Teacher Receptivity to System-wide Change in Secondary Schools:

Preliminary results from a Study of the use of Student Outcome Statements in Western Australia.

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Abstract: This paper reports the preliminary finding of a study which sets out to investigate the relationship between teacher's receptivity to a system-level educational change, the use of Student Outcome Statements, as the dependent variable, and seven independent variables in the context of differences in a number of situation variables. The dependent variable, receptivity, is measured in four aspects: feelings,
attitudes, intentions and behaviour. The independent variables are set out in two groups - work organisations and teacher beliefs (feelings). Work organisations are measured in three aspects: shared goals, collaboration and teacher learning. Teacher beliefs are measured in four aspects: cost benefit, alleviation of fears and concerns, perceived support and feelings compared to previous system. The situation variables are the school's Socio Economic Status (SES), size and location, the department's subject area and size, and the teacher's age, experience, gender, involvement in the decision to participate and the teacher's use and their purposes for the use of Student Outcome Statements. A sample of teachers from Western Australian government secondary schools have been chosen to provide variation in the dependent variable. Various correlational techniques such as cross-tabulations, correlations and multiple regression will be used to test the relationships in the model.

Introduction

'Student Outcome Statements describe in progressive order most of the outcomes students are expected to achieve in each of the learning areas throughout the compulsory years of schooling... The Student Outcome Statements reflect the knowledge, understandings, processes and skills, which are considered to be essential for all students. There are eight broad areas of learning: The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English, Mathematics, Science, Society and Environment, Technology and Enterprise (Education Department, 1996:2). The Western Australian Student Outcome Statements evolved from
'A two year trial of the Students Outcome Statements: Working Edition 1994 was the culmination of both State and national efforts to develop a standards framework that would improve student learning and the accountability of teachers and school's. Education Department, 1996:1). The trial process involved 'work with eighty-eight schools representing all learning areas, all phases of schooling and all types of schools across a wide range of geographical location's (Education Department, 1996:5). The wider study seeks to establish what factors have maximised the receptivity of teachers to the change.

The wider study investigates teacher receptivity to a system-level change in a centralised education system in Western Australia. It does this by applying a general model of teacher receptivity to a specific system-level change in Western Australia, the implementation of Student Outcome Statements in secondary schools, and investigates its relationship with teacher's work organisations and teacher's beliefs about change. Teacher's work organisations include 'the particular way teachers work together as a community' (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991:15) and incorporate such aspects as the extent to which teachers share common goals, help one another, teachers and students learn and grow, teachers believe in themselves and spark enthusiasm and hope (Rosenholtz, 1991).
This study identifies a number of variables from Rosenholtz's (1991) work which were found in those good schools known as 'high consensus school's and which were evident in their shared goals, beliefs and values binding them 'to pursue the same vision' which was manifested by teacher collaboration. Rosenholtz (1991:1) conducted an indepth study of elementary schools as a workplace and describes teacher’s work organisations as 'the meaning that the organization has for those who work within it'. Her study demonstrated 'how good schools can be at their best, and how bad they can be at their worst'.

Education systems throughout the world continue to develop policies and processes which are designed to effect change in schools. Of particular concern is the extent to which these central initiatives are actually taken up by teachers and implemented at the classroom level.

McLaughlin (1987) states that '...policy cannot always mandate what matters to outcomes at the local level; individual incentives are central to local responses; effective implementation requires a strategic balance of pressure and support; policy-directed change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit'. She cites Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) who, she said, 'showed that implementation dominates outcomes - that the consequences of even the best planned, best supported, and most promising policy initiatives depend finally on what happens as individuals throughout the policy system interpret and act
Rosenholtz (1991:4) in her study of elementary schools, contends that 'there are shared aspects of work that cut across individual biographies with sufficient force to explain the pattern of beliefs and behaviours in schools... teachers attitudes, cognitions, and behaviour have less to do with the individual biographies teachers bring with them to the workplace than with the social organisation of the workplace itself - social organisations that are not characteristics of individual teachers but that teachers have helped shape; social organisations that then have consequences for teacher's perceptions and behaviour's. She identified five variables which are associated with schools which are 'moving' and have a work organisation which is conducive to change.

It is suggested in her study that teachers will respond in a positive way to change and reform if the environment in which they work fosters a work organisation which supports shared goals; teacher collaboration; teacher learning; teacher certainty and teacher commitment.

In their study of Secondary School Work Culture and Educational Change, Hargreaves, Davis, Fullan, Wignall, Stager, and Macmillan (1991:xii) found that 'collaborative work cultures in secondary schools create and sustain trust, risk, openness, opportunities to learn, shared language and common experience that make educational changes less abstract and less threatening to individual members of the school community'.
Hargreaves et al. (1991:x) drew on the work of Rosenholtz (1989), Little (1982) and Fullan (1989) stating that 'we knew that the workplace culture of a school may be vital to the success or failure of change in school's when he looked at the way in which secondary schools had implemented the policy of 'destreaming' and the work organisations which supported the change.

Aims

This study is part of a wider study which has three aims in line with the model. One, to investigate teacher's receptivity to the use of Student Outcome Statements in Western Australian government secondary schools. Two, to investigate the relationships between receptivity, as the dependent variable and seven independent variables: non-monetary cost benefit, alleviation of fears and concerns, perceived support from senior staff, feelings compared to the previous system, shared goals, collaboration and teacher learning. Three, to investigate the relationships between receptivity and the independent variables in the context of the situation variables related to the school, department and teacher.

This paper reports the preliminary data of the study and focuses on the receptivity of the teachers to Student Outcome Statements as measured in the model by attitudes, overall feelings, behaviours and behaviour intentions.

This paper reports on the attitude of secondary teachers towards
Student Outcome Statement in government secondary schools in Western Australia. A total of 126 teachers responded to a questionnaire designed to measure teacher attitude according to a model.

Background
The wider study incorporates the beginning of the implementation stage and is about teacher's responses to the reform and their relationships with their work organisations. Those schools and teachers who have decided to use Student Outcome Statements are doing so in a voluntary capacity as mandated implementation is being phased in over five years commencing in 1999.

Model
The model that provides the theoretical framework for this study has been developed by combining and utilising variables from research on change (Rosenholtz, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves 1991; Hargreaves, Davis, Fullan, Wignall, Stager & Macmillan, 1991; McLaughlin, 1990, 1987; Waugh & Godfrey, 1995, 1993; Waugh & Punch, 1987, 1985). The dependent variable is receptivity towards the use of Student Outcome Statements and is measured in four aspects: overall feelings, attitudes, intentions and behaviour (Ajzen, 1989). The independent variables are non-monetary cost benefit, alleviation of fears and concerns, significant other support, feelings compared to the previous system, shared goals, collaboration and teacher learning. The situation
variables are the school's SES, size, country/metro, type of department, size of department, teacher age, experience, status, gender, involvement in the decision to participate and the use and purposes of Student Outcome Statements.

The model indicates that there are moderate relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables and between the dependent variable and the situation variables. Without elaborating on each relationship, it can be said that, as an example, the model indicates that there is a positive relationship between attitude to the change and non monetary cost benefit. That is, the higher the perceived cost benefit to the teacher of the change, the more positive the attitude to the change and the lower the perceived cost benefit to the teacher of the change, the less positive the attitude to the change.

It is expected that the most important relationships between the independent and dependent variables will be those which are linked to teacher's beliefs, that is, group one variables. In particular, significant support from others is expected to have a strong relationship to teacher receptivity. It is also expected that collaboration will have important relationships with the dependent variable as the research cited focuses heavily on this relationship. Shared goals and teacher's opportunities to learn are expected to be less significant. The least significant variables are expected to be the significant situation variables. However, the type of department and the teacher's decision to participate are expected to have
important relationships with the dependent variable.

All government secondary schools in the state were invited to participate in the study. A total of 126 questionnaires were received from teachers.

An initial questionnaire was developed and adapted from existing questionnaires such as those used by Waugh and Godfrey (1995) and Rosenholtz (1991). It was then trialled with 15 expert secondary curriculum officers who worked with teachers regularly. It was also trialled with seven secondary principals. Extensive feedback was received and the items and format modified accordingly. The questionnaire was shortened and the language modified to ensure that it was able to be easily completed.

Results

Demographics
126 teachers responded to the questionnaire. 52% were from schools in the metropolitan area and 47% were from the country and 36.5% were from schools which were classified as disadvantaged and received Commonwealth funding. A large number of teachers worked in Departments which had between 6-10 (47%) staff members and 39% were in Departments of between 2-5.

Twenty-five per cent were from English Departments, 27% worked in the
Arts area, 12% in Health and Physical Education, 11% in Mathematics and 11% in the Design and Technology area.

Teachers

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents were classroom teachers only and 27% had other duties including Head of Department or Teacher in Charge of the Subject area. The largest group (32.5%) had been teaching between 11-20 years, 20.6% had been teaching for between 6-10 years and 16% had been teaching between 21-30 years. Thirty-five per cent were aged between 31-40, 29% between 41-50 and 28% were between 20-30.

Student Outcome Statements

Twenty-five per cent had been using Student Outcome Statements from between 13-18 months, 23% had been using them for up to 6 months only, 21% had been using them for between 2-3 years and 11% had been using them for between 7-12 months. Sixty-four per cent of the respondents were using them with all of their classes, 22% with some classes and some 9% with only one class. Thirty-five per cent of respondents were working in schools where the whole school was using Student Outcome Statements and only 3.2% were the only teachers in the schools using them. 36.5% were from schools where the decision to use the Student Outcome Statements was made by the whole school. 42% came from schools where individuals had made that decision and 7% had been the only ones in the school to make that decision.
Trial

In 1995 and 1996 the Education Department conducted a trial of SOS in which 88 schools participated. 43% of the respondents were involved in that trial.

Purposes for Using Student Outcome Statements

91% of teachers were using Student Outcome Statements to plan teaching and learning programs, 79.4% used them for reporting student achievement to parents and 86.5% used them to collect assessment information.

Analysis

This paper reports the preliminary findings with regard to the dependent variable, teacher receptivity toward the new system which is measured by overall feelings, attitudes, behaviour intentions and behaviour. No attempt has yet been made to correlate the independent variables with the dependent variable.

Feelings Towards the Unit Curriculum Compared to Student Outcome Statements

The overwhelming response from teachers was that they felt that the use
of Student Outcome Statements in comparison to the old system was a more positive experience. They agreed that Student Outcome Statements address the needs of individual students better (83.4%) provide for better student learning (81.8%), that they better describe student learning (81.8%), that and that they are able to make better judgements about student learning achievement (80.1%).

Benefits of Student Outcome Statements

The above table reinforces the positive benefits which teachers felt were gained by the use of Student Outcome Statements. They felt that in weighing up the balance between any extra work generated by of Student Outcome Statements and their satisfaction with teaching, the use of Student Outcome Statements was worthwhile (81%). The extra work was beneficial for better student classroom learning (80.2%) but not as strong for student assessment (67%).

Attitudes Towards Student Outcome Statements

Attitudes Towards Student Outcome Statements.

The respondents were positive about their general behaviour intentions towards Student Outcome Statements.

Alleviation of Concerns
Concern about the level of support is evident in this table. 41.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement that their were regular school meetings at which they could raise their concerns about Student Outcome Statements. However, 69.9% felt that they could resolve concerns informally.

Behaviours

The behaviours of the respondents support the general positive views already expressed about Student Outcome Statements with over 80% of teachers attending meetings and professional development to improve their knowledge about the use of Student Outcome Statements.
References


