

What Motivates Teachers to Lead Change?

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Abstract

This paper presents a personal narrative, examining an Ontario teacher's motivation to lead change, in the context of changes in Ontario educational policy.

Keywords: change, education, teacher, motivation, Ontario, curriculum

### **Introduction**

Change is often a top-down process, managed by leaders with positional power. But often change originates as a grassroots initiative, lead by followers. Within education, change often begins with teachers.

### **Research Question**

What motivates teachers to lead change?

While a comprehensive study, involving a broad sample of teachers, would be ideal, I have chosen to focus on my personal experience, in the context of policy changes over the course of my teaching career and within the changing culture of K-12 education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Autobiographical inquiry is a form of professional development, where “day-to-day teaching events become episodic evidence of changing perspectives and a growing life in relation to society and the world at large” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 22). It is through this inquiry process that I hope to examine my own motivation to lead change during my career as a teacher and leader.

Maslow (1943) stated that motivation is a person’s drive to fulfill five basic needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. I contend that influencing change in one’s environment and influencing others to change, can impact all five of these needs.

Motivation is a “psychological construct used to explain why human beings do certain things” (Coates, 2016, p.71).

Leadership as practice rather than leadership as competency, where the practitioner is able to “comprehend the subtleties of sophisticated dynamics like unlearning, transition and transformation...to be an embodied, embedded way of being and approaching organizations”

(Carroll, Levy & Richmond, 2008, p. 371), is the focus of this paper. Erica Ariel Fox and Nate Boaz advise a focus on people rather than policy, and suggest that “linking strategic and systemic intervention to genuine self-discovery and self-development by leaders is a far better path to embracing the vision of the organization” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 2)

Complexity theory states that “the link between cause and effect is difficult to trace, that change (planned and otherwise) unfolds in non-linear way, that paradoxes and contradictions abound and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under conditions of uncertainty, diversity and instability” (Fullan, 1999, p. 4). For the purposes of this paper, complexity can be seen to contribute to the challenge of answering the research question.

First order change is “trying to do better whatever is already taking place”, while second order change “entails doing something that has not been done before” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 105). This paper addresses both orders, with particular consideration to the challenges faced by teachers who attempt second order change.

The question of “Why” has found resonance in the business literature, through the work of Simon Sinek and Amanda Lang. Sinek has observed that some leaders are able to inspire those around them, and that this can be learned (Sinek, 2011, p. 1). The motivators for change, identified by Sinek, are: manipulation, inspiration, price, promotions, fear, aspirations, peer pressure, and novelty or innovation.

Through an examination of one educators’ career, it is hoped that links with theories of change, leadership, and motivation will answer the question “why”.

### **Context**

I am a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered female, raised in a traditional western family by two parents. I attended the United Church of Canada until age 18 and would describe myself

now as an atheist. For the first seven years of my life, my experience would have been typical of a child in Ontario in the 1960's: my father carpooled to work and my mother was a "housewife". Then my father returned to university to study medicine and my mother took a job in a library, so we joined the ranks of the working poor but lived in a relatively rich cultural and intellectual environment. At age twelve, my father started a medical practice in a small town, my mother reduced her work to part-time, and my environment became less intellectually and culturally stimulating, but much more supportive of individual initiatives. Within this smaller community, if something was "missing" one had to build it oneself, and so I had role models who introduced a music program to our high school, who started a community theatre, and who engaged politically in municipal government. At the end of high school, I had a choice between Applied Mathematics at the University of Waterloo, and Music Education at the University of Toronto, and I opted for the potentially more "fun" path in the exciting city. There I responded to my new environment, where physically handicapped musicians could not enter the Edward Johnson Building, and where the program for music education majors was at risk due to the use of contract instructors, by running for Faculty Council, and driving change to make my world better. I brought this experience to my career as a secondary school teacher.

I have been a teacher, coach, coordinator and administrator in nine locations within one single public school board. In each of my positions, I have either participated in, or led, change initiatives.

### **Design & Methods**

I began this process by writing "My Leadership Journey", as a task within a doctoral-level course. It was shared with four other students, and we studied and discussed our five stories to identify leadership themes. This led to the creation of a dramatic presentation focusing on

gender, power, sexism, racism, classism, ageism, favoritism, leadership, mentorship, which explored how these impacted our faith in our abilities.

I received feedback on my writing, both from our professor and from the four members of our seminar group, and a consistent question was “why?”. Why did I feel compelled from an early age to change the world in which I lived, and to change those around me?

The process of narrative analysis can take the form of autoethnography, a form of study that can “take on the hegemonic grand narratives of dominant voices and seek to find a legitimate space for life experiences to be heard” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 21) This description resonates with me, as I see my voice as a minority within the educational context. Critical autoethnography “uses data to analyze how structures of power inherent in culture inform some aspect of her or his own story” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 60). The culture of education and its power structures play a role in this autoethnography.

This paper is a synthesis of my experiences leading change in an Ontario school district, over almost thirty-five years. I relate my actions to the political climate and culture of the time, and to my personal growth as a leader. I analyze my role as a change agent as I developed from a teacher “being changed” to a leader “effecting change”. To be an effective leader, one must understand “motivations and other inner drives” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 3)

### **What motivated me to lead change?**

“People take to change when it is intrinsically interesting and when they have some say in its evolution, develop ownership with others, and enjoy doing something worthwhile with peers inside and outside their schools” (Fullan, 2014, p. 148). My career has been characterized by all three: I am intrinsically motivated to change, I have worked to develop ownership with my colleagues, and I truly enjoy my work. The question is why?

#### **Motivation**

Motivational theories focus on mindset, possible selves, hope, curiosity, and passion (Coates, 2016, p. 72). When I was twenty-one, I was told that I was “the most optimistic person” this forty-something man had ever met. Perhaps it was due to the fact that I was engaged to be married, or because was spending the summer playing trombone at the Banff School of Fine Arts, but I haven’t lost that optimism, hope, curiosity and passion in the intervening years. I don’t think I had as much optimism as a teenager, but once I had achieved adulthood and a degree of agency over my own life, I have grounded my life work in a positive mindset. Remembering my teen years, however, keeps me aware that not everyone shares this experience, and may need to be supported to maintain hope.

Depending upon whether one sees oneself as part of a market or a polis, motivation can be either self-interest or altruism. (Stone, 2012, p. 35). Even altruism is self-interest, if altruistic behavior garners loyalty, power and community good. In my case, my actions for change all resulted in positive results for myself, though some came at a cost as well. Researchers focus on the positive results of their research, and rarely examine the “side effects”, that could be damaging. For example, the current conversation about the use of social media by students can be argued as connecting students globally while at the same time alienating them in their local

community. I supported the change to allow student use of cellphones in class on the basis that we had the greatest potential to influence good behavior by modelling and teaching, rather than by banning. The benefit to me of this decision was fewer phone confiscations, but at a cost of teacher frustration and potential loss of instructional focus in class.

### **The status quo isn't working**

Resistance to change on the part of teachers may stem from their “investment in the familiar institutional practices of the school” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 9). This argument makes sense if school has been the place of success for the teacher, as it is for many. In my case, I was terribly bored at school. There were wonderful moments of engagement and joy, but I was usually more interested in something other than that presented by the teacher: the person next to me, the novel in my bag, or the ideas in my head. As technology has allowed me to indulge each of these through social media, the Kindle app, and Google, I myself have become an increasingly less compliant student. This self-knowledge has driven me to change the classroom experience for my students. When planning a lesson I consider the experience for each of my learners, and must look for ways to avoid the clarion call of the cellphone, or the temptation of the conversation with another classmate. The learning process has to “work” for my students, and if it doesn't, I must change.

### **Who suggests the change?**

Although I have always responded with curiosity, and often enthusiasm, to changes initiated by those I follow, changes championed by peers have a greater chance of success: “some leaders make the mistake of wanting to get the credit for a successful idea.... you'll earn far more credit and credibility... for being hands-off while facilitating change” (Gabriel, 2005, p.91) I have seen this in action both with those I lead, and those I follow. One of my career

successes was when our director of education changed the language in his annual speech from “laptops for teachers” to “projectors in every classroom”, based upon the results of my IT2007 change project.

### **Failure of Professional Development to Drive Change**

Professional development, delivered through a single medium to a large number of teachers, has been the key method by which policy changes have been implemented in my school board. The school board articulates its mission, vision and values, and sets goals that are communicated annually to all stakeholders. As an administrator, I live daily with the poor results that this practice produces: teachers who still do not follow assessment and evaluation policy, superintendents who focus their work on their latest interest despite its lack of alignment with articulated goals, and colleagues who are overwhelmed by the number of initiatives that must be supported within a single school. In my own personal experience, I have experienced many cycles of improvement, realignment of system goals, and refocusing of attention, as those leading our system move on, and another one takes their place. “Money bombs” arrive from the Ministry of Education, and the most efficient way to spend them is to pay for a day at a conference centre, with a tasty lunch, and supply teachers covering classes back at school. However, sending one teacher to a day of professional development, or even a school team, does not result in changes for an entire school. As a resource teacher, during a year where 25% of the secondary teachers were required to teach 100% of the time with no preparation time, I had to change my practice from instruction to team-teaching, in order to support teacher learning. I modelled instruction in the classroom with the teachers, and then supported them to practice these new instructional strategies. This site-based model was made even more powerful when it was a team of teachers working on a common focus, who could then support each other in a

learning community after I departed. Later, in my role as coordinator, I lobbied for the creation of new resource teacher roles, to bring site-specific learning to schools, rather than host large-scale central workshops. While Fullan would argue that supporting individual teachers is ineffective (Fullan, 2014, p. 29), he is basing this upon a model of teacher appraisal, rather than teacher education.

### **Role of a Teacher – Critical Thinking**

Teachers structure their classroom assessment to include four achievement categories: Knowledge and Understanding, Thinking and Inquiry, Communication, and Application. With the implementation of new curriculum in 1999, the second category, Thinking and Inquiry, was the subject of discussion. While it was mandated that thinking should be assessed, there was little in the curriculum that demanded demonstration of achievement beyond knowledge and skills. So, the focus for much of the professional development as we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century was around critical thinking. A side effect of this was that teachers developed their own critical thinking skills as well, and in some cases this developed a “culture of complaint” (Starr, 2011, p. 654). For some, this meant that they developed a cynicism and negative mindset, while for me this was a call to action. Once a problem has been articulated, it seems foolish not to address it.

### **Individual Leadership vs System Leadership**

As my career advanced, I changed from a “small I” leader, to a system leader, within roles such as resource teacher, coordinator, and then to school leaderships as a vice principal and then principal. Fullan discusses both roles, and the challenges faced when individual leaders “find the system is less than helpful”, or when system leaders “find individual leaders to be stumbling blocks to improvement” (Fullan, 2005, p. xi).

**Values**

Perhaps values “are the core explanation as to why some people ambitiously climb the career ladder and why others are happily content with what is” (Jenni, 2017, p. 76). Certainly my values of social justice and equity have driven me to speak up and make change in my career. I felt I had no voice as a teacher, and so pursued the role of assistant department head in order to sit at the table and influence working conditions for myself and my colleagues. Jenni links values to behaviours to motivations for someone might want to step into a leadership role. My values resulted in behaviours that then motivated me to look for leadership opportunities, since I needed the position and its influence to be heard and to be able to change policy and other people. As a secondary school principal, I am now in a position that aligns with my values, allows me to behave in ways that can effect change in both systems and in my staff.

**Self-Improvement**

While I did not formally pursue leadership for the first half of my career, I still took on informal leadership roles. I could not stand by, observing a practice within my school and thinking “I could do that better”, without voicing my opinion. This was not new; even as a child I would speak up if the parent driving me home made a wrong turn, or if my teacher mis-stated a fact. I can recall thinking that my teacher spent all her time trying to help us to “get it right”, and it was appalling when she didn’t do so herself. Most people abandon this pattern continuous learning once they leave school, but teachers are immersed in it every day, and so it is nurtured as a habit, and becomes embedded as a mindset, for better or worse. I’m sure that my vocal criticism of queue-jumpers, or those who don’t turn off their cellphones during performances, is not always appreciated.

As probationary teacher, it was necessary to be evaluated four times in the first two years of teaching, and this process encouraged a mindset of continuous improvement. Every day, as a teacher, I was assessing my students, providing them with feedback, and looking for growth and improvement. So, immersed in a world where change is celebrated, it is surprising to me find teachers who do not embrace change.

But, believe it or not, most teachers I have encountered do not like to change. Perhaps this goes back to Maslow's needs for safety; if the world changes it might not be as safe. I have learned that I need to find out what each teacher's currency is, and then frame the change in terms of a gain for them. Perhaps they wish for more autonomy. Perhaps they wish their classroom was quieter and easier to manage. Perhaps they want the accolades that exemplary students earn. Perhaps they hate dealing with parents, and wish they wouldn't challenge their teaching practices. Whatever their need, change will only happen if it aligns with their needs, and does not require an inordinate amount of time and energy to achieve. Investment of time and energy occurs only when multiple needs are being met: social, esteem, and self-actualization. This applies to both teacher leaders, and to those they lead. If the change involves social interaction, increases their sense of self, and results in self-actualization, then it has an increased chance of success.

### **Capacity Building vs Accountability**

Accountability is the mandate of the EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office), and the focus of the current review by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Where capacity exists, mandated accountable change may take place. However, "extreme pressure without capacity results in dysfunctional behavior" (Fullan, 2014, p. 27). This applies to systems, and to individual teachers. As a leader, I have been able to bring my skills to bear, in support of

those I lead, to build their capacity to change. Teachers, as a group, should be expert as this, since this is their classroom mandate as well. However, often those at the top misjudge the capabilities of those they lead, and place them in an untenable situation, where they are unable to change. As a principal, I often look for ways to change a teacher's assignment, to allow them to function well, rather than struggle. They are then able to consider other changes, from a position of strength.

### **Surround yourself with change agents**

Fullan's "focus on team over self" (Fullan, 2014, p. 131) has been key to my success as a leader. Early in my career I chose to move schools to work with similar-minded educators. Later, I was able as a principal to hire to create the team. Teachers who are willing to take risks, and to look for opportunities to work with others who share their interests, can effect change more quickly through collaborative work.

### **Belonging**

A fundamental need is to "belong", and it can act counter to a desire for change. "One cannot live outside the box and still maintain all the rights and privileges associated with staying inside of it" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 14). I have not ever felt like I belonged, and so I believe I have been more willing to give up belonging in favour of other rewards. Society does us a disservice by suggesting that people should feel like they belong; it is an elusive and rare quality, and I have yet to meet someone who claims to really feel that they belong. So, if taking a risk and making a change challenges one's potential to feel that they belong, they are likely to avoid it.

### **Contagion**

The Internet and social networking was a key factor in encouraging my impulse to support change. Once my classroom innovations were posted to my class website, and I was talking about them in the Electronic Village, and then the Education Network of Ontario, I was networked with others. They implemented my innovations, and I theirs, and together we shifted classroom practice. “Contagion makes rapid change a reality” (Fullan, 2013, p. 69).

### **Helping Disposition**

The role of a teacher demands that one adopt a helping disposition. An unhelpful teacher will experience classroom management issues, and lack of collegial support. Helping, in a school context, means looking to improve things for those around you.

### **Motivating Others**

The most sustainable level of commitment comes when mental and spiritual needs are satisfied (Kaser, Mundry, Stiles and Loucks-Horseley, 2006, p. 98). In my own change leadership I am most effective when I have an understanding of others’ spiritual and mental needs, and am able to articulate the connection between the change initiative and the meeting of those needs. A change that others do not find meaningful will not be sustained, so my communication skills are key. My teachers are currently experimenting with iPads and an assessment app called Sesame. Some are doing so because they can see that it helps their students learn, others are enjoying the novelty of the technology, and a few are participating merely to demonstrate that they are supportive of me as a leader. This latter motivation may launch the initiative, but it will need to continue to meet other needs to be sustainable.

**Complex change lessons**

Fullan, in the 1990's, articulated eight change lessons, many of which link to my experience as a teacher-leader:

1. Moral Purpose – in order address student needs, top-down mandates with external accountability, and bottom-up energies focusing on local capacity development are critical.
2. Theories of Education and Theories of Change need each other – local context is a crucial variable.
3. Conflict and Diversity are our friends – will lead to creative breakthroughs.
4. Operating on the Edge of Chaos – become used to a degree of uncertainty.
5. Anxiety is necessary – and is handled well by emotionally intelligent people.
6. Anxiety is necessary – and arises from collaborative work.
7. Connectedness and Knowledge creation are critical – with coherence as a goal.
8. There is no single solution. (Fullan, 1999)

An example of this is my implementation of the new BTT100 curriculum in 1999. My vision was of a paperless classroom, with all resources available through a class website. To complicate matters, of the three teachers, only I had functional knowledge of all the software tools we would be using, and none of us had taught a full course in a computer lab with one computer per student. Our moral purpose was to prepare our students to meet the demands of each new course they would encounter in their four years of secondary school, OAC courses having been eliminated. We didn't know our school community, as this was a brand-new school, so were learning our community and context as we worked. We had never worked together, so conflict, diversity and chaos resulted in anxiety on a daily basis. We worked toward coherence

through continual communication, and flexibility, assuming that there was more than one way to reach our goals, and that we would reach them together. It was a year of learning, both for us and our students, and resulted in a model course that is still being taught, with only a few modifications, more than fifteen years later.

### **Inertia**

Change cannot happen if we “fail to understand... the inertial constraints that prevent changes from taking place” (Jonasson, 2016, p.1).

The constraint of tradition, basing decisions on long-standing normative criteria, is supported by existing school staff, parents, and the broader community. Even when the traditions do not stand up to scrutiny, there is a romanticized notion of the “good old days” where students didn’t get pregnant, suffer drug overdoses, or swear at teachers. I often respond to such statements with anecdotes from my own teen years, which were not at all the rosy picture painted by those who wish to maintain the status quo.

The constraint of the school system itself, where changes need approval at many levels, make the institution a limiting factor for change. An example of institutionalization is the naming of subjects within school, and the identification of some as “core” and others as “optional”. As a teacher of computer studies and music, my disciplines have always been optional, and have been relegated to inferior status within the school. However, when students talk about their secondary school experience, it is more often about the option courses, than those deemed to be core.

The standards, or curriculum policy, are a constraint that that limits change. There is no room in the curriculum for financial literacy, for social media literacy, or healthy living

instruction beyond grade 9. To meet the standards of literacy and numeracy, all other priorities take a back seat.

Since most teachers were successful in school themselves, they believe in the effectiveness of the content and processes they experienced, and are unwilling to abandon any of the basics in favour of new disciplines such as genetics, computer and cognitive science or communication science (Jonasson, 2016, p. 7).

### **Lack of Fear**

In Fullan's description of Deep Learning, he describes three necessary conditions for sustainability of change in a data-driven society: "drive out fear; set up a system of transparent data-gathering coupled with mechanisms for acting on the data; make sure all levels of the system are expected to learn from their experiences" (Fullan, 2005, p. 22). Eliminating fear is like building trust; it is built over many, many experiences, and destroyed by a single experience. So, as a leader, it is a significant challenge to remove it from our schools. Learning from experiences is difficult in a litigious society. Our teacher unions threaten grievances, and our teachers may feel challenged by their administration, parents and students. One of my roles as a leader is to stand behind my teachers, and support them to take risks that might jeopardize their sense of safety.

### **Gender**

The educational environment in secondary schools has changed significantly since I began teaching in 1983. I worked only with male administrators and department heads for more than a decade, and I was a minority within my school as being both female and under thirty. Now it is a challenge to hire young male teachers, and female administrators far outnumber our male colleagues. In the 1980's, I saw my minority status as a challenge, and I worked to

encourage young women to pursue careers in computer science. However, I still believed that leadership was not compatible with my wish to be a mother, and so I did not consider positions of responsibility or influence until well into my career. Even when I became a vice principal, twenty-two years into my career, I still had not met a female leader who had successfully achieved motherhood, marriage, and career balance. I hope that I have provided a model for some of those I have mentored, and that they do not see my delayed entry into administration as a cautionary tale.

### **What you teach impacts how you teach**

When I entered education as a teacher, the premier of Ontario was Bill Davis, who had been minister of education through the 1960's, and had been responsible for the creation of the community college system, and for implementation of recommendations from the Hall-Dennis Report. Although the Progressive Conservative Party (also known as the Tories) had been in power in Ontario since 1943, and were known as the 'Big Blue Machine', they had been led by a series of premiers who were called 'red Tory', due to their focus on progressive social legislation (Pinto, 2012, p. 23). So, my first few years of teaching were in a climate of progressive education, where curriculum documents were frameworks for teacher planning, but there was little accountability nor monitoring of my practice.

I was teaching music and computer studies, both of which allowed for a great deal of latitude in terms of instruction and assessment. This was an era before social media, so I had few role models for my classroom practice: only my own high school experience, my practicum experiences as an undergrad and a pre-service teacher, and what I could observe through the doorways into the classrooms of my colleagues. Our course binders consisted of rudimentary lesson plans, and unit tests. In music, most tests were performances, with short quizzes on

theory and history topics. In computer studies there was a combination of programming projects and written tests of programming knowledge. Since the DIC2G0 course was a prerequisite for three possible grade 11 courses: computer science, data processing, or computer engineering, there were also units relating specifically to these disciplines, including hands-on breadboarding of electronic components. Both music and computer studies features continuous change: in music, our repertoire reflected both popular and traditional music, so no two semesters were the same, and in computer studies the technology was undergoing rapid innovation, and so our classrooms had to keep pace as well. With these as my grounding experiences in education, it is logical that I would be primed to continue to expect change throughout my career.

### **Two Narratives: Realism and Romanticism**

Realism is based on logic and reason, while romanticism is based on emotions and passions. In schools, realism demands accountability, precise curriculum, and firm behavioral expectations. Romanticism promotes a student-centered curriculum, inquiry teaching, and personalization (Alvy, 2017, p.22). My narrative of change begins with romanticism, and then embeds it in policy to operationalize the changes that began with a focus on the student. This cycle of romantic motivation for change, and then realistic implementation, is a necessary cycle for change. Teachers can be motivated by the precision of a realistic approach, as it meets their need for safety and structure. Or they may be motivated to change by the romantic goals, and will then implement the procedures and processes necessary to support the change.

**Technical change versus cultural change**

It is easy for a leader to impose technical changes, such as timetabling, curriculum revision, or assessment policies. However, “they produce very few positive results when used by people who do not believe in the intended outcome of the change” (Muhammad, 2009, p.15). In my experience, only that that cannot be undermined will survive, unless the culture of the community is also changed. Changing culture means changing the thoughts and beliefs of others, and requires skills in diplomacy, salesmanship, patience, endurance and encouragement. (Muhammad, 2009, p.16). Teachers are usually only able to effect technical changes within their classrooms, as they have no power to impose those changes on others. As a teacher, I looked for opportunities to participate in school and system committees, where technical changes could be made that would be foundational to subsequent cultural changes. As a principal, I theorized that having a common lunch, where students would have access to their friends every day, would impact the school climate and culture in a positive way. Those who opposed this technical change soon embraced it for the cultural changes they observed. When my teachers stopped “policing” the hallways, and no longer had to keep students quiet, they were able to participate in a more accepting and positive environment. I wanted to eliminate the negative interactions between students and teachers, and this technical change achieved that goal, and improved culture as a byproduct.

**Believers**

A model of teachers who embrace change in support of an ideal learning environment, is described by Anthony Muhammad as “Believers” who have six characteristics:

1. High levels of intrinsic motivation
2. Personal connection to the school and community

3. High levels of flexibility with students
4. Application of positive student pressure
5. Willingness to confront opposing viewpoints
6. Varied levels of pedagogical skills

My actions as a novice teacher exhibit many of these. And I believe they reinforce themselves as one engages in cycles of change. The more one practices them, and receives positive response, the more willing one will be to engage in change practices.

### **Empowerment**

Barriers to change are blame, bureaucracy and “baloney” (Reeves, 2008, p. 57). However, if you believe, as I do, that a problem demands a solution, then these are not barriers. Rather than blame the student who is swearing at me, I inquired to find out why. Rather than rail at the increased paperwork, I looked for a solution to reduce it. And the “baloney”, or the culture of superstition, prejudice and deeply held convictions without evidence, could not take hold in my rationale, scientific approach to my world. I see more willingness to change in two subject areas in my school: science and social science. In both, they work with theories and evidence, and so they are willing to view educational change in the same light.

### **Anti-social behaviour**

Visionary leadership has not had the desired effect to effect change, perhaps due to the nature of educational leadership. “One does not get to lead in education without being well socialized to the norms, values, predispositions, and routines of the organization one is leading” (Elmore, 2000, p.2). From this I would conclude that my effectiveness as a change agent has primarily been because I am NOT well socialized to these norms and values. I was described by principal, in my first role as vice principal, as a “bull in a china shop”. I was sent for coaching

after I challenged the associate director on her policy regarding access to student data. And I was told that I would never be promoted if I continued to lobby on behalf of my students. These actions, taken within a unionized context, did not seem to be a great risk to me. I knew that I could continue to teach and lead, though I might not be promoted. For some, however, that potential loss of career advancement could limit their willingness to lead change.

### **The role of unlearning**

The cycle of learning consists of:

- Active Experimentation – planning, trying out
- Concrete Experience – doing, having an experience
- Reflection Observation – reviewing, reflecting on the experience
- Abstract Conceptualization – concluding, learning from the experience (Juliani, 2018, p. 14)

Because I was always in the Active Experimentation stage in my teaching, due to my subject areas of computer science and music, and because this cycle was different every time, I was in a continue mode of unlearning. This is an ideal condition to nurture innovation and change. Juliani's (2018) Intentional Innovation Framework provides us with a series of actions that should support teachers to innovate:

P – Praise

L – Look For

A – Assess

S – Support

M – Make Time For

A – Allow

These technical actions can support teachers to innovate and change. I believe that I was doing this as I worked as a classroom teacher, and continued this cycle as I took on leadership roles and positions.

### **Renegade Leadership**

An interesting framework for leadership embodies ten leadership traits:

1. Pedagogical Precision – focusing on Collaboration, Ownership, Digital connectivity and Experiential learning (CODE)
2. Transparency
3. Connectedness
4. Innovation
5. Risk-taking
6. Capacity building
7. Child centered
8. Empowered learner
9. Impact and influence
10. Moral courage (Gustafson, 2017, p. 9)

This framework was developed recently, but it aligns with my practice as a teacher and leader. The last two, impact and influence, and moral courage, speak to the question of motivation, and partially answer the question of “why”. Throughout my career I have been motivated to work from a position of mutual trust and integrity, fighting for what is best for my students. I enhanced my curriculum with current social themes, added computer skills as they became accessible, and lobbied for technological innovations that supported student learning, well before they were validated by formal research. I was using email with my students in 1998,

social media in my classroom in 1999, and web-based phone and fax systems in 2000. It took some time for board policy to assess these tools, and determine that they were good for student learning. In the meantime, I innovated and shared.

### **Justification for Change**

Intuition is often what drives change, but in order to sustain the change, the leader must be able to articulate both the why, and the what. Putting the rationale of “why” into words provides the emotional context for decisions, the “how” are the actions you take, and the rational “what” offers proof of its success (Sinek, 2009). I have found that I often discover a “what” in my teaching practice, I figure out the “why”, and then I refine the “how” so that I can communicate it to others. For example, I learned that my math students were much more successful on my math tests when they worked on the problems in a spreadsheet on the computer. When I probed, I learned from one of my students that “you can’t cheat”. He had, in the past, merely copied his math work from a friend. When he worked on the computer, he was forced to actually do the work, and to understand which value went in which cell, and which formula he needed to enter. While we had thought that the computer was teaching him math, it actually was only an accountability tool, forcing him to think and learn. Now that I knew the why, I could plan how to teach more effectively, and leverage this knowledge of why my students were learning.

### **Change as a function of adult mental complexity**

Kegan and Lahey describe three plateaus in adult mental complexity:

1. The socialized mind
  - a. We are shaped by the expectations of our personal environment
  - b. Our self coheres with that with which it identifies

- c. This is expressed in our relationships with people and our “schools of thought”
2. The self-authoring mind
    - a. We are able to step back to generate an internal “seat of judgment”
    - b. Our self coheres with its own belief system; by its ability to self-direct, and to create and regulate its boundaries on behalf of its own voice.
  3. The self-transforming mind
    - a. We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology; see that any one system is in some way incomplete; be friendlier toward contradiction and opposites; and hold onto multiple systems
    - b. Our self coheres through its ability not to confuse internal consistency with wholeness or completeness, and through its alignment with the dialectic rather than any pole. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 17)

Kegan and Lahey’s observation that “our own mental complexity lags behind the complexity of the world’s demands” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 30), may have identified a key reason why some teachers embrace and lead change, and others do not. My ability to consider contradiction and opposites has been responsible for many of my successes in championing change. Openness to input, and to new ideas, has made my staff more willing to follow my lead, and be more comfortable with the uncertainty, and sometimes chaos, that a change process demands. Kegan and Lahey also speak about individual’s hidden competing commitments. Teachers often have hidden commitments to reduce their workload, to be liked by their students, or to avoid conflict. These can counter a change initiative, and so a leader must be aware, name these commitments, and demonstrate where they are either incompatible, or can be adjusted to

facilitate change. Experience and maturity support a leader's growth, and movement from one plateau to the next. In this way, my 35 years in education have assisted me to become a more effective change agent.

### **Six secrets of change**

As a teacher-leader, and more-so as an administrator, I have found success in Fullan's six secrets of change (Fullan, 2008).

The first, to love your employees, was one I had to learn early in my career. As a young teacher, I didn't feel I had much to contribute, and didn't see myself as responsible for my teaching colleagues. However, once it was clear that my skillset and expertise could assist them in their roles, I was able to take on a nurturing, supportive role, and could see how these relationships supported change in a way that my formal school leaders could not create.

The second, to connect peers with purpose, bore fruit in my role as an online facilitator for the Ontario Teacher's Federation's "Creating a Culture of Change" project. Through online discussion groups, I was able to listen to teacher's concerns from across the province, and connect teachers with similar concerns to solve their specific problems.

The third, that capacity building prevails, became apparent when leading my department as we opened a new school. We had all the skills we needed within our group, but there was little overlap, so we needed to work together to develop skills in each other. Once we could all function effectively, I was able to move on to a new role, knowing that my team was able to continue our work.

The fourth, that learning is the work, has been a common observation as I have outlived many centrally-driven mandates. Where the initiative is part of the work of the school, it succeeds. Where it's a workshop or course, with no local context, it dies.

The fifth, that transparency rules, has borne fruit in my roles as department head, coordinator and administrator. For teachers, in particular, the data that can be presented on an ongoing basis provides a stronger impetus for change than any central decree.

And the final secret, that systems learn, has been demonstrated in my observation of individual leaders, whose initiatives have not outlived their tenure. In my experience, grounding learning in shared principles has been much more effective than rules listed by a leader. When we opened a new school with the principles of stewardship, technology, opportunity, responsiveness and meta-curriculum, the school continued to function beyond the tenure of its founding principal, and the ten key process leaders. Now, when we are considering a change or improvement, our school team articulates the underlying principles that drive our decision-making process, and we are better able to communicate the potential change to the rest of the school, and gain their support and trust.

### **Sense of efficacy and self-actualization**

Influencing change supports a teacher's sense of efficacy, and self-actualization. Counter to this is the need for ease "being ineffective means others do the work for them" (Gruener & Whitaker, 2017, p. 155). I was raised to value hard work, and to celebrate successes, so I am inclined to step into change. My parents embodied the "growth mindset", choosing to learn skills in order to build a series of recreational vehicles and homes. I brought this approach to my teaching, learning to code in new languages only weeks ahead of my students, and trying out new technologies in the classroom on the basis of a newspaper article or blog post. Even when I crashed the board's servers accessing a streaming video site with my class in 2001, I saw this as a triumph.

### **Hierarchical change**

“The role of the hierarchy in organizational change is typically to communicate the essential message of change” (Reeves, 2009, p. 50). When this communication is subject to the “telephone” effect, what was mandated at the top becomes something very different at the bottom. When I’ve observed this, and have returned to the original message, I have felt compelled to step in a “right the wrong” by taking a leadership role in implementation of the change. The Ministry of Education’s funding of computers, for example, indicated that the funds must be used to the benefit of learners. Our board interpreted this by banning the purchase of any computers for teacher use, and wrote a policy to that effect. Once the use of computers became increasingly beneficial to teachers in their practice, I was able to return to the original mandate, and lobby for a change in board policy to allow computers attached to projectors in classrooms.

### **School Culture**

Among the feedback I received to my “Leadership Journey” paper, was the question “why would you not have pursued a department headship in an existing school?”. The reason is the culture; I am still intimidated by the prospect of entering a resistant environment, and having to influence and lead change. I’ve had the experience of joining a school in its fourth year, of opening a brand new school, and many experiences of joining a school staff who have been together for years. “Imagine working at a school where, whenever people find something not working, they fix it” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017, p. 86). When a teacher is part of team planning a new school, habits of monitoring and change become part of the culture. However, after only four years, some of the staff become resistant, particularly if the change is to reverse or alter a change that they initiated. The resistance is weak, because the articulated vision of the school overrides the personal feeling, and the teacher is compelled to permit the change. In

schools where the staff has worked together for decades, there is little support for change, no matter how good it might be. I learned to “float ideas” repeatedly over time, and to share my observations of where a particular practice was detrimental to students. I also invited input, and reflection, on a regular basis, with no particular change goal in mind. Soon I was hearing my words come back to me, through the voices of my teachers, and we were able to move our practice. This is a very slow process, but one which then builds capacity for the next change.

### **Change as a habit**

Habits that have become ingrained become barriers to change. If I had stayed at my first school longer, it is unlikely that I would have been as willing to apply to new positions, and move schools. The fear of the unknown would have overridden my desire for promotion. However, having been forced to move after an extended leave, I was more willing to consider a second move, and then a third, fourth, fifth, etc.

Teachers have many habits that they have practiced over years. A teacher who has been asking questions daily, over many years, will find it difficult to change her method of questioning, because her routine will have been habit (William, 2015, p.185). I was fortunate to be in a position of precarious employment in my first decade of teaching, and had to accept assignments each year to teach outside my areas of qualification. By so doing, I developed a different habit: adaptation to changing curriculum, classrooms, and students each year. I am hopeful that the current climate, where teachers experience a series of short-term assignments over many years, before being offered full-time contract work, will be nurturing a habit of flexibility and innovation in our newest generation of teachers.

### **Ministry Mandate: Growing Success**

When *Growing Success* was published (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), many of its mandates had been in place for a decade, but had not been presented in a coherent, single policy document. The approach taken by my school board was to “pilot” the document in a few schools, and then share “best practices”. As a result, when workshops were held for school leaders and teachers, the focus was on the pilot project as a model, rather than on the document itself. Since the pilot school focused on its areas of concern, there were significant policy features that were either ignored, or only cursorily addressed. The focus of the conversation became the details of the school’s implementation plan, rather than the policy document itself. As a result, implementation in schools was uneven, and incomplete. To this day, there are teachers who still are not in compliance with policy, since there was no process of accountability, and an ineffective implementation plan. I am now living with the fall-out of this process, having to work individually with teachers to impress upon them the need for their practices to change to align with Ministry of Education policy. It would have been much better had the document been presented to all stakeholders, and schools been given the mandate to implement with a clear timeline and set of specific benchmarks and goals. This type of change would have been met with great resistance, but the alternative, of leaving it to each teacher, was not effective. Douglas Reeves calls this myth “Just a little bit better is good enough”, and shares research that indicates that “implementation that was moderate or occasional was no better than implementation that was completely absent” (Reeves, 2009, p. 44). Engaging in the behavior, even by those who do not welcome the change, will produce results that will then lead them to believe that it is beneficial and is the right thing to do. As teachers, we believe this in our classes, where we direct students’ activities, despite their lack of understanding of the process, knowing that they will benefit from the practice. I believe that experiences as a child, such as I

had when studying piano, contribute to a teachers' understanding of this process, and willingness to embrace a practice without a solid belief. Perhaps my teachers who resist change have missed out on key "growth mindset" experiences themselves.

Dylan Wiliam identifies two fundamental flaws of trying to copy others. Firstly, we may choose the wrong features, attributing them incorrectly as the drivers of success. Secondly, even if we are correct about the cause, we assume that the same things would work in our context (Wiliam, 2016, p. 21). It is only in our own context that we can accurately assess, and then propose changes. When teachers recognize the flaws or inconsistencies in central policy, and can identify the how they could "do it better", they are motivated to drive change.

### **Personal nature of change**

Since teachers, as internal agents, have capacity to refract externally mandated change, it is important that school change engages their "hearts and minds", and do not ignore the personal domain (Goodson, 2001).

### **Role of a single person**

Merely stating policy is not sufficient to drive change. Organizations need to support the full potential of all; "one person... can provide that catalyst" (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 10).

Throughout my career I have seen myself as that catalyst, particularly in instructional technology. The action research that I undertook daily in my classroom in the 1990's produced results that I shared with colleagues, and was then able to drive change in policy and processes throughout the organization. As a department head, my mandate was to ensure student success in the courses within my department. The success that I had achieved in my classroom, contrasted with the relative lack of success of other teachers in their classes, compelled me to

share my learning, and to push to change policies and processes to support these new, superior instructional and assessment practices.

### **Personal awareness**

If the key to change rests within individuals, then examination of individual motivators is useful. Fox describes “the Big Four” of what she calls a person’s “inner team”: Inspirational Dreamer (CEO), Analytical Thinker (CFO), Emotional Lover (CPO) and Practical Warrior (COO). Leaders need to deploy each of these roles intentionally and effectively to match the needs of the current situation (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 7). Teachers are well-positioned to develop each of these roles. Few enter the field of education without some sort of inspirational vision, in my case it was initially to share my joy of creativity in music and computer programming. The job of teacher requires that one be analytical in managing the curriculum, the assessment structure, and the students’ results, and this has been necessary for me to manage to balance work and family. If a teacher cannot connect with emotions, build and maintain trust, and collaborate with others, her work within a school will be very difficult, as I have seen when I haven’t attended to this aspect of my professional life. And in daily self-regulation, a teacher must be able to speak hard truths, hold her ground, and take action, though this is becoming more difficult in this era of accountability.

### **Discussion**

This examination of my own story of change has partially answered the question “what motivates teachers to lead change?”, but not as completely the question “why do teachers resist change?”. The factors that mitigate against major change: complexity of schools, numerous stakeholders, constant policy change, unfavorable media and political commentary, diverse

student population, and busy, messy unexpected events, (Starr, 2011, p. 646) explain system resistance, but not that of individuals.

### **Conclusion and Future Study**

My experiences as a teacher leader have been in alignment with the literature regarding change processes. The conditions that motivate change have been met in my career.

A study of teachers who resist change would be a welcome contribution to the literature on change.

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