

No: P55
Title: A Headteacher's reflections on changes in behaviours and practices resulting from the ICT Test Bed Project
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The aim of the action research is to examine the extent to which one infants' school has been successful in the process of implementing change through the ICT Test Bed Project. I will break the research focus down and re-define it in practical terms.

So that I might determine whether anything has changed as a result of the ICT Test Bed Project, the first section attempts to answer the question: What changes in behaviours and practices have resulted from the creation of an ICT rich school?

In order that I might interpret both the content and outcomes of the innovation, the second section attempts to answer the question: How does knowledge about implementation help to provide understanding about the phenomenon of creating an ICT rich school?

Finally, after an examination of both the innovation and the process of implementation, the summary and conclusion draw together those major points and addresses the third question: How does knowledge about creating an ICT rich school improve understanding of the reasons why some innovations succeed or fail?

The innovation

This first section is divided into four areas which reflect the factors which determine whether the innovation has been implemented successfully.

These are:

- a) need
- b) clarity
- c) complexity
- d) quality/practicality.

a) Need: Why changes are being introduced

It is clear that the majority of staff acknowledge that the new ICT equipment has been a bonus for the school. A significant number of staff believe however, that although there are many good reasons for being involved in the ICT Test Bed Project there have been too many other competing demands on schools. This sentiment is one of the recurring themes which have emerged throughout the inquiry.

Need: Feelings about the changes

Staff have made positive comments about the ICT Test Bed Project. A typical response relates to the benefits to be gained from the new equipment, both personally and for the school. These positive attitudes may well be due to either

previous experience of change, or a climate of readiness having been established in the school. Staff who have been anxious and/or concerned about the Project feel that some of the changes have caused too much pressure and the money would have been better spent on books. Staff friendship groups are evident here. If a popular member of staff has been in favour of a particular aspect of ICT Test Bed the response has been much more positive than that given for an innovation which has been imposed on them e.g. The visualisers were very well received, as opposed to the introduction of CMIS.

b) Clarity about purpose

The Leadership Team has promoted ICT Test Bed as an initiative which will assist teachers in their professional development and will also help those responsible for the management of the school; but the chief reason for taking part in the Project is that we believe that it will improve the quality of teaching and learning. Responses from staff indicate that most of them perceive the changes introduced as being beneficial for their own professional development. It is worth noting that when discussing training, school-based INSET, with the exception of CMIS training, is generally viewed more positively than that provided by the L.E.A.

Clarity about the change initiatives

My conversations with staff indicate that they have not always had a clear understanding about the purpose and process of the Project.

c) Complexity

The main concern has been staff management and overcoming the resistance to change. Changes can only be successfully introduced when staff have appropriate involvement in the management of change process, reflecting their interests and expertise.

The Leadership Team decided that it was important to make changes at a speed which the staff could cope with, without too much stress or loss of confidence. This would be a change taking place over a period of years and we viewed it as the most suitable strategy when considering the emphasis on improving teaching and learning, the feelings of the staff and the provision of ICT equipment in the school.

d) Quality/practicality

In order to establish the relationship between the ICT Test Bed aims and the chosen strategy, I considered the ways in which the school was organised and the changes that would be needed in order to move towards the accomplishment of the aims. Fullan (1991, p.93) emphasises that:

The odds against successful planned educational change are not small. Increasing our understanding of implementation may alter them. We will see examples of how change can work when the factors of initiation, implementation, and continuation are combined in certain ways. The theory of the meaning of change and the change process provides us with an underlying conception of what should be done.

The extent to which the staff have had a clear knowledge and understanding of the aims of the Project and have been able to carry them out is due to the

process of implementation. This next section deals with that aspect of the process and is divided into four factors that I suggest will affect success with this innovation. They are:

- e) the role of the L.E.A
- f) the role of the head
- g) the process of change
- h) the role of staff development.

Section Two: Factors which have lead to successful implementation:

e) The role of the LEA

The LEA has encouraged the schools and college in the ICT Test Bed cluster to work closely together. Their argument has been that we will be much more successful if we share ideas and that we will also be able to negotiate better prices when ordering equipment in bulk.

At this school we decided to appoint an ICT specialist rather than a teacher as Project Manager. Initially the LEA didn't support this decision, arguing that as the ICT Test Bed Project was concerned with raising standards in teaching and learning it was necessary to have a teacher in charge.

Subsequently the LEA decided that our model for project management was innovative and our ICT Test Bed Manager began to support other schools in the cluster, particularly with CMIS. This led to him gaining a post with the LEA as MIS adviser. A teacher now manages the ICT Test Bed Project in school (0.5). working with two members of our support staff (1.0 f.t.e) and a technician from another ICT Test Bed school (1 day a week).

The LEA ICT Test Bed Manager, the Inspector for ICT, BECTA, Manchester Metropolitan University and Nottingham Trent University have all provided excellent support for the school during the Project.

f) The role of the headteacher

Hopkins (1986) suggests that the head needs to get involved in the substance of the innovation. ICT is not one of my strengths and I found the compilation of the Test Plan very challenging. Other demands, such as preparation for OfSTED, have meant that I have not been very proactive in managing the Project. Fortunately there are several talented members of staff in school who are working hard to make the ICT Test Bed Project successful.

g) The process of change

Although the ICT Test Bed Project has accelerated the process of change it is still not possible to say that there is common agreement about the benefits of ICT Test Bed throughout the school. Several respected and experienced teachers have been reluctant to use the new equipment and it has been difficult to directly involve them in the implementation of the Project. Watson (1986) makes the

point that an innovation may fail because staff who feel that they will be disadvantaged as a result of the change will oppose it either actively or through passive resistance. The participation of all staff is recognised as a means of breaking down resistance to change. The more actively involved members of an organisation are, the more skilled they will become, working from a position of commitment and knowledge of the changes being made. This applies to the members of staff who have been involved in Action Research. Two members of the non-teaching staff in particular have gained enormously from undertaking Action Research, in collaboration with staff from Manchester Metropolitan University, and they are now key members of the Project team.

The main issue now (January 2006) is seen as involving all staff in improving the quality of teaching and learning and school management through the use of ICT.

h) The role of staff development

The school gave much energy and attention to staff development and the staff generally acknowledge that the courses provided have been of value, especially the school-based INSET.

Factors that have contributed to this have been

- i) the organisation of awareness raising sessions which have not only been a source of information to staff but have also allayed concerns and anxieties.
- ii) the organisation of specific training which has communicated the seriousness of commitment to the change process, valued the staff as individuals and prepared the staff for their part in the process.

One of the factors which may limit the chance of success in implementing change can be the lack of continued support and assistance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This section will address the third initial question. This is:

How does knowledge about the creation of an ICT rich school improve understanding of the reasons why some innovations fail or succeed?

Two major factors emerge from the enquiry which reflect Fullan's views that two sets of complications surround staff perceptions about the need to take part in change initiatives.

1. Precise needs are often not clear at the beginning, and the staff's worries and concerns are only alleviated when they start doing things.
2. It is not just a question of whether an activity is important, but more a question of how important it is in relation to other needs or demands e.g .Assessment for Learning, preparation for OfSTED, school self-evaluation.

If staff are going to engage in the change process with some commitment, it is important that they do so in the knowledge that the time and effort put into the innovation can be justified by the benefits to both the individual and the school.

My perception is that staff have not always clear about the purpose of ICT Test Bed and it would seem that initiatives are more successful when there are identifiable targets which are based on the school's priorities for development, relate to career development and are supported by INSET.

Amongst the factors which have led to the successful implementation of the Project have been appropriate and sufficient training for all teachers and effective encouragement and guidance from the Leadership Team, the Project Manager and the L.E.A.

In conclusion it would appear that the evidence arising from the case study indicates that the change process required by the ICT Test Bed Project has been effectively managed.

I feel that several benefits have resulted through the development of a collaborative approach to the management of the Project.

The production of the ICT Test Bed plan has provided a co-ordinated approach to all aspects of planning. This includes curriculum and assessment, teaching, management, and organisation, finance and resources. The school's aims and objectives have been focused on; especially the learning and achievement of its pupils.

Staff have grown in confidence as they have been encouraged to put forward their views and use their initiative. The quality of staff development has improved and in-service training is ensuring that teachers are developing new knowledge and skills.

The ICT Test Bed plan breaks the long-term plans for the Project into short-term goals, making change manageable. Staff are able to cope with stress more effectively because they have greater control over change rather than feeling controlled by it.

I have found that the task of reporting the progress of the Project to parents, governors and inspectors has been made easier and that the partnership between staff and governors has been strengthened.

Implementing the ICT Test Bed Project has involved a collaborative approach which has led me to conclude that it is no longer possible to rely solely on the Leadership Team to figure it out. The ICT Test Bed Project has been particularly successful when integrated thinking and acting has occurred at all levels within the school.

References

Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell Educational Ltd.

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