

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

What are teachers' perceptions of teacher-led curriculum initiatives in relation to change in practice?

This literature review aims to identify areas in literature that highlight what affects and sustains teacher-led initiatives in schools. It focuses on how distributed leadership, trust, and collegiality shape teacher leadership initiatives, which lead to reflection on practice and school effectiveness and improvement. The literature has been selected to suggest that these factors contribute to successful teacher-led initiatives and teacher development.

2.1 Teacher Leader Concept

Many researchers and authors including Frost (2000) have contributed to the definition of the various types of teacher leaders and the roles they play in the teacher-led school improvement paradigm. Teacher leadership is not a formal role or set of tasks but Alma Harris sees it as more a form of agency where teachers are empowered to initiate and lead development work that directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. These teachers lead within and beyond their classrooms; they associate themselves with and add to a community of teachers. Their enthusiasm influences others to move toward improved educational and classroom practice. (Harris, 2001).

We know that teacher-led school improvement is a relatively new approach to educational reform that focuses on the professionalism of teachers. It stresses the importance of motivating people to produce quality and aim for excellence themselves (Newman and Clarke, 1994). It highlights capacity building in schools, with a focus on shared leadership or *distributed leadership* (Hargreaves, 2001). In this model, teachers are encouraged to participate and lead in the organisational development and change. Frost and Durrant (2002), emphasise the capacity of all teachers to engage in teacher-led development work, and the choice by teachers to contribute to school improvement. Teachers are fundamental to school improvement, as any improvement in teaching is reflected in student achievement, and this is the current measure of the success of a school. Fullan's challenging book, 'Change Forces' (Fullan, 1993) argues against the current emphasis on vision and strategic planning, and against strong, top-down leadership, rationality and accountability. He proposes that in the current context, teachers need a personal, moral purpose and they need to be the change agents.

2.2 Distributed Leadership

Teacher-led curriculum initiatives go against the organisational structuralist theory which states that the leader is the strong, heroic, charismatic individual at the apex of an organisation (Ball, 1987), as teacher-led curriculum development places value on the importance of human agency. Instructional leadership emphasises that individuals can

modify organisational structures – agents can exert transformative power over structures. This acknowledges that teachers can bring about change and, therefore, *distributed leadership*, which allows teachers to lead and make a difference to current practice, is an important factor in educational management.

The obvious structure within a school is that of management. The management arrangement will impact on teacher-led curriculum initiatives and how these can be implemented and practised. This construct of teacher leadership is being seen as the next step in whole-school reform. Allowing teachers to lead curriculum change, manage pedagogy, and guide schools from within the classroom is a new approach to school improvement. It permits teachers to enhance their practice by addressing their own concerns, and use these to initiate change.

According to Frost (2003), 'in order for individual teachers to exercise leadership, they need support both internally and externally. Internal support needs to come from Head teachers, who must first recognise and understand the potential for leadership in teachers, then create the internal structures and conditions conducive to teacher-driven work. External support comes when the school enters into partnerships with other agencies who can provide scaffolding for a process of reflection, planning and strategic action, and foster critical discourse through membership of support groups, critical friendships and networking.'

Research has shown that the engagement of teachers in processes of decision-making and school development allows for a deeper, shared understanding (Harris and Lambert, 2003). Sergiovanni (2001) talks about leadership density and the benefits of more people being involved in the work of others, which in turn builds trust, initiates new ideas and assists with decision making. This research will endeavour to ascertain how teachers initiate and sustain changes to teaching practice, and whether the concept of *distributed leadership* has played in a role in these initiatives.

2.1 Trust

The degree of *trust* that exists between members and stakeholders is vital in the development of distributed leadership and for the success of any teacher-led curriculum development programme (Hargreaves, 2003). Fullan (1992) emphasises that *trust* in others generates solidarity, mutual obligation and gives authority.

According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), *trust* and risk are reciprocally connected. *Trust* must be incorporated into a school's administrative culture; it must be placed in processes and people. This will allow for the development of teacher leaders who are able to take risks to move school development forward. The question of *trust* will be addressed in the research, and the level of risk taking that teachers feel has allowed them to initiate change in practice, will be questioned.

IDEAS research in schools in Wisconsin highlights a framework that allows an organisation to re-image itself. This re-imaging relates to growing professional communities, which work collaboratively and reflectively, taking on pedagogic leadership roles. (Crowther et al 1997). This emphasises the *trust* that must be placed in the teachers for the success of the initiative and for the feeling of professionalism to be experienced. Further research into the IDEAS implementation process of teacher-led work, practised at White Rock Senior High School, captures the experience of teachers within the professional community, and the resultant perceptions of change on individual and group learning (Andrews and Lewis, 2000). This research will attempt to analyse whether trust is a factor within the GISCDI, whether it improves the professional image of teachers, and whether it is a factor in affecting change in practice.

2.4 Collegiality

According to Harris and Chapman (2000), recent research has shown that even under trying conditions, schools can motivate improvement through professional development and providing teachers with skills to lead changes and guide improvement. Research has clearly outlined the need for strong *collegial relationships* to promote change and school improvement (Bush, 1997). Barth (1999) has shown that teachers who work collegially are more likely to remain in the profession because they feel supported and valued in their role. Keeping teachers

in the profession and happy in their work is vital to maintaining standards and improving schools.

Similar informal research published by Andrews and Lewis (2000) describes the actual experiences of a professional community with teachers recreating themselves with a new image and also recreating their places of work. The changes they record within the school organisation, students' learning, and within the broader community, are positive and emphasise the benefits of developing a school into a professional learning community. They indicate how the teachers' taking leadership roles in developing and sharing a school wide pedagogy are beneficial to all in the community; they believe that the *collegiality* has sustained the process. Although their results are not yet entirely quantifiable, interviews and questionnaires have shown that teachers have had positive experiences and feel that their students are benefiting, as seen by students' improvements in classroom practice and in school pedagogy. This research aims to foreground these improvements in practice and analyse why the teachers believe they are successful in improving quality in their classrooms.

Collegiality is vital to developing teachers as leaders. Bush (1997) lists the most appropriate ways to introduce this *collegiality* into schools. He believes that, once this exists, the foundation for leadership will be laid within the school. He organises staff into working groups to develop proposals. These groups are led by curriculum co-ordinators who

acquire skills and expertise in their areas of specialization, and then work alongside teachers to demonstrate ideas in practice. The teachers operate in a climate in which constructive scrutiny of practice is expected and appreciated. These *collegial* models will be analysed and the benefits of this type of collaboration, within and between schools, will be presented in the research.

Little (1990) describes how *collegiality* operates in practice and lists elements of this approach, which include:

- Teachers talking about teaching
- Shared planning and preparation
- Presence of observers in classrooms
- Mutual training and development.

For any change in practice to be implemented and sustained, Fullan (1992) has found that implementation occurs when teachers interact with and support each other as they try out new practices, cope with difficulties and develop new skills. Positive change becomes possible when educators become more collaborative and *collegial*. He also lists factors for successful implementation, and states that any development must be incorporated as part and parcel of an implementation plan. This research aims to find out if teacher-led initiatives and *collegial* teacher interaction have been factors that have led to teachers reflecting on and implementing changes to improve their practice.

2.5 Reflecting on Practice

The changes that teachers make in their classrooms after exposure to new ideas and strategies for developing teacher skills is called reflective practice. According to Monica McLean and Richard Blackwell (1997) p 87-88, it is the individual's efforts to make positive changes after discussions about teaching and learning that can be termed reflective practice. "Attempts to make opportunities for fruitful conversations about teaching and within and across disciplines" allows for reflection-on-action and leads to change of previous practice.

Reflective practice is a beneficial form of professional development and this happens as teachers 'gain a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom'. Ferraro, J.M. (2000) *ERIC Digest*. P 1-5.

This research endeavours to outline how reflection on practice has created positive change to classroom practice.

2.6 Inhibiting and Supporting Factors

For any research on teacher-led curriculum initiatives to be useful, it must take cognisance of factors that inhibit the process and factors that support it. Research done by Harris (2002) as well as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), have elicited the following comments from teachers in teacher-led programme.

Inhibiting factors include:

- top-down leadership models
- non-acceptance of teacher leaders by colleagues
- poor interpersonal capacity
- balancing personal and school responsibilities
- stress of building new relationships
- resistance of others to new ideas
- unwilling veteran teachers
- roles become blurred
- contrived collegiality
- timetabling alignment

Supporting factors include:

- experimenting in class, during school time with colleagues
- free in-service training in the classroom
- access to first class consultants on site
- trying new ideas and no longer procrastinating
- ease in asking for help, and support tactfully given
- teachers as researchers
- better connections with administrators

- teachers feeling like agents of change
- reflecting on practice to implement change
- professional learning and collaboration

This research aims to consolidate this list and add any relevant information for the benefit of school improvement strategies.

Jianzhong Xu (2003) emphasises the value of keeping a journal or portfolio on classroom practices, problems and subsequent colleague or teacher-leader interventions. The positive responses by the teachers and leaders at Avery Public Elementary School in Upper East Side, Manhattan, New York, give a clear indication that teachers are open to support by their colleagues in their teaching and learning practices.

2.7 Summary

The effectiveness of teacher-led strategies is not well documented. Anecdotal evidence, which focuses on the relationships built between teachers and teacher leaders, and the positive effects on classroom practice, show the benefits, but further data gathering and measurements of success are needed in this relatively new field of school improvement.

For teacher-led curriculum development to be placed on the school improvement agenda, it is important to provide strategies for encouraging and building this ideal. This research aims to ascertain how teachers

perceived they improved their classroom practice by being involved in the teacher-led curriculum development initiative. It is hoped that practical and useful ideas for implementation, so as to facilitate the changes that schools might need to make to affect improvement in teaching and learning, will be forthcoming.

While the literature revealed many powerful teacher-led initiatives that resulted in change in teacher practice, the areas of distributed leadership, trust and collegiality will form the framework of this research. This literature review attempts to highlight a research agenda for teacher-led curriculum development and focuses on the benefits of such a proposal to schools. It attempts to provide an understanding of what motivates teachers to reflect on their current practice and apply these new ideas into their classroom and how it facilitates improvement in teaching. When read alongside the research data, the benefits of such a programme will add to current research on school improvement strategies.