

FINDING TRANSFORMATIVE THEMES ACROSS MULTIPLE SYSTEM CHANGE EVALUATIONS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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Finding Transformative Themes Across Multiple System Change Evaluations

Stages of Change

A tool we use frequently to analyze systemic changes is a matrix that we refer to as a “continuum of system change.” The first one we developed was based on work with a large number of states involved with systemic change in education. See Appendix D. This continuum shows six stages in the process of moving from one form of the education system to a desired new form.¹ Over a number of years and a variety of experiences we developed the following definitions of the stages of change.

As an organization/system attempts to change from one state of being to another, we find six roughly definable stages during the progression to the new system’s dominance.

Stage 1 — Maintenance of the Old System

In this stage, people try to improve what they were already doing. They tend to say, “Well, we know that we could do this a little bit better. If we just try harder, I’m sure it will work.” Soon they realize there is something to the adage: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you always get what you always got.” Gradually they begin to say, “Maybe there is something that we need to do differently. Maybe this just doesn’t work.” At this point they begin to enter the Awareness stage.

Stage 2 — Awareness

In this stage, people are aware that what they have been doing is inadequate and that there must be something better. This can be frightening because they recognize the need to give up the familiar, and yet don’t know what to do instead. The awareness can also create a sense of guilt and unhappiness with past performance. Guilt and blaming one another often characterize this stage. For example, as teachers learn about other teaching strategies they may feel that they have failed or have damaged children in the past by teaching in less effective learning methods. Other people may start blaming one another. Teachers and service providers blame the administration, administration blames front line workers, and the front line workers blame students and parents.

Eventually people realize that blaming and guilt do not help. They begin to look at the alternative practices and become more open to the possibility of their own change. This leads into the Exploration stage.

Stage 3 — Exploration

During Exploration, people begin to pick up on new ideas from many sources; this can take different forms. One method to move into this stage is to visit other schools and communities to observe new practices. Simply talking about the new ideas can be insufficient; people need to observe the practices in operation or, at the very least, by watching videotapes of new practices. Visits are most helpful because of dialogue with their counterparts which gives a more in-depth view of how practices have changed.

¹ There are a number of descriptions of stages of change that are available that also have features that are helpful.

Another way to move people into Stage 3 is to set up study groups within the school or agency. These groups identify and read articles on new practices and then discuss what they have read and how to apply it to their situation.

These conversations are extremely important both at the Awareness and the Exploration stages. They show how we learn through interaction (whether adults or children), and that adults' discussion time leads to changes in the mental image and modeling of good teaching, service, administration, or other practice. The ground rules of effective dialogue become particularly important here (see Senge, 1990).

Another useful activity is to encourage people in all parts of the system to actually try out some new approaches. The idea is for different approaches to spring up among those who are interested in trying new things. Some teachers may be exploring cooperative learning; others may be involved in site-based management approaches; others may look at different ways to engage students in conducting projects; and still others may try performance assessment with projects and portfolios instead of multiple choice tests. Service providers may try shifting toward an emphasis on prevention or work out ways that teams could provide better beneficiary service. The focus of this stage is for people to understand at a deeper level, and experience how it works for their situation.

A couple of precautions during this stage: a common problem has been that people adopt one technique on the basis that it will solve the problems of the system; then they often advocate this approach and criticize others for not using it. This undermines the environment of trust and encouragement for learning that is essential to progress. Another problem that can occur is when people try too many things. This results in practices that are tested at only a superficial level instead of at the depth required to judge the usefulness of the approach in their situation.

During the Exploration stage, people often reach a point where so many things are happening that they can't put it all together. They try to choose one technique over another and don't recognize fundamental themes running through many of these approaches.

People need to identify themes and common assumptions that provide the basis for designing their new system. For example, teachers who use cooperative learning may realize that students arrive at jointly shared solutions that are better than individually developed ones. Similarly, a principal who uses site-based management may find that better decisions are made by teachers whose perspective is deeper because of being in the classroom. Teachers are more committed to solutions they understand because they have helped to work them out.

As the Exploration stage progresses, people look more deeply at the commonalities of effective practices and fundamentals that are the characteristics of the new system.

Stage 4 — Transition

People now move into the Transition stage. At this point people begin to make a commitment to some new practices. Until now they have been able to try new things and keep the old. If critics become concerned about new practices, the reformers can lean back on the old approaches. However, in the Transition stage they begin to realize they can't do both. They are faced with the adage "The politics of subtraction are much more difficult than the politics of addition."

Until now it has been relatively easy to keep adding new practices. Perhaps they have been able to find teachers or others in the system willing to contribute extra time (probably with little pay) to try something new. However, now they realize this cannot continue as the main operational mode. Some practices must be eliminated because of cost and because of the confusion they

create. Therefore, this stage is characterized by hard decisions of what to keep and discard, personnel requirements, and budget allocations.

Stage 5 — Emerging New Fundamentals

As people move into this stage, they begin to make real commitments to new practices. One indication of commitment is when new teachers or administrators are hired based on criteria reflecting new operating methods. Another indication is when resources are allocated to support new practices, rather than to maintain the old.

A key example is when resources are allocated based on student results rather than on traditional budget categories. At this stage we tend to see 20-30% of schools or communities committed to using new practices and policies.

Stage 6 — Predominance of the New System

This stage is called “Predominance of the New System” rather than “New System,” because as people move closer to their vision of a new system they begin to see beyond to even better possibilities.

Consider the story of a city fellow who went to the country looking for Joe Jones’ house. He stopped at a farmhouse and asked the woman who answered the door if she knew where Joe Jones lived. “Oh yes,” she said, “just go three Cs down this road and turn left.” “Three Cs?” he asked. “What do you mean by that?” “Well,” she said, “you go once as far as you can see, and then you do it again, and then again, and then you turn left.” So too with the shaping of our vision of education and human services. We get a vision as far as we can see based on what our current knowledge is. As we get closer, we see something over the horizon that is even more intriguing and seems more appropriate.

At this point it is unrealistic to expect that everyone will have adopted the “new system” as defined. A state could be considered to be at this stage when about 65-85% of communities are operating according to the definition of the new system.

A continually evolving picture of our direction seems to be a characteristic that will be with us for a long time. Our period of history has so many changes, that we need to become accustomed to change.

Appendix D – Continuum of System Change in Education

Elements of Change	Stages of Change		
	Maintenance of Old System	Awareness	Exploring
Vision	<p>Vision reflects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning based on seat time • Teaching as lecture • Mandates and inputs • Education system separate from other systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple stakeholders realize need to change from old system, but unclear on what to change to • Strategic plans, study group reports from influential groups call for fundamental changes getting some attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternatives to old system begin to emerge in piecemeal fashion • Stakeholder groups promote new ideas about parts of the system • New examples visited/debated • Growing numbers and types of stakeholders being drawn together around change
Public & Political Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support generally taken for granted • Only becomes of concern when finances are needed • Public informed, not engaged, by educators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports on need for changes in education discussed among policy makers, in news media • Public forums on need for change with input from public encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task forces formed to recommend changes for district, school • Political/public opinion leaders speaking out on selected issues • Minor resource allocations to explore possibilities • Public involvement in redefining desired student learning outcomes
Networks, Networking, and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking among peers often seen as subversive or insignificant • A few teachers within schools begin to network • Partnerships are one-shot, supplemental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of value of networking as a way of learning new operations of education system • A critical mass of teachers in a school explore joining restructuring networks • Realization that partnerships need to be longer term and more integral to school mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks (including electronic) used as a way to speed up sharing of information and new ideas • Networks joined across schools, districts, states • Whole schools join networks • School leaders begin conversations with potential partners on core educational issues
Teaching & Learning Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis placed on using standard curriculum, instruction, assessment methods more rigorously • High attention to standardized test results and ways to raise scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that traditional teaching and learning methods are not based on current research about learning • Recognition by administrators, public, teachers that education problems are due to social, economic, technological changes that are broader than education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual schools, teachers, districts debating and committing resources to learning and using new ways of teaching • Multi-person and multi-year commitments to try new teaching and learning approaches • New modes of assessing learning explored, developed • Learning outcomes being defined
Administrative Roles & Responsibilities	<p>Role/responsibility seen as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminish conflict • Emphasize standardization of approaches, following rules, regulations • Serve as major channel, source of information • Top-down decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators (at all levels) recognize need to change roles to better support change & learning by teachers • New roles, responsibilities for administration discussed • Media attention on innovative leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site based decision making (SBDM) approaches piloted • Professional development for administrators focuses on new roles/responsibilities • Bureaucratic layers questioned, vacant positions not filled • Administration learning to allocate resources to support learning outcomes
Policy Alignment	<p>State, district policy emphasizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook selection • Standardization of instruction methods • Standardized test, comparisons among schools on student achievement • Hierarchical organizational structure • Program evaluation results used as bias for blaming and fault finding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that standardized tests not measuring all desired learning outcomes • Attention directed to performance assessment to support desired • Recognition that low achievement may be due to broader conditions rather than poor teaching • Debates on how to use policy to help lead reform rather than force change • Waivers to regulations made available to promote experimentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, districts, states explore new modes of student assessment • Policies debated, enacted, piloted to define graduation based on demonstrated learning rather than courses taken • New policies piloted on curriculum frameworks with higher learning for all

Appendix D – (continued)

Stages of Change

Elements of Change

Transitioning	Emerging New Infrastructure	Predominance of New System	Elements of Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emerging consensus on new system components Old components disparaged/shed Need for linkages of new components within system is understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continual vision development seen as major force for change Vision includes student outcomes, system structure, underlying beliefs Recognition of need for continual refinement, development of vision with expanded stakeholder involvement 	<p>Broad agreement that in the desired system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All students can learn at higher levels Learning means achieving and applying skills, knowledge Teacher as coach, critic, facilitator Distributed decision making Vision-setting leadership Connections to other social systems 	Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public debate on specific changes with mixed support Opinion leaders campaign for change Resistant groups vocal More resources allocated for innovation Diversity of population recognized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing commissions, task forces established to maintain momentum for change as political leaders come and go Resources for innovation are ongoing with emphasis on meeting diverse student needs Public engaged in change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public, political, business involvement and connection seen as essential feature of system Allocation of resources based on new vision supported 	Public & Political Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition that networks are a long term feature of a less hierarchical system Debates on how the district can support ongoing networks Disenfranchised groups (e.g., teachers, ethnic groups) use networks for long term empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networks seen as accepted practice Networks act as major source of new knowledge Empowerment issues debated Multiple partners support vision and student learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources allocated for networks Effective network operations developed Networks serve as communication and information channels Empowerment issues being resolved 	Networks, Networking, and Partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant numbers of teachers, schools, districts intensely trying new approaches Teachers given time for planning Recognition of depth of change needed and difficulty, time and resources required Teachers convinced it's not a fad Changes being assessed 	<p>For significant numbers of schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State, district teaching/learning assessments encourage continual improvement, recognize uneven progress Graduation based on demonstrations of established learning outcomes Teaching methods actively engage students Heavy and ongoing investment in teacher development 	<p>For most schools in district it's the norm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have students actively engaged in learning Student assessments show continual improvement on skills, knowledge established in vision as desired outcomes Outcome focus used in teacher and administrator preparation programs 	Teaching & Learning Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods of distributing decision making to lower organizational levels developed Emphasis on outcomes to be achieved with flexibility in how they are achieved Allocates resources to support continual learning by teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrators hired using new criteria for leadership/management Policy supports SBDM Required school-community councils Teachers responsible for instructional decisions Infrastructure supports school change to match vision 	<p>Administrators expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage rethinking, improvement Encourage flexibility in approaches to meet needs of all students Allocate resources to support student learning rather than rigid categories Determine SBDM for learning, equity 	Administrative Roles & Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task forces define student learning outcomes, frequently based on national standards Policies enacted that give schools latitude to redesign their teaching and learning approaches Recognition that all policy needs review to determine what system is supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exit learning outcomes developed by broad based stakeholder groups at state, district, school levels; outcomes emphasize problem solving, more complex learning for all Multiple means of measuring student learning used; inclusion of demonstrated skills, knowledge Major review of policy for realignment to support new system Policies across education, health, social services, etc. interconnected 	<p>Policy at school, district, state supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing rethinking, continual improvement Allocating resources to support student learning Curriculum frameworks with high student standards Learning outcomes guide decisions at all levels of system including classroom Flexible instructional materials/methods to meet diverse student needs Alternative modes of assessment 	Policy Alignment