

Reflection on:

What Motivates Teachers to Lead Change?

This personal narrative was an excellent opportunity for me to synthesize two years of learning within the OISE doctoral program, and connect my experiences as a student, teacher and administrator. The narrative began with the question of “why”, which also anchored my first paper within the program.

The question “why change?” can be answered differently by every person, and the decision to embrace leadership is also very personal. Being a change leader is a role that is undertaken by some educators, and avoided by most, and I am curious why that is so. I am also interested in this from a policy perspective, as I observe great resistance to change at the policy levels necessary to support significant change in education. Powell and Kusama-Powell (2015) differentiate between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. While a technical challenge can be solved by training or provision of resources, an adaptive challenge requires us to address values, beliefs, assumptions, and identity. Policy change is technical, but it creates adaptive challenges when the policy is grounded in values that may not be universally shared.

I have always been drawn to quantitative research, and clearly defined criteria. So, the concept of a personal narrative as a form of research was not one which I had ever considered, and which raised “red flags” for me. As a leader I am skeptical of decisions based upon the “squeaky wheel” on a team, and so I am inclined to disregard personal statements, and look to data instead.

And as an individual, I have been prone to disregard the value of reflection, assuming that I will have thought sufficiently during the process to guide future action, and have no need to dedicate additional, possibly wasteful, time to looking backward.

So, being asked to document my leadership story, and then analyze it using processes learned throughout two years of study, turned out to be a valuable exercise. The techniques learned as I completed my qualitative interviews the previous winter were now applied to my personal writing. It's only when documented and then analyzed that the themes reveal themselves, and provide the basis for synthesis, so the detailed personal narrative allowed me, my study group members, and our course instructor to learn from our experiences.

The structure of the narrative, as being at once both the phenomenon and the method, required a new way of thinking and writing for me. And the use of both the personal and the academic voice was a challenge with this writing task. It is still uncomfortable for me to begin a sentence with "I" when writing for a technical or academic audience. I need to do more reading in this area, to develop my facility moving from the personal content necessary to set the context, to articulate the clear quantitative data that will be needed to complete the logical argument.

I also need to work more to connect theoretical frameworks to current research and to my own personal experience. And I need to practice creating my own conceptual frameworks, to clearly communicate these connections. In reflection, I should have returned to Gitlin and Margonis (1995) to connect their first-wave and second-wave school change processes, and to Hall and Hord (2001) who outlined twelve change principles, in contrast to Michael Fullan's (1993) eight lessons. The process of preparation for the comprehensive exam should be an excellent exercise in this process, as the 15-minute presentation will need to be coherent and comprehensive.

Now, writing a reflection on a reflection, I am also learning how the process of reflection is an important component of academic research. I see this trend when I examine a body of work of a particular researcher; observing that they develop their thinking over the course of many

years and many publications. Michael Fullan is an excellent example of this, as his work on leadership and change has responded to new learning throughout his career. Within the area of assessment, the work of Susan M Brookhart has evolved over the past two decades, from grades to rich feedback. Allison Zmuda's writing over the past decade has seen her focus shift from school libraries to personalized learning. I wish that I had embarked on an academic path earlier in my career, as it might have made me a better leader, and better able to contribute to innovation within our educational institutions.

What is missing from my writing thus far is feedback and criticism. I now need to publish, in order to hear responses to my thinking, and further challenge my conclusions. I began a blog, prior to beginning my doctoral studies, but found it was the one thing I could easily postpone when faced with deadlines. I feel that I now need to write for publication, in order to grow.