Curriculum research: Schleicher (2018)

Schleicher, Andreas (2018), [‘Making education reform happen’, in World class: how to build a 21st-century school system,](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264300002-5-en) OECD Publishing, Paris.

Chapter 5 of Schleicher’s book ‘How to build a 21st-century school system’ explores the questions of what is preventing change in education and why great plans may fail.

Schleicher argues that:

The reason why it is so hard to move education systems is that there is a much larger, invisible part under the waterline. This invisible part is composed of the interests, beliefs, motivations and fears of the people who are involved. (p 204)

This shows how essential it is for communication of the underlying evidence for change to be made available to educators and teachers. It is school leaders and teachers who have considerable experience and knowledge who will make the practical connections between the classroom and the policy reform. A list of the requirements for successful policy reform is provided. Educational reform will only be successful if policy makers assist educators to recognise what needs to change, particularly in regard to what will be accomplished for student learning. Information needs to be communicated on the advantages of the reform versus inaction. Policy makers need to create a shared understanding and ownership of the necessary change. In addition, they need to focus on building capacity and providing resources. Accountability measures should encourage innovation rather than compliance (pp 204-5).

Schleicher stresses the importance of having a range of stakeholders involved from the outset. By involving teachers in the design of the reforms, they are more likely to be supportive in the implementation stage. Experimenting with the policy, utilising pilot projects and evaluating the proposed reforms may assist in building consensus and overcoming resistance before their final implementation. Review and evaluation should be ongoing, even after implementation. Educators are more likely to accept policy initiatives if they feel they can make recommendations resulting in further adjustments. Teachers and school leaders are in a strong position to identify examples of best practice and the best ways to evaluate their peers. Any evaluation system introduced needs to be useful, objective and fair.

The importance and use of data to provide feedback on progress individual, institutional, local and national performance is highlighted. Survey data, comparative data and assessments can be used as a catalyst for change and a guide to policy making (p.2012). Schleicher advocates that,

There needs to be progression from initial reform initiatives towards building self –adjusting systems with feedback at all levels, incentives to react and tools to strengthen capacities to deliver better outcomes. (p 2012)

She further maintains that it is essential to engage teachers and school leaders in their own appraisal or evaluation. This could be in the form of setting objectives, self-appraisal and preparing portfolios (p 2019).

Building capacity is required for successful reform implementation. Educators need ‘professional know-how’ and therefore, there may be a need for significant staff development. Teachers and school leaders will be the major change agents so additional support in change management skills may also be necessary.

The fundamental challenge of policy implementation is seen as mobilising the experience and knowledge of school leaders and educators who are best placed to make practical connections between the classroom and mandated changes. Engagement of these key stakeholders especially teachers is seen as imperative in creating and implementing policy responses.

**Discussion and self-reflection questions**

1. Policy makers are rarely successful with education reform unless they help people recognise what needs to change and build a shared understanding and collective ownership for change. (Schleicher, 2018, p 204).

As a network leader consider and outline the strategies you will use to enable participants to see a need for change if student outcomes are to be improved.

1. Evidence from national surveys and inspectorates, as well as comparative data and assessments, can be used to catalyse change and guide policy making (Schleicher, 2018, p 2012).

As a network leader, what sorts of data do you think will be useful to document the expectation of your participants and the progress of your network? Consider both data collected at the network’s establishment and throughout your network’s journey.