ABSTRACT. This article sets out new directions for thinking about educational change theory. In particular, a number of different segments in educational change processes are examined – the internal, the external and the personal.

In analyzing the importance of these different segments of educational change, a socio-historical approach is adopted. It is noted that in the expansionist period of the 1960s and 1970s internal change agentry was dominant and, as a result, modernist change theory located in that period stressed the importance of the internal processes which had become central in orchestrating the change process. In the 1980s and 1990s external change mandates have become dominant, with a number of downsides related to internal and personal missions.

In the new millennium it is argued that, as well as internal and external segments, increasing attention will need to be paid to the personal missions and purposes which underpin commitment to change processes. Without a fully conceptualized notion of how the internal, external and personal will interlink, existing change theory remains underdeveloped and of progressively less use.

In the final sections, a tentative model of change processes is defined. In this model, the internal, external and personal are integrated in ways that seek to provide new momentum for change processes and their study.

Educational change proposals resemble political parties. They represent a ‘coalition’ of interests and projects brought together under a common name at a particular point in time. When these separate segments of projects and interests are harmoniously organized, the social movement behind the political party or the educational change gains direction and force (Touraine, 1981; Morrow and Torres, 1999).

This article defines a number of different segments in educational change processes – the internal, the external and the personal. Internal change agents work within school settings to initiate and promote change within an external framework of support and sponsorship; external change is mandated in top-down manner, as with the introduction of national curriculum guidelines or new state testing regimes; personal change refers to the personal beliefs and missions that individuals bring to the change process. As Sheehy (1981) has argued, the embrace of change only happens with an inner change in people’s beliefs and plans.
The more these segments are integrated and harmonized, the more it is likely that the social movement underpinning educational change will gather force and momentum. At certain times segments may be tightly interlinked and integrated. At other times, a greater degree of separation might be evident, but even in periods of separation these segments stand in close relationship to one another.

Most commonly, one of the segments achieves primacy in driving educational change in a particular historical period and dominates the ‘coalition of change’ for a time. In the 1960s and 1970s, internal change agentry was often dominant, followed by a period where more external interests have driven the change process. Now we may be entering a period where personal agency begins to gather force in a world where, what Giddens (1991) calls, ‘personal life politics’ are increasingly powerful.

**Change Processes and Historical Periods**

In the post World War Two period, the internal professional power of educators began a period of substantial growth. This internal agentry was facilitated by external forces – expansionist economic conditions and policies; concern about Sputnik and new technological initiatives; the desire to build a ‘great society’ in the United States, and the development of more welfare-oriented societies in Europe (Sarason, 1998). The period of ‘Cold War’ between political ideologies set capitalist business values against systems of Communist production. Egalitarian social policies were often pursued and public education systems were heavily promoted as vehicles of common purpose and social good. Business values and the private sector lived in ‘mixed economies’, where public sectors provided a good deal of the ‘public services’ of national systems (Reynolds, Sullivan and Murgatroyd, 1987).

In this period that lasted well into the 1970s, and even longer in a few countries (for example Canada), educators were seen as having large amounts of professional autonomy. Much educational change was left to internal educational experts to initiate and define. In these historical circumstances of substantial professional autonomy, change theory looked for the sources of initiating and promoting change to the educator groups who were ‘internal to the school systems’ (Sarason, 1996a,b).