Sustainability of Change

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How do schools sustain and enhance the changes made through professional development programmes once those programmes have officially ended?

At the end of 2008 my school finished its three years on the MOE's ICTPD contract, for which we were the lead school (We are a decile 1a South Auckland School)
As well as being the lead Principal on the contract, ICT is also an area for which I take direct responsibility (along with a team of teachers) in my school. We were also one of the schools in our local area EHSAS contract which would have drawn to a close in 2010 (had the government not shut it down earlier). This contract concentrated on numeracy and literacy, and while my study looked at ICT its application to the EHSAS work was also an important consideration.

Between these two ministry contracts the clusters we were in were receiving a considerable amount of extra government funding to develop new programmes and enhance existing ones, which would cease to be available to us.

Both contracts had served to improve outcomes for children considerably by up skilling existing staff. EHSAS was for most of us an extension of work already begun under the SEMO project and its follow on incarnations (AUSAD and OTLC), while the ICT contact provided perhaps a higher level of teacher development (in that it was our first serious ongoing ICT development)

For me then the question I wanted to answer was how to maintain the changes that had been made through the contract once the money ran out (and that meant the facilitator was no longer available to us, at least on the basis she had been under the contract). The issue was not of course just how to maintain the change, but also how to continue the development and ensure that change continued to occur. Do you re employ the facilitator out of local funds? Do you set up specific ICT lessons for all classes? Do you continue the lead teacher programme, can you expect teachers to continue implementation without outside assistance etc? and how does this all fit into the new curriculum?

To try to get some answers I arranged to visits a number of schools and discuss these questions with either the Principal or DP (in a couple of cases the lead teacher)
Schools visited were all higher decile than us, had completed the ICT contract 1-2 years previously, and ranged from those reputed to be at the forefront of ICT to those very much just starting the journey
While my questions centred around implementation, professional development and curriculum, it was also interesting in some schools to also talk about the actual hardware and financial aspects.
In the hope of finding some different answers all the schools visited were higher decile schools and none were in South Auckland

The following are merely my impressions, based on the discussions. Conclusions and generalisations are mine, they are based on a relatively small sample of schools with no attempt to justify their validity

Change
While the discussions I had set out to have were about the place of ICT, most principals were more inclined to see the issue in terms of the new curriculum and learning and teaching methods, with ICT simply an add on, or a part of the process
So the change through the ICT contracts and since was in fact about issues like inquiry learning, and the implementation of the new curriculum, rather than about the application of specific technologies. ICT was simply one of the tools being taught to children to enable them to learn in the modern context. Other tools, from the contract and subsequent work were things like thinking keys, graphic organisers, thinking hats etc

I suppose the answer should have been obvious before beginning the study, but the main impression I received was that, where a school was well down the journey, ICT was simply an integral part of everything they did, not something taken separately. Several principals talked about a progression of introduction – implementation – institutionalisation, with the contract providing the introduction and some of the implementation, and the school then moving on to experiment and implement it, but that only when a school institutionalised the learning was there real sustainability
This fits well with Hargreaves and Fink who use the metaphor of an educational 'ecosystem', which is developed in order to enable people to adapt to and prosper in their increasingly complex environments.

In terms of maintaining and developing ICT (and teachers skills in ICT) there seemed to be a continuum
At one end were these schools that in my impression were nearer the start of a journey. These schools tended to be still very concerned with what each teacher did in terms on ICT and tended to have labs with a specialist teacher, and often still employed a facilitator to help staff. ICT was a thing in its own right, part of the new curriculum yes, but in some way also separate At the other end, schools apparently well down the journey tended to have no labs (or the lab had a very specialised function such as trying out totally new applications) and to simply expect all staff to be implementing ICT ("every child is expected to produce at least one piece of digital work every term"). Professional development was still being delivered in a variety of ways, from whole school sessions to small group voluntary workshops, to pair help. Many schools talked about new staff simply observing 'how the syndicate does it' and then receiving help from a partner (especially over planning), lead teacher or syndicate leader etc
As schools progressed down the journey they seemed to become less concerned with the individual teachers application of ICT in the classroom. Two things seemed to be operating here. First the process was so integrated into everything the school did that all teachers were involving ICT in the curriculum in some way anyway, and secondly, so many teachers were using it well that a small group who were not were no longer seen as threatening. They

would catch up in their own time. One principal commented, "focus on the tall poppies and don't worry too much about those that do not want to get involved, they will have to come on board eventually"

Fink and Stoll (in Hargreaves 1998) talking about schooling improvement note the importance of "school culture… the power of school culture and the importance of teacher collegiality to promote or obstruct change". Here, as the processes and learning are institutionalised, so they become part of the school culture. The problem of individual staff not being fully "on board" becomes much less of an issue as a critical mass of teachers have accepted the change and so it becomes self sustaining

An important issue for many schools was to build capacity in key people who could then spread the message to the rest, and who had the ability to look for, learn, and then introduce new applications

Everyone was using inquiry learning at some level (from a couple of inquiry units per year across the school to everything purportedly being inquiry. Everyone used ICT extensively in their inquiry. The ways in which inquiry was used differed from school to school as would expected and most talked of it as a developing exercise which was constantly being refined, not as something that was developed during the contract and then put into place already defined

Facilitator or lead teacher availability to assist and train staff varied. Some (nearer the start I think) had re employed the original facilitator, or found a new facilitator who worked at specific times. Others had lead teachers with a variety of release time available to them. A couple had a lead teacher working directly with each class in a lab on a rotating basis. In one case the lab seemed to have the specialist position of trialling new applications and assisting staff and students who were already skilled to become even more skilled (there was intense competition to access this facility). In others the teacher in the lab seemed to be there to make up for a lack of class teacher skill or class facilities. Yet others had a lab but no specialist teacher for it, class teachers used it as a means of taking whole class lessons where everyone had ICT access at once

An interesting development in one school was to use ICT to make allowance for those pupils who were able to work independently by allowing them to negotiate a learning task, then check out whatever digital equipment that task might need and then go and work elsewhere in the school on the task

Who Drives the Programme?
Again, this is an impression which may not be sustainable, but it seemed to me that where a school was furthest along the journey, the journey was being driven directly by the Principal rather than DP or lead teachers. Principals knew exactly what hardware was in the school, were often one of the providers of the PD for teachers, and had a good grasp of the software applications in use. A couple of schools talked about (during the learning phase of ICT) setting a task for each class (e.g. making a video about the current topic) and expected the Principal to also carry out the task (at least the first time around). In these schools the Principal was seldom the one delivering most of the support, all had lead teachers to do that and principals worked with a team in implementation This is not to say that Principals in other schools were not supportive, in all cases they were highly supportive, but the drive directly from the top seemed to make a difference.

An interesting side line in one school where the Principal was one of those delivering the PD was to have PD on things probably more applicable to the individual teachers life outside of school such as how to get the best out of your ipod running along side programmes with direct class application

Ongoing Professional Development
All schools talked about the need for ongoing professional development and all had programmes well in place
These ranged from compulsory staff meetings to voluntary meetings on specified topics. There was a range of response to the voluntary meetings. Again, an impression, but it seemed that schools near the start of the journey found that voluntary meetings were not well attended and so had opted for compulsory ones, those more advanced seemed to find good attendance at the voluntary meetings and so seldom had compulsory ones (an issue about who is really buying in to the programme, or perhaps about who is driving it, or even about school expectations perhaps?)
Many schools saw continued attendance at the CORE conferences as being important, particularly for lead teachers and other key personnel and budgeted accordingly. Other PD now seemed to be more focussed on the new curriculum.
Few schools seemed to have specific programmes in place for new teachers. Comments about new staff tended to be around, "I give them some lessons if needed" or "they work in a syndicate and learn it from them"
What I did note, not from the interviews themselves, but from an incidental discussion with a scale A short term reliever in one of the more advanced schools, was the comment that if you do not turn the computers on for the children they go next door and ask that teacher to come and get them going – and that's in the year 1 class. In other words the ICT aspect has become so much part of the culture of learning and teaching in that school that the children themselves will drive the programme if staff do not.

Technical support was also seen as an issue.
For teachers who are struggling particularly, having the equipment malfunction is a serious setback. Providing sufficient technical back up, both in terms of lead teachers who can quickly trouble shoot the small stuff, and ICT techs for the big stuff is seen as important. Allied to this of course was the need to have a sufficiently fast and robust system, sufficient storage space etc etc, and where appropriate the peripheral equipment as well. While most schools employed contract technicians from one of the bigger IT firms, one had their own technician, and a second was talking about making such a change. In these cases however it needs to be noted that the Principal had very high level ICT skills, most did not and relied on the professional firms

The MOE ICTPD Contract
While I was not seeking information about the way the contract operated and its effectiveness, the issue certainly came up for many people
Many schools commented that the cluster approach, while useful, was probably less useful than having an individual school approach. The issues here seemed to centre around the politics of running a cluster with schools at different stages of the journey and with different needs, the politics of some of the facilitation providers, and change within the individual school. This was particularly the case where the Principal or the lead DP/teacher had changed during the contract period, often bringing quite new and different needs. The rapid change of lead teachers was also seen as an issue, with their increased skills providing them

with other job opportunities. A couple even commented that they had regressed in their ICT application by the end of the contract. Some contracts obviously ran very smoothly, others were reportedly trouble from beginning to end. Facilitators, especially those from larger organisations came in for some flack. Interestingly where the Principal was seen as the main driver the contracts seem to have run more smoothly and effectively, where there had been issues it was sometimes a DP or lead teacher doing the driving, so perhaps the issue here lies more in who is telling the story that in what actually happened, or perhaps in the power base involved

Finance
Here there was considerable variation. Some schools were able to give a per pupil figure that they have available each year for hardware, others made a year by year case. For all schools it was a limiting factor but the attitude towards finance differed considerably
My impression is that where schools were well advanced in the ICT journey the attitude tended to be that it was an integral cost in the budgeting process, no different to staffing or heat light and water. Schools at an earlier place in the journey tended to see it as an extra that they had to allow for and that came at the expense of something else, and that the cost sometimes severely limited what they could achieve. Indeed for some near the start of the journey it was seen as the main barrier to progress ("how can we maintain what we have done without more funding" was not an uncommon statement for those near the start, it was never said by those who seemed more advanced)

Hardware
While schools obviously varied considerably there seemed to be a move towards more computers in classrooms as opposed to labs, often through COWs, with mobility seen as important (ie wireless access where possible, especially at the more senior levels)
Data projectors (often permanently fixed in classrooms) seemed to be common, often seen as a pre runner to interactive whiteboards which were less common ("If they start using the data projector regularly they will use the interactive whiteboard well when we can afford it") Digital cameras, either in every classroom or between two rooms were also a common feature. There was a mixture of leased and purchased equipment. The more advanced schools seemed to have more equipment, and it seemed to be more up to date.

In Conclusion
Hargraves and Fink talk of one of the areas for sustainable change being "improvement that fosters learning, not merely change that alters schooling", and in the way many Principals immediately turned the discussion from ICT specific to the new curriculum and the learning that is involved there this seems to be one of the things that will make the change most sustainable. For most, if not all, the change from the ICTPD was not about ICT, it was about future (and present) learning

SO for me the lessons are
Sustain change by:

- Focusing on the tall poppies
- Don't fret the ones who don't use it, they will come round eventually
- Integrate ICT into the whole programme
- Develop and value key people
- Institutionalising the programme keeps it sustained
- Institutionalising change as part of the process keeps change occurring
- Accept that we are all different and we will all sustain change in our own unique ways
- ICT funding is not an extra, its as important as heat light and water
- Ongoing, focussed PD is essential

Hargreaves, D. & Fink, D. (2003). 'Sustaining leadership. Making improvements in education.' *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 84(9), 693.

International handbook of **educational change** -
by Andy Hargreaves - 1998