learner" (Sunday Times, 30 March 1997). Despite the fact that the emphasis should become the focus of the learner, there is a great need to build professional capacity among teachers.

Theoretically, educational policy change may well be implemented through laws and new structures. However, a willing practical participation and a commitment from teachers is also required, considering that particularly on the personal level, teachers interpret, and act as filters, influence, affect, mediate and relate to educational change, individually and collectively. Successful implementation of new education policies through programs, processes and innovation is a formidable task. The process of facilitation offers some opportunity for processing educational changes, supporting and encouraging teachers, as their meaning and responses impact on the tangible policy implementation.

A PREFACE TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The initial focus is, what does South African education bring out of teachers; the best or the worst they can be? Are teachers' perceptions, their truths of education policy change and uncertainties to their advantage, or to their disadvantage? Does the traditional conception of teaching or imparting of knowledge can make sense in a changing environment? In the context of educational change, Rogers and Freiberg (1994:152) offer some sound advice to teachers:

“The person who has realised that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis of security. Changingness, a reliance on process rather than on static knowledge, is the only thing that makes sense as a goal for education in the modern world.”

For the purpose of this presentation, educational policy change which is an immense intricate and complex issue, will not be dealt with in the context of the intentions of policy makers, the process and the actual effect or outcome as envisioned in the curriculum and teaching approach. Instead I wish to explore the possibilities of change facilitation for teachers as they deal with proposed changes. Facilitation workshops could offer opportunities for teachers to become aware of their attitudes, values and beliefs, and their responses, resistances, denials and simply avoidance. Teachers’ meaning in what they do and think, primarily predetermines their responses and the outcomes of the proposed education policy change. In addition, I believe that these changes not only involve variations over time in the relationships among individuals, groups and societies, structural changes such as technological and institutional developments, but also intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup processing in search for new meanings. Education policy change has corresponding human dimensions, constructed and created personal meaning. However top-down mandates for policy change do frequently leave teachers out of the reform process, discounting often that they are the targets of reform although they exert relatively little if any control over policy.

FACILITATION AND THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

Workshops for teachers with a person-centered approach, grounded on the assumption that human beings tend to move toward wholeness and self-actualisation can support policy implementation through participatory methods. The person-centered approach is best considered as a ‘way of being’ rather than a ‘way of doing’, and is captured best in Rogers’ (1986:199) own words:

“The person-centered approach, then, is primarily a way of being that finds its expression in attitudes and behavior(s) that create a growth-producing climate. It is a basic philosophy rather than simply a technique or a method. When this philosophy is lived, it helps the person expand the development of his or her own capacities. When it is lived, it also stimulates constructive change in others. It empowers the individual, and when this personal power is sensed, experience shows that it tends to be used for personal and social transformation.”

During a workshop a growth-promoting climate is established in the group by the facilitator, creating a relationship based on certain attitudes such as accurate empathic understanding, acceptance, non-possessive warmth, caring and genuineness. As the facilitator projects these attitudes and an accepting and caring climate emerges, it is presumed that teachers will drop their defenses and work toward personally meaningful goals. What permeates here is Rogers’ basic trust in the human ability to move forward if the appropriate conditions fostering growth and change are present. The group process with a person-centered approach can be instrumental in empowering and enabling individuals by offering them a place and space to explore and express their inner characteristics. The process of facilitation is conducive in creating an accommodating climate and an opportunity for exploring meaning, individual growth and collective educational change.

For effective education policy change implementation, teachers’ would have to ‘see’ and believe that change is indeed possible. The facilitator of the group could for example focus on the resistances to change within the group and assisting members to realise when and why they are holding back. Teachers would be encouraged to express their feelings and expectations, focusing on themselves and their feelings of stress, avoidance and denial. The facilitator creates a safe climate where teachers can talk directly to one another, and where risks may be taken for example

expressing conflict openly. An interfactual style of teacher to teacher is fostered versus a teacher to leader approach. The facilitator can also express some interpretations to create sensitized airiness, which can either be directed at the group as a whole or at the individual. Power-related issues are often either ignored, or they are verbally confronted, sometimes even through verbal abuse, most visibly via gender, class, race and authority issues, within and even beyond the group like human and social issues from the wider society. These responses require deep empathy and unconditional respect for individual teachers.

On a personal level, teachers can learn more about themselves through experience to find their meaning. This may reflect the growth of the individual beyond normality to full functioning, which is characterized by the acceptance of responsibility for decision making, for the experience of emotions and feelings, and for the professional performance of tasks. The quality of work done by teachers is a direct function of the level of self-development and the optimal functioning, which impact on education policy change.

TEACHERS' MEANING AND CHANGE

The world appears within a context of meaning, suggesting that experience of education policy change be also in personal terms (Alan 1990:189). In the education system, teachers are the most prominent persons mediating policy change, as they become part of the interactive process of reflection and action with regard to the intentions of educational change via the education policy and their personal response within a particular historical context. This constitutes an important link for understanding the eventual effect of change for from a person-centered approach people are not seen to perceive, represent or reflect the world from the outside. Instead everything from the 'outside' is determined from within. Reality depends on the 'inner reality' (Goldsmith 1989:52-54) that is to say, "...we're not driven by reality, but by our perception of reality," (Robbins 1992:69) and unless teachers' reality-perceptions are not understood, one can not really fully understand. Reality is not something 'out there', reality is something inside the head and in the heart.

In this context, Fallen (1982:ix) in *The Meaning of Educational Change* argues that for attempts of educational change to be successful, cognisance would have to be taken of what this change looks like from the point of view of the individual teacher, student, parent, administrator and the actions, reactions and responses of each. In addition it would be viewed in terms of the interrelatedness of individuals within a web of meaning partly structured by the historical context of the particular person or group of persons (Berkhout & Smit 1997:4).

Webs of meanings also depend on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or whether they are exchanging ideas and support as a group, and experiencing positive feelings about their work. In participatory workshops, where experiences are shared, explored together and listened to, collegiality, open communication, trust, support and assistance, interaction and morale may be attained.

Change initiatives in education cannot discount dealings with emotional dimensions of change as experienced by teachers, which are often ignored in change processes. In a similar vogue, change may produce a sense of uneasiness, a lack of direction, a sense of incompleteness, insecurity and a lack of closure or boundaries. Educational change involves most likely a continuous process of 'letting go', of what may be perceived as a state of disequilibrium, emotionally and intellectually. Loss of the status quo presents not only logical, intellectual problems, but also the emotional problems associated with anguish, conflict and frustration. I believe that the often ignored psychological impact of education policy change which hinders its goals, can be explored and optimised through facilitative methods.

Apart from the public discourse, the legislation and communication of policies for education, depends on what teachers think and do and on their personal disposition and feelings with regard to change or policies proposing change. The manner they mediate and act on policy proposals has a major impact on the eventual effects. Fullan (1982:120) considers this understanding "... the subjective world – the phenomenology – of the incumbents (is) a necessary precondition for the engaging in any change effort with them . . .”.

Facilitators know that change occurs at different rates and paces and its omnipresence is now a constant feature of our lives. Attitudinal change may lag behind technological and scientific change, creating great difficulties in reconciling old values to new circumstances. This attitudinal lag is a major challenge in organizations creating a dissonance between change itself and our capacities to make sense of it (Whitaker 1993:25). In these attempts of sense making processes in transitional times, teachers still enjoy the options of choices. For those who crave stability, order and predictability there is at least one choice and that is to leave, or alternatively not just to accept, but to embrace the stormy weather, these uncertain times. There are no guarantees about anything, even in education. No certainties, no guarantees, only immense changes in education is what Sunter (1996:72-73) illustrates. Using a comparison between 1940 and the 1990's of disciplinary problems in American schools, he illustrates some of the complexities faced by teachers – not only in the US. In 1940 these included, talking out of turn, chewing gum, making a noise, running in hallways, queue-jumping, ignoring dress code, and litter. Disciplinary problems of the 1990s are however quite different: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sexual behaviour, (attempted) suicide, rape, sexual assault, robbery, theft and physical assault. Apart from these temporal changes, which is also part of the context in which teachers in South Africa have to educate, they are also expected to facilitate various changes that would contribute towards the realisation of newly accepted democratic ideals of society.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE: THE AFR-I-CAN OPTION

You can't teach an old dog new tricks nor can a leopard change its spots. Whatever view is held, experience of the world at large teaches us that we live in the midst of ongoing pervasive change. Change in South Africa is viewed differently by various persons or groups of persons and is succinctly seen by Lascaris & Lipken (1993:1) in terms of contrasts, as either the

“most thrilling country in the world or the most traumatic, depending on the individual perspective. It is a complex fusion of paradox: First World, yet Third World; immensely wealthy, yet agonising impoverished; the most advanced country on Planet Earth, yet one of its most backward; precisely the same as other countries, yet precisely different; teeming with awesome opportunity, yet fraught with insurmountable problems; everything is changing, yet nothing has changed”.

According to them (ibid. 49-51) South Africa will always be a polarised society. Only now there is no polarising between black and white but between magic and tragic. It is no coincidence that South Africa has the highest rate of both miracles and murders per capita in the civilised world. Reality has hit home as they (ibid. 47) illustrate:

“We have seen that the pace of change, the violence, the uncertainty, the increased competition, the collapse of the Rand, the corruption, the friction between government, business and labour, the changing of the rules, the ongoing corporate downsizing, the see-saw between black aspirations and white paranoia, have all contributed to the national plague of fear and fatigue.” (Lipken & Lascaris 1996:47)

An inner resourceful state of mind, emotional mastery, proactive responses and the power to make every life experience a learning encounter can be accomplished through facilitation processes. To take responsibility (the ability to choose a response; Covey 1992:71) to celebrate and embrace change and turbulence by using its momentum to turbo-boost our thinking, challenge the assumptions, liberate the emotions and to dare the rational logic is the 'response-able' choice in change facilitation, the 'Afr-I-Can option'. Educators do have a choice and they can decide whether to be inspired or deflated. They need not be highjacked by their emotions. At best their IQ determines about 20 % to the factors that determine their ability to cope with life and change, the other 80% is determined by their (EQ) emotional quotient (Lipken & Lascaris 1996:103). This is the ability of self-motivation, persistence, impulse control, and emotion regulation in dealing with others and in making others feel special by overtly demonstrating their care for them.

IN CONCLUSION

At the heart of education transition, is the desire to prepare children and young adults for a transforming society of the 21st century, a world for our children, which changes so much faster than our schools. Any discussion of educational change, and its constructed diverse meaning, requires that educational researchers locate themselves accurately within the area of diverse agendas before they are able to make useful proposals within the field of education. Educational policy change can be facilitated through inspired participatory dialogue and understanding between the theoretical, practical and emotional components of change, between the barriers that inhibit change and the factors that assist to overcome those barriers.

REFERENCES

- Alant, Cornie et al. 1990. *Sociology and society*. Humanistic Profile. Halfway House: Southern.
- Berkhout, Sarie J & Smit Brigitte. 1997. *Towards 'Afr-I-Can' education in hard times*. Paper read at the Annual Conference of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society, 10-12 January 1997, Livingstone, Zambia.
- Covey, Steven R. 1992. *The seven habits of highly effective people*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Fullan, Michael. 1982. *The meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goudsmit, Arno 1989. *Self-organization in psychotherapy – Demarcation of a new perspective*. Berlin: Springer Verlag
- Lascaris, Reg & Lipken, Mike. 1993. *Revelling in the wild*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau Tafelberg.
- Lipken, Mike & Lascaris, Reg. 1996. *Fire and water. The power of passion, the force of flow*. Sandton: Zebra Press.
- Robbins, Anthony. 1992. *Awaken the giant within*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Rogers, Carl. 1986. Client-centered therapy. In Kutash, I.L. & Wolf, A. (Eds), *Psychotherapist's casebook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rogers Carl R. & Freiberg H. Jerome 1994. *Freedom to learn*. New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company.
- Sunter, Clem. 1996. *The high road: Where are we now?* Cape Town: Tafelberg Human & Rousseau.
- Whitaker, Patrick. 1993. *Managing change in schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

NOTES

Paper read at the 12th Annual Conference of the Association for the Development of the Person-Centered Approach, 22-26 May 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and USA.

Policy Statement

The Person-Centered Journal is sponsored by the Association for Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). The publication is intended to promote and disseminate scholarly thinking about person-centered principles, practices, and philosophy.

All materials contained in The Person-Centered Journal are the property of the ADPCA, which grants reproduction permission to libraries, researchers, and teachers to copy all or part of the materials in this issue for scholarly purposes with the stipulation that no fee for profit be charged to the consumer for the use or possession of such copies.