

Chapter 8

Embedding Professionals and Collaboration in the Organizational Change Context

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ABSTRACT

Change in schools often concerns improving education, originating in the aim to align learning and outcomes with societal and labor market needs. Change is often dictated by policy and management, yet generally translated, integrated, and effectuated by education professionals, who see their practice continuously changing. Approaching the matter with a combination of systems approach and social constructivism, this chapter aims to analyze change and improvement in schools from the perspective of educators, who through their daily practice and professionalism constitute and breathe school changes. It does so by examining managerialism, self-determination theory, and professional identity as a foundation for a more practical approach to team learning. Distributed leadership and other recommendations are provided to bridge tensions and distance between educators, management, and leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

The body of literature in improvement and effectiveness in schools is significant. Generally, the concept of school effectiveness refers to if and how schools are able to achieve goals and objectives regarding student learning, development, and well-being. Often, this focuses on issues such as teacher's professional development, didactics and methods, or assessment, much like various chapters in this book. Change in school effectiveness, then, tends to relate to change in teacher practice. Separately, there is a huge body of literature in educational change: concepts and policy intended to make education better and to improve outcomes. Thinking about such educational change is strongly influenced by theories and models from the broader field of organization science. In many cases, the focus of existing and new research is on organizational and facilitative matters, at times overlooking the individual professionals within such organizational contexts. In educational environments, change initiatives are often imposed top-down, not rarely resulting in resistance, feelings of alienation, and a sense of protectionism among education professionals (Coppoolse et al., 2014). Moreover, expectations or obligations to change and collaborate may cause protective behavior and selective interaction between professionals. Such a context obviously complicates development and change, as these require involvement and interaction throughout the organization.

It is remarkable that although the role of leadership in school improvement has been widely recognized for quite some time now (e.g. Harris et al., 2002; Pont, 2020; Schildkamp, 2019), there is little understanding of what leadership can do to support and mitigate barriers to educational change which often is executed by educators and other education professionals. Meanwhile, professional collaboration has become key in organizational and educational practice and in approaches to change, while at the same time collaboration and its mobilization into the educational professional context is highly varied and at times hard to grasp and implement (Campbell, 2024). This situation highlights the need to explore approaches that respect and foster professionalism and collaborative learning to embed practice and change in the organization, and that mitigate negative effects of managerialism and imposition of change.

This chapter aims to contribute on the topic of educational change from the perspective of education professionals who, through their daily practice and professionalism, constitute and breath educational change, by contextualizing their behavior and relationships when confronted with necessary and ever-present educational change and by delving into the dynamics of change and professional development in educational settings. With particular attention to challenges and opportunities presented by the interplay between professionalism, teams and learning communities, and managerialism, it seeks to address the prevalent top-down approaches to

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