

The Emotions of Teaching and Educational Change

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One of the most neglected dimensions of educational change is the emotional one. Educational and organizational change are often treated as rational, cognitive processes in pursuit of rational, cognitive ends. If emotions are acknowledged at all, this is usually in a minimalist way in terms of human relations or climate setting, where the task of leadership is to manipulate the mood and motivation of their staffs, in order to manage them more effectively. The more unpredictable passionate aspects of learning, teaching and leading, however, are usually left out of the change picture.

In this chapter, Andy Hargreaves makes a case for studying and energizing the emotions within the educational change process. Then, drawing on an empirical study of a group of change-oriented Grade 7 & 8 teachers in Canada, he describes how teachers' emotional goals for and bonds with their students permeate teachers' orientations and responses to all other aspects of educational change – such as curriculum planning, teaching and learning, and school structure. When the emotional aspects of teaching and educational change are considered seriously, Hargreaves argues, what is at stake in educational change and how best to manage it, will never look the same again.

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of a new millennium, change is on most people's minds, not just the President's. Education prepares the generations of the future, and educational change is therefore front and center of all the talk about change in general. Educational reform is indeed pervasive right now. Learning standards are being defined for children, professional standards are being drawn up for teachers, assessment reform is extensive, new technologies are being widely advocated and implemented, schools in serious trouble are being reconstituted so they can make a fresh start, and school partnerships are being promoted everywhere with businesses, communities and universities. A growing change literature is also helping people understand how teachers and schools cope with educational change, and what sense they make of it (e.g., Fullan, 1991, 1993; McLaughlin, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Louis & Miles, 1990; Sarason, 1990; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Important as all this reform work is, I believe that many of those who initiate and manage educational reform, or who write about educational change in general, ignore or underplay one of the most fundamental aspects of teaching and of how teachers change: the emotional dimension.

Emotions are at the heart of teaching. They comprise its most dynamic qualities – literally – for emotions are fundamentally about movement. Emotions are

basically “mental states accompanied by intense feeling and (which involve) bodily changes of a widespread character” (Koestler, 1967, p. 226). The Latin origin of emotion is *emovere*: to move out, to stir up. When people are emotional, they are moved by their feelings. They can be moved to tears, overcome by joy, or fall into despair, for example (Höpl & Linstead, 1993). Emotions are dynamic parts of ourselves, and whether they are positive or negative, all organizations, including schools, are full of them.

Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It isn't just a matter of knowing your subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers aren't just well-oiled machines. Computers can never replace them. They are emotional, passionate beings who fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy. In Fried's (1995) terms, teaching is a passionate vocation. Good teachers are passionate about ideas, learning and their relationships with students. Woods and Jeffrey (1996) studied what made “exceptional” English primary school teachers especially creative. These teachers did more than teach to set standards or use approved techniques. Their classroom relationships featured “interest, enthusiasm, inquiry, excitement, discovery, risk-taking and fun”. Their cognitive scaffolding of concepts and teaching strategies was “held together with emotional bonds” (p. 71).

Emotions are virtually absent from the literature and advocacy of educational change. Strategic planning, cognitive leadership, problem-solving, teacher reflection, higher-order thinking, and standards-based reform have virtually nothing to say about them. Even the idea of organizational learning which is on the very cutting edge of change theory, is almost exclusively cerebral in its emphasis. In so much writing about teaching and leading, it is as if educators only ever think, manage and plan in coldly calculative (and stereotypically masculine) ways. It is as if teachers think and act; but never really feel.

Even where feelings are acknowledged in discussions of how schools and other kinds of organization work

the people presented are emotionally anorexic. They have ‘dissatisfactions’ and ‘satisfactions’, they may be ‘alienated’ or ‘stressed’, they will have ‘preferences’, ‘attitudes’ and ‘interests’. Often these are noted as variables for managerial control. . . . We find little or no mention of how feeling individuals worry, envy, brood, become bored, play, despair, plot, hate, hurt and so forth.

(Fineman, 1993, pp. 9–10)

Emotions are usually acknowledged and talked about only insofar as they help administrators and reformers “manage” and offset teachers’ resistance to change, or help them set the climate or mood in which the “really important” business of cognitive learning or strategic planning can take place. The more volatile, passionate emotions (which are also the less easily managed ones) are kept off the educational agenda in favor of ones that encourage trust, support, openness, involvement, commitment to teamwork and willingness to experiment. This is so whether the emotions are positive ones like joy and excitement, or negative, like