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MA in TEFL/TESL

Take-Home Exam
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OPTION: Management of Innovation

Question 38

What is the importance of 'culture' in implementing an innovation?

(Note: You may use any concept of 'culture' as long as you define it in your essay, and you may choose to discuss 'culture' at any one level or more levels (e.g. individual/ group/ institutional/ regional/ national).

Introduction

A lot of research has been carried out concerning 'culture', for example, Hofstede's (cited in H.D.Brown 1994: 420) work on national cultures. There has also been a lot written recognising the importance of the individual in the innovation process. And yet, whilst recognising that teachers have an important role to play, little has been done to show directly the significance of their influence.

In this paper I intend to talk specifically about 'teacher culture', which will be explained below, and innovation implementation. I shall attempt to first describe how these elements can, and do, interact and then illustrate this through the use of case studies.

A definition of innovation

'Innovation' and 'change' will be used synonymously throughout this paper, to refer to planned change, concerned with improvement.

A definition of 'culture': 'teacher culture'

Whilst admitting that, for example,

'[T]here may be more than one teacher culture within an institution depending on its history and on the histories, generational experiences, orientations and commitments of individuals and groups of teachers' (Sikes 1992: 43),

I believe that it is possible to identify certain characteristics common to many teachers wherever they may be working. I therefore define 'teacher culture' as the culture of those within the teaching community, encompassing their values, beliefs and attitudes, which are apparent in their classroom behaviour (Carless 2001: 264).

'Teacher culture' and its importance in innovation

As Kennedy, J. & Kennedy, C. (1998: 468) point out, 'Individuals belong to different cultural groups or networks', which interact with one another. One of these is the 'teacher culture' or 'teacher network' which due to the influence it has needs to be taken into account when innovation is planned (Kennedy, J. & Kennedy, C.1998: 455). Change affects teachers' beliefs (Sikes 1992: 38):

'Much depends on what the change means for teachers' ideologies and philosophies, for the kind of teacher they want to be and be seen as being, for their objective and subjective career aspirations, and for what they are required to do in their job' (Sikes 1992: 49).

Thus, when looking at ‘teacher culture’ and the effect that change may have upon it, it is insightful to consider not only the structural elements of the organisation, but also to ‘...interpret the organisation through the individuals working in it...’ (Kennedy, J. & Kennedy, C.1998: 466-467). It therefore follows that ‘[T]eachers’ attitudes and beliefs must be considered’ (Kennedy, C. et al. 1999: 53) in the innovation process.

There are three innovation strategies: Power-coercive, Empirical-rational, Normative-reeducative (Markee 2001: 123). A brief outline of each of these is deemed necessary at this point, as evidence of how they interact with ‘teacher culture’ will be apparent later in the case studies.

The Power-coercive strategy is used to impose innovation when there is a difference between the institutional culture and the individual cultures therein contained (Kennedy, C. 1987: 164) of which ‘teacher culture’ is one. The Rational-empirical strategy is used in an attempt to align institutional and individual cultures. However, the ‘Normative-reeducative strategy, with its emphasis on active participation and involvement, is the one that offers the greatest potential’ (Kennedy, C.1987: 165), or is perceived to do so, in education.

Yet, as Kelly (1980, cited in Kennedy, C. 1988: 336) says, it is important to realise that no innovation is a ‘solution’ per se, but an improvement on the existing situation. According to Kelly, ‘: *feasibility*, *acceptability*, and *relevance*’ (1980, cited in Kennedy, C. 1988: 36-337) from the teachers’ point of view, are the three key factors to innovation. In a similar vein, Rogers (cited in Brown 2001: 109) says that there are five important elements of innovation: ‘compatibility, relative advantage, complexity, trialability, and observability’. Again, these elements refer not only to the organisational ‘fit’, but that of the teaching staff and the innovation.

But how important is *teacher attitude*? There are those that believe that:

‘[T]eacher attitude...is not sufficient for successful implementation of change and ...other equally important factors need to be taken into account’ (Kennedy, C. & Kennedy, J.1996: 351).

Whilst agreeing that teacher attitude alone may not be overly influential, it is too early to determine whether or not it has *significant* influence in innovation implementation. As

change requires people to change, 'teacher culture' including attitudes, cannot fail to have significance.

Different types of change have been identified: Cognitive change, Coercive change, and Rational change. Cognitive change, where people, are engaged in the innovation and their beliefs are changed as part of the process, is very important in teaching, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT). Whilst very difficult to achieve, Cognitive change is absolutely necessary for the successful implementation of innovation. This form of change recognises the importance of 'teacher culture'.

Coercive change, on the other hand, does not. It involves imposed, top-down change, and is frequently found in ELT case studies as will be seen later. It should be noted, however, that a typical feature of this kind of change is that people continue using time and energy after implementation to find a way to subvert the change. This is because 'teacher culture', including beliefs and attitudes, remains fundamentally unaltered. A description of further ways in which teachers may resist change will be given in later.

Finally, there is Rational change which attempts to convince those affected that the innovation is a good idea and often employs training courses for teachers to this end. However, whilst the innovation may appear to be a great idea whilst on the course, the later realisation that it does not suit the home context can prevent implementation. This is a common phenomenon in the ELT context.

For change to be accepted those potentially involved must not only recognise the need for change (Kelly 1980, cited in Kennedy, C.1988: 336), but also want to change:

'...there has to be a movement for change on the part of the implementer, the teacher, otherwise the change will fail. Changing teachers in this sense will only come about if there is a change in attitudes and beliefs on the part of the teacher (cognitive change) and if the circumstances surrounding the change are such that they do not lead to resistance' (Kennedy, C. et al.1999: vii).

Why do teachers resist change?

In ELT change is often about new teaching ideas and this could explain why teachers appear to be dubious about change: as experienced teachers they will have seen many 'innovations' come and go. Additionally, teachers are often asked to change what they do

according to specifications laid down by someone who does not know them or their context (Sikes 1992: 36). In such a situation the changes they are supposed to be implementing, may not, in their opinion, be either appropriate or possible (Sikes 1992: 37). DeLano et al. (1994: 489) recognise that sometimes, too many times in their view, 'new' is wrongly assumed to mean 'better'. Therefore, whilst resisting change is commonly seen to be a negative thing, it may in reality 'be well founded and...not just an automatic defence mechanism put up against change' (Kennedy, C. 1999: vii).

In implementing an innovation, teachers generally carry out a personal 'cost/benefit' evaluation. There will, hopefully, be 'gains', (to be discussed later in the paper,) but there will also be 'losses'. These latter factors will be discussed in continuation.

Retraining and learning new skills, a common factor of innovation, takes time, and time and effort, both 'physical and mental' effort (Kennedy, C. 1988: 340), constitute huge 'losses' for teachers. In this way the possibility of imposed change can constitute a threat to them and their 'teacher culture'.

Teachers may feel that they have no control over the change process (Kennedy, C.1988: 340-341), and become stressed and anxious, even unsure of their abilities as teachers either in the short or long term (Sikes 1992: 43-44; Powell 1992). White goes even further than this in his prognosis:

'No one can accommodate too many changes at the same time, and over-zealous attempts to implement too many changes at once can lead to stress on the system's capacity to cope. This will be revealed in people's behaviour: dissatisfaction, complaints, anxiety, stress, even illness and absenteeism' (White et al. 1991: 186).

This may seem extreme, doom-laden even, yet it must be realised that innovation places a huge demand on teachers which is twofold: firstly, they themselves have to adapt to the change, especially '...where the changes involved represent a major shift in beliefs and practices...' (Kennedy, C. et al 1999: 3), and secondly, they simultaneously need to implement that change in the classroom and present it to students. This extra workload is a major concern for teachers involved in innovation (Powell 1992).

Whilst it is accepted that in ELT at least, teachers try to work in schools that have a similar view of education as themselves (Sikes 1992: 41), innovation can drastically change how they feel about their work. Imposed change can have a very negative effect meaning that the original reasons for someone having become a teacher no longer apply (Sikes 1992: 40-41; 50). One result of dissatisfaction with their teaching situation is that teachers could decide that it will no longer be a priority in their lives. Thus, channelling time and energy once devoted to teaching into new areas, such as leisure, or the family (Sikes 1992: 48), could be an option. Other options, such as leaving that particular institution, or remaining to 'sabotage' the innovation, also exist.

The option of 'leaving' highlights the fact that in ELT '...there is an important distinction between the public or state-funded and the private sectors' (White et al. 1991: 166). Leaving the school is more likely to be an option in the private sector than in the public sector since changes introduced in the public sector are more commonly 'across the board' i.e. national. Therefore, in the public sector, leaving one school for another to escape change would be a futile act. Sikes claims that some teachers may feel strongly enough to leave the profession, but does allow that it would be a big decision after having started a career in teaching (Sikes 1992: 46).

In the private sector the individual's 'teacher culture' may be more decisive. Having found him/herself in an institution implementing a change that he/she feels unhappy with, the teacher can 'move on'. However, this could be one reason why the management of such institutions do not take the 'teacher culture' of their staff into consideration when innovating: it may be that staff turnover is seen to be more of a common feature than teacher loyalty. Unfortunately there does not seem to have been much research done on this aspect of innovation and consequently adding anything further would be pure speculation.

Another option in the face of imposed innovation as mentioned above, is 'sabotage', which may be underestimated as it involves time and effort on the part of the teacher.

Sikes claims that

'Teachers can overtly or covertly set out to sabotage imposed change by doing things wrong or by refusing to cooperate. Active sabotage requires commitment because it can result in difficult working conditions and can mean students 'suffer' (1992: 48).

This may appear extreme, but teachers, as will be seen in the case studies discussion, do employ a variety of strategies to subvert changes with which they are not in agreement, even to the extent of open conflict with innovation supporters:

‘If a change is forced on reluctant teachers, the dangers are that at best it is accepted but not implemented, or at worst the resultant conflict leads to withdrawal of the innovation’ (Kennedy, C. et al. 1999: 4).

As indicated in the above quote, teachers may also use ‘lip-service’ when faced with imposed change. This involves the apparent acceptance of an innovation, whilst in reality avoiding innovation implementation (Wiseman 1997: 12).

More comprehensive lists of possible ways in which teachers may respond to innovation implementation have been devised by Lamb (1995), and Cabaroghu & Roberts, J.(2000). Among the options for negative responses are Lamb’s (1995) ‘No uptake’, and ‘Rejection’, and Cabaroghu & Roberts’ (2000) ‘No change’, which could ultimately be lesser evils when compared with what Wiseman refers to as:

‘...the phenomenon of adaptation – perhaps unconscious – rather than adoption, which may perhaps be called an adoption of the innovation, but on the adopter’s own terms...’ (1997: 17).

In this way the innovation may be modified according to the individual’s ‘teacher culture’ and then implemented in a way never intended by its originators (Roberts, J. 1998: 308; Lamb 1995; White et al. 1991: 180).

Using ‘teacher culture’ to encourage teachers to embrace innovation

These negative responses to change management could be mitigated by providing institutional support, and emphasising the personal benefits that the teachers, would gain from collaborating (Powell 1992; Kennedy, C.1988). If ‘teacher culture’ is taken into consideration so that teachers can perceive advantages for themselves in the innovation (Wiseman 1997: 12; White et al. 1991: 184) then they are more likely to be influenced in favour of the proposed change. As C. Kennedy notes:

‘job security...good relations with the adopters...improved service to the students...increasing the knowledge and skills of the teacher...intellectual/affective satisfaction...economic and professional rewards...’ (1988: 339-340)

are all ‘gains’ in the ‘cost/benefit’ equation that teachers tend to be interested in.

‘Gains’, or rewards, connected to the innovation that take into account ‘teacher culture’ do not need to be economic:

‘One of the things a manager needs to establish is the kinds of rewards which are meaningful and motivating to the people being asked to make implementational efforts. Job satisfaction may, in some circumstances, be a more powerful reward than a pay increase’ (White et al. 1991: 187).

In Jennings and Doyle (1996), one of the case studies looked at below, taking teacher, and student, satisfaction into account is shown to have a very positive effect on the success of the innovation.

Of course, teachers may recognise that the change is appropriate. A significant factor in winning teacher commitment for an innovation can be the approval/disapproval of the change by ‘significant others’ (Kennedy, C. & Kennedy, J. 1996: 357). This deferral to peers, or those held in high regard by teachers is noted by a number of writers (Kennedy, J. & Kennedy, C. 1998: 461; Wiseman 1997; White, R. et al. 1991: 184).

Generally, though, imposed change has been ‘notoriously unsuccessful’ (Sikes 1992: 38) and one reason for this may be because the instigators *forget* (my emphasis) that teachers are people and individuals and that ‘...their interpretation of what the change means for them influences what they subsequently do and how they do it’ (Sikes 1992: 38).

Whilst the importance of, for example, communication, support, rewards, resources, training, participation, feedback, and ownership for those involved, is widely accepted by writers on innovation, such as Carless (2001), Kennedy, C. et al (1999), White (1988), and Gross et al. (1971 cited in White 1988), to name but a few, it would appear that there continues to be a gap between theory and in practice. The following brief notes on some case studies have been included to allow the reader to identify the factors from the ‘cost/benefit’ evaluation above mentioned, and to see how ‘teacher culture’ was either threatened or taken into consideration in the implementation of the innovations.

CASE STUDIES

Case studies to illustrate a clash between ‘teacher culture’ and innovation

The seven case studies briefly examined here, in no particular order, are intended to illustrate how failing to take into account the part teachers’ beliefs and attitudes have to play can prove costly and detrimental to the innovation process.

EDWARDS (1999)

Edwards (1999) found that teachers were resistant to the innovation proposed by the management of their college to a large extent because they could not see its relevance to their situation. Furthermore the innovation incurred a great amount of extra work for teaching staff.

Little attempt was made by management to convince teachers of the value of the innovation and instead, a coercive innovation strategy was adopted, forcing teachers to implement something they were strongly against, or lose their jobs. This conflictive stance, made very clear by management, led to a type of ‘lip-service’ as teachers fulfilled their roles in a superficial manner.

Teachers had no ownership of the innovation, no control, and it can be seen that by ignoring ‘teacher culture’ the management of the college lost the goodwill of their teachers not only for the duration of this particular innovation, but also for the long term.

KENNEDY, D. (1999)

Kennedy describes an imposed, top-down innovation in which teachers had little incentive to change, as the ‘cost/benefit’ equation did not make this to their advantage.

This study shows how poor preparation and lack of teacher awareness concerning an innovation can lead to a lack of confidence in its possibilities of success. Kennedy, following Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour (1999 cited in Kennedy D. p32-33), shows how this decision is arrived at using the teacher’s own perception of the innovation, the way in which others view the innovation, and the amount of control teachers believe themselves to have over the innovation. Taken together these three facets combine in the overall decision of the teacher to adopt the innovation or not. In the case outlined by

Kennedy (1999) lack of adoption was the result. It can clearly be seen that the factors leading to the lack of innovation implementation would have been taken into consideration had 'teacher culture' been recognised.

SERGEANT (1999)

This case outlines an attempt to implement technological innovation: CALL. Attitudes towards the innovation were found to be negative. Various explanations for this are given in the case study. I shall note what I perceive to be the most important of these here.

Despite the relevance of the innovation to the situation, teachers were found to be intimidated by the extent of the proposed change, and by the expertise required. Additionally, whilst attempting to give ownership to the teachers, the innovation required a large amount of extra work on the part on the teacher for a minimum output in the classroom. For the teacher, therefore, the 'cost/benefit' equation, did not result in their favour, and 'teacher culture' could not accommodate the innovation as presented.

Ultimately, the innovation proposed was very complicated and Sergeant admits that '...safer, less complex activities tend to be favoured by the majority' (1999 cited in Kennedy: 81). Ongoing training is seen as being a possible solution to this perceived problem.

BRACAMONTE (1999)

Bracamonte's (1999) case study also involves the attempted implementation of CALL. At the first attempt, the implementation foundered due to a lack of motivation and confidence in the innovation by teachers. This could, perhaps, have been avoided had teachers been involved more in the innovation process and had the appropriacy and usefulness of the technology been explained in more detail to them.

However, the case study goes on to show how at the second attempt at implementation, using cascade training, the innovation met with greater success. Bracamonte (1999) concludes that an effective way of dealing with resistance is to implement the innovation incrementally.

In addition, it should be added that at the second attempt greater attention was paid to teachers' needs, beliefs, and attitudes, i.e. 'teacher culture' via the use of cascade training.

CARLESS AND GOH: Two case studies (1999)

I have taken these case studies together due to the fact that they share many of the same problems involved in innovation implementation.

In both cases there was an attempt to push the innovation through too quickly, using top-down strategies, with minimum involvement from teachers regarding the process. Whilst training was recognised as being important, it can be seen to have been kept at a minimum if the all-pervading nature of the innovation: curriculum change, is taken into account. Additionally, little consideration was given to the fact that teacher beliefs and attitudes would need to change to accommodate the innovation, or the fact that the proposed additional workload was unrealistic and would serve mainly to antagonise teaching staff. In other words, 'teacher culture' was largely ignored.

Carless (1999) points out that it is possible to accept innovation without implementing it, and this is amply illustrated in this case study. Lack of motivation or incentive to change or support from the educational system, and ultimately, lack of ownership, cancel out any positive elements of the innovation. As Carless states:

'It is widely acknowledged that the relative advantage of an innovation does not necessarily lead to its successful adoption' (1999: 25).

DOYLE (1999)

The main points from this case study are that if an innovation is in conflict with teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching, i.e. 'teacher culture', then it has a limited chance of being successfully implemented. Doyle's case study illustrates the point that:

'[A] collaborative approach which does not take on board the 'whole person' of the participant is essentially politically naïve' (1999: 65).

Case Study taking ‘teacher culture’ into account in innovation.

The case study examined below has been chosen as a prime example of how the implementation of innovation can prove successful when taking into consideration teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, ‘teacher culture’, and embedding them in the process. It serves to demonstrate White’s claim that:

‘In general, innovations which are identified by members of an institution and arise within it *stand more chance of success* than those which are imported or imposed’ [my emphasis] (1987: 212).

JENNINGS, K. & DOYLE, T. (1996)

From the very beginning when it was decided that innovation was necessary, a team effort, using the cascade training principle, was perceived to be the best way of devising and implementing it. Support and collaboration were perceived to be key to the process.

Elements such as the feedback mechanisms which were put in place, the reward system for those involved and undertaking extra work, the fact that the issues to be addressed firmly focussed on increased teacher satisfaction and relevance to their situation, make this case study especially interesting with reference to ‘teacher culture’. Teacher involvement and ownership of the change formed the basis of the innovation process and in turn led to a motivated staff who were generally positive about the outcome.

Great pains were taken to ensure that everyone, including students, were kept informed at all times of the progress of the innovation. This learner involvement in the process is another defining feature of this case study.

This case study clearly illustrates that when innovation is implemented by, and for, teachers, taking ‘teacher culture’ into consideration, a greater level of success can be reasonably expected.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the importance of ‘culture’, in this case ‘teacher culture’ in implementing an innovation. It has been seen that what at first seems like a fairly facile question from Wiseman: ‘Systems may change, but do attitudes?’ (1997: 18) does in fact strike at the heart of the issue of innovation. Changes in beliefs and attitudes, changes in ‘teacher culture’, are fundamental in innovation and without them it is hard to find examples of successful change.

Of course, deciding whether or not an innovation has been successful is no easy task: Wiseman (1997) suggests that in order to really see what he terms the ‘deep level responses’ to innovation it is necessary to return to the same institution about ten years after the original implementation. The idea of such a longitudinal study may be daunting, but as has been seen, innovation is really about change over a long period of time, changes in beliefs and attitudes, not just a quick, ‘fix it’, solution.

Finally, those involved in implementing innovation in education and wishing to use knowledge of ‘teacher culture’ to advantage would do well to heed MacDonald’s warning:

‘Teachers are, on the whole, poor implementers of other people’s ideas’ (1991: 3 cited in Carless 1999).

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