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Essay review

## Changing our view of educational change

An essay review of “**Developing teachers, the challenges of lifelong learning**” Christopher Day; Falmer Press, London/Philadelphia, Educational Change and Development Series (1999), ISBN 0 7507 0748 8 (cased), ISBN 0 7507 0747 x (paperback)

There are many books describing educational research and its results. Many of these also explore possible consequences for educational practice. However, the problem often is that such consequences are formulated at a general level and that application to everyday practice in schools is not all that easy. That is one of the main reasons why teachers and school principals are seldom enthusiastic about the professional literature on teaching and teacher education.

Rare are the books that appear to be not only research based but also grounded in a wealth of practical school experiences. Christopher Day has written such a book. And he has done more; he has used his many years of experience with inservice teacher education and his extensive knowledge of the research literature to arrive at the core of the problem of educational change: why do so many attempts to change educational practices fail, and what can we do to support teacher development? In a sense, parts of the book read like a manifesto, showing Day’s commitment to the teaching profession and his abhorrence of attempts to change schools or teachers by a top-down approach.

In this review of the book, I will first discuss the problem of educational change itself, which will help to clarify why I think that Day’s book is of extreme importance, especially at this point of time. Second, I will try and give the reader an impression of Day’s view of teacher development, with an emphasis on his guidelines for promoting this

development, which in certain respects contradict the views of many policymakers. I will also make a few critical remarks about the book, but will end with the recommendation to consider this book as a most valuable contribution to the field. I say this both as a researcher and as a teacher educator.

### 1. The problem of educational change

I think it is not necessary to explain here why educational change is so important in these times of rapid developments in science and technology and their enormous influences on almost every profession. However, educational change is a problematic issue. There is a wealth of literature dealing with the often unsuccessful attempts to change teachers and schools. Bullough (1989) rightly notes that this may be considered one of the core problems in teacher education.

In the 1998 *International Handbook of Educational Change*, Holmes (1998, p. 254) sets the stage for an analysis of this problem by stating that

Even the strongest advocates of change concede that large numbers of change projects have gone sadly awry.

The handbook shows that many of these change projects have been based on the RD&D model, consisting of a sequence moving from research, to development, to dissemination. This model has been (and still is) very popular amongst policymakers, as the underlying rationale seems to be very logical: we have a lot of knowledge about ‘good education’, so why not teach this knowledge to a group of teachers, and, once this has led to successful innovation, disseminate the success.

However, people do not change on the basis of logic alone. That is one of the most important reasons why the RD&D model has serious limitations, as Lieberman (1998, p. 19) states in her introduction to the *International Handbook of Educational Change*. She refers to an unpublished paper by Huberman in which he “critiques the RD&D model as being “hyper-rational and technocratic”, and insensitive to the unique properties of school cultures. Indeed a major mistake underlying many attempts to implement innovations in education has been that the wish to change came from the outside and did not meet the needs and concerns of the teachers and the circumstances in which they worked”. McLaughlin (1998) concludes that “it is exceedingly difficult for policy to change practice”. I can add that this is extremely difficult for teacher educators as well. Even school principals, although knowledgeable about the structure and culture of their organisations, are often unable to really influence what is happening behind the classroom doors.

Although the insight gains ground that “if we know anything we know that change cannot be ‘managed’” (Fullan, 1998, p. 22), the belief that change can be directed from above or from the outside, is still very much embedded in the thinking about educational innovation. For example, although an author such as McLaughlin (1998) is aware of the fact that “the presence of the will or motivation to embrace policy objectives or strategies is essential to generate the effort and energy necessary to a successful project” (p. 72), such a statement still looks at the problem of change from the vantage point of the outsider wishing to change teachers. Holmes (1998) puts it even more clearly:

Despite the rhetoric, school change projects are inevitably top-down. For all the talk of democratic decision-making, collaboration, and recognizing the importance of teachers, change projects are and must be implemented from the top. Occasionally, teachers may exercise the right of veto, but more usually any resistance will see them being accused of being afraid of change and defenders of the status quo, the most grievous sin in Fullan’s moral code (p. 250).

Elliot (1991) states that, as a consequence, teachers often feel threatened by theory coming from the experts, and that these feelings of being threatened are enhanced by the generalised form in which these experts tend to formulate their knowledge and by the ideal views of society or individuals behind their claims. As such, many innovation projects imply a threat to teachers’ professional status.

For teachers, the only way out of the feeling of falling short is to adopt the common habit of considering plans for educational innovation too theoretical and useless. Then they cannot be ‘blamed’ for not functioning according to ‘theoretical insights’, but the experts can be blamed. It will be clear that this social game of putting the blame on the other, too often played by teachers and people responsible for change projects, is in fact a power game with few positive outcomes. It only widens the gap between theory and practice. Elliot (1991) concludes:

The perceived gap between theory and practice originates not so much from demonstrable mismatches between ideal and practice but from the experience of being held accountable for them (p. 47).

The problem may be that for a long time we did not know what other possibilities there were to initiate developments in education. This is reflected by Holmes’s statement that

... there is an admitted problem in trying to train teachers like seals, but there is little chance of their implementing the desired changes if left alone (Holmes, 1998, p. 254).

The dichotomy between “training like seals” and “leaving teachers alone” is an example of what Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974, p. 90) call “the illusion of alternatives”: if we accept this dichotomy we are trapped by the idea that these are the only two possibilities. This is symptomatic of the approach towards educational change that has for a long time dominated the thinking of reformers. As Hargreaves (1994) notes, these reformers in fact often showed a disrespect for teachers. Indeed, rare are the projects that really take teachers seriously and aim at working with

them on the basis of *their needs and concerns*. This may even imply training them in the use of certain skills, but only on the basis of *their wishes* to develop these skills. This means neither to train them like seals nor to leave them alone, but to take account of teachers' commitment to their own work and to start from there. How to realise this has been a neglected question for a long time, since

... there is almost a complete lack of account of how the changes come about. This is a significant deficit for those interested in teacher education because programmes need to be based on an understanding of the mechanism of change rather than milestones (Desforges, 1995, p. 388; see also Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 1).

Burden (1990, p. 325), too, says "There needs to be clarification of the nature of teacher changes and the process by which this change is brought about". This is the central aim of Day's book.

## 2. Day's contribution

In my view, Day's contribution has to do with an aspect of change that has until now attracted relatively little attention from researchers writing about change. In fact, it is hard to find this in the two volumes of the *International Handbook of Educational Change*. It is the notion that there is a world of difference between two ways in which we can use the word "change" as a verb. The first is the transitive use of the word, for example in the sentence "I wish to change this teacher". The second is the intransitive use: "teacher X changes". The former use of the verb "to change" implies that there is an external pressure, however subtle, put on the teacher. The latter sentence refers to change directed by the teacher himself or herself. This clarifies the double meaning of the title of Day's book. Day is absolutely clear about his point of view:

Teachers cannot be developed (passively). They develop (actively). It is vital, therefore, that they are centrally involved in decisions concerning the direction and process of their own teaching (p. 2).

This is one of the basic assumptions of Day's book, leading to a fresh look on teachers' professional development. On the other hand, the variety of ideas and approaches in this book are certainly not all new. McIntyre and Hagger (1992), for example, have earlier stated that

'Development' takes what is there as a valuable starting point, not as something to be replaced, but a useful platform on which to build. To do so is to recognise not only that teachers do have valuable existing expertise but also that, if teachers are forced to choose, they will usually revert to their secure established ways of doing things.

The metaphor of 'building on what is already there' is not, however, satisfactory because it suggests adding on something separate to what is there, something extra on top. The concept of development, in contrast, implies that whatever is added, whatever is new, will be integrated with what is there already, and will indeed grow from what is there (p. 271).

Although Day does not refer to these notions of McIntyre and Hagger, they basically constitute the line of thought that he elaborates.

Day shows a route through the complicated landscape of educational change which takes seriously the insights discussed in the previous section. Over and over again, he emphasises that teachers should not only be participants in decisions about changes to take place, but that they should be considered as the central agents.

In that respect, Day's book fits into a longer tradition within UK educational literature, a tradition connected with the work of Stenhouse. Day takes the position that teachers' everyday reality should be the starting point of thinking about teacher development. This starting point brings him to an analysis of important factors such as work pressure, limitations of time and energy, and commitment, factors that in other publications in our field often receive only marginal attention. Throughout the book, one can feel that Day is thoroughly acquainted with the everyday reality of schools. He cites many teachers involved in change processes, not only to illustrate the possible success

of his ideas, but also to remind us of the dangers and constraints. For example, when describing a developmental process in a specific school, Day mentions that “it was observed in two of the groups that ‘people started getting fairly tired through the year’ and one group’s work began to ‘peter out’ (p. 125). In this context, Day emphasises that “without doubt the biggest single factor in people deciding that they would not get involved was time” (p. 121). He also cites a teacher saying

There is the inevitable problem that you have a vision of what you want to do, and what you actually accomplish is only going to be a fraction of that vision. (p. 124)

In the book, many examples are presented of successful projects in schools and fruitful approaches followed in inservice teacher education courses. These examples strongly tone down the role of experts and emphasise the need to create peer-supported development. Thus, it will be no surprise that Day further elaborates his notion of *critical friendships*, i.e. links with one or more colleagues, which he considers to be pivotal in promoting change. Critical friendships “are based upon practical partnerships entered into voluntarily, presuppose a relationship between equals and are rooted in a common task or shared concern” (p. 44). He describes both the pros and cons of critical friendship relationships, and emphasises the importance of “mutual disclosures of thinking and practice, feelings, hopes and fears” (p. 101). This is one of the ways in which Day shows an open eye for the teacher as a whole human being, something not common in the professional literature. Too often, teachers are solely analysed on the dimensions of their thinking and behaviour. The crucial role of emotions in teachers’ functioning is only recently beginning to draw attention.

One of the most neglected dimensions of educational change is the emotional one. Educational and organisational changes are often treated as rational, cognitive processes in pursuit of rational, cognitive ends. (...) The more unpredictable passionate aspects of learning, teaching and leading, however, are usually left out of the change picture (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 558).

In line with this, Day reminds us over and over again that change is a matter of the head and the heart. Indeed, the problem of educational change is first of all a problem of dealing with the natural emotional reactions of human beings to the threat of losing certainty, predictability or stability. This affective dimension is too much neglected in technical–rational approaches towards teacher development.

Another instance where Day rightly takes a position in favour of the teacher as a whole person, is in his discussion of the concept of reflection. Although for many years this concept has occupied a firm position in the top ten of professional issues in our field, Day states that it is not always remembered “that reflection on teaching is not simply a cognitive process. Like teaching itself, it demands emotional commitment” (p. 47).

In line with this view and with the work of Stenhouse, he warns against the current emphasis on performance management systems, based on detailed targets for teachers and pupils. Such systems are in conflict with the heart of the teaching act, which Day relates to pedagogical tact, connoisseurship and emotional intelligence. He emphasises that teaching is a moral enterprise, requiring the “application of wisdom, insight, experience, content knowledge, and pedagogical and organisational strategies”, which vary according to the context of the problem. Day states that

Because of this, it is impossible to provide universal authentic definitions of effective teaching beyond baseline generalities. This is the problem in attempting to use the same competences as a means of assessment for everyone (p. 55).

I often think that many more prominent people in education should voice this message, so that we can stop the fruitless attempts at creating uniformity in teaching. For this reason, I am very happy with the first precept on which Day’s book is based, which contains the following statement:

Support for their [teachers’] well-being and professional development is an integral and essential part of efforts to raise standards of teaching, learning and achievement (p. 2).

In my view, the greatest strength of the book is its focus on continuing professional development of teachers, grounded in the needs and ideals of these teachers themselves. This focus is of paramount importance in an era in which continuous change is the most central feature of education and society at large. The strong need to prepare children for a continuously changing environment leads to the central educational goal of developing a disposition towards lifelong learning in students. Congruent with this view, Day states that

[Teachers] must, therefore, demonstrate their own commitment towards and enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Continuing, career-long professional development is necessary for all teachers in order to keep pace with change and to review and renew their own knowledge, skills and visions for good teaching” (p. 2).

He wrote a book which not only takes this view seriously, but which also takes teachers seriously as professionals with their own “life histories, their current phase of development, classroom and school settings, and the broader social and political context in which they work” (p. 2).

### 3. Some weaker points

I used the metaphor of a route through the educational landscape to explain what Day’s book has to offer. This metaphor also illustrates a problem I feel Day has been wrestling with: the educational landscape is quite complicated and the route to take in concrete developmental projects in schools can only be found on the basis of the features of the landscape at that spot, at that moment. That makes it difficult, if not impossible, to write a book about “what works”. Day tries to solve this problem by not keeping to the level of examples and anecdotes, but by connecting his rich experiences in schools with the body of knowledge on teaching and teacher education. The book provides clear overviews of theoretical issues such as types of reflection, teachers’ developmental phases, educational leadership, school cultures, single- and double-loop learning. Readers interested in an

overview of the literature on teacher development may be happy with this, but here a weak point of the book also comes to the fore. In the way Day describes these issues, there is sometimes quite a big gap between theory and practice. He presents lists of reflection types, career phases, and so forth, which look well grounded in research, but connections with the practical examples in the book are sometimes lacking. I got the impression that Day tried to summarise his complete bookcase, but that a no-man’s land surfaced between the more practice-oriented and the theoretical chapters. Day’s 10-line-definition of professional development (one sentence!) may be very authoritative, but certainly does not help to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

On the other hand, we should not forget that this more or less mirrors the present situation in our professional domain. There are few authors really succeeding in creating a seamless link between theory and practice. Such a link sometimes requires a new language, and Day does make an important step towards developing that language through his use of terms like practical wisdom, critical friends, learning partnerships, communication networks, commitment, self-renewal, head and heart, the whole teacher, and so forth. In this way he does make a start at filling the no-man’s land.

As far as I am concerned, Day could have paid even more attention to this aspect of the book than to the presentation of research-based theory. One problem arising from his attempt to present complete overviews of the mainstream literature is also that I miss certain topics that I think should have been included. For example, it is remarkable that Day devotes relatively little attention to the growing body of literature on teachers’ practical knowledge and craft knowledge, although this would have fitted perfectly into the framework of the book. He mentions this topic only briefly in the context of teachers’ narratives and stories, where he connects it to the importance of the personal and professional biography in understanding teachers and teaching. However, this issue also is only touched upon. I miss, for example, references to the important work of Bullough on teacher identity. I agree with Bullough (1997) that

Teacher identity — what beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning and self-as-a-teacher — is of vital concern to teacher education; it is the basis for meaning making and decision making. (...) Teacher education must begin, then, by exploring the teaching self. (p. 21).

In a variety of publications, Bullough has worked out practical approaches to enhancing teachers' awareness of their own identity. Day does stress that to "change deeper sustained levels involves the modification or transformation of values, attitudes, emotions and perceptions which inform practice" (p. 98). However, he stops short of further exploring the consequence that this requires a certain type of teacher reflection, one that focusses on an analysis of one's personal and professional identity. An important question is how we can promote this type of reflection in teachers, given the fact that it is often threatening to the self, something that Day is aware of:

The emotional non-rational factors central to processes of investigation and change which are personally as well as ideologically and educationally relevant can cause ripples of change throughout all facets of life which are not always positive. (p. 100).

Are "critical friends" always able to support such a process of investigation of self? The literature on therapeutic approaches shows us that people avoid discussing with others what they themselves are afraid of. In my training courses for supervisors of teaching practice, I have often seen this phenomenon surface. It can be an obstacle to the second-order changes that Day wishes to promote. It is my experience that university tutors can promote self-analysis in teachers at a deeper personal level, but that this requires supervision skills and attitudes that have to be developed. In other words, if we as teacher educators wish to help teachers develop, we will have to develop ourselves.

Moreover, self-analysis alone is not enough for teachers or teacher educators; they must also be able to consciously *use* their personal identity, especially their beliefs and ideals, and their strengths, in their work. As it is not common to pay attention to personal qualities and strengths (educational

change generally focusses on what should be altered!), I would have liked to see this line of thought elaborated in the book.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chris Day has written an extremely important book, based on both research and practice. Its strength is the unconventional approach to educational change, well grounded in concrete experiences inside schools and in respect for teachers most of all. Day helps us question assumptions about teacher development which have long been taken for granted and shows us new perspectives for educational change.

The book is a bit conventional when describing theoretical underpinnings, as it sticks to well-known theories and models, and does not always succeed in relating the theoretical perspective to the practical. On the other hand, the fundamental tone of the book is clear and highly relevant to practice.

If all innovation projects in education would be based on this book, teachers would be much better off. The terms educational change, teacher development and inservice teacher education would then get a different meaning. For that reason, the book is a must for everyone committed to teaching and teachers.

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