



Educational Innovation as Professional Development.

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Contribution

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The teaching profession is a key mediating agency for society as it endeavours to cope with social change and upheaval (Bransford, 2005). But the teaching profession must be trained and equipped so that it will have the capacity to cope with the many changes and challenges which lie ahead. If it is to retain the confidence of society, the teaching profession must adapt a great deal so that it can act in a constructive manner within a fast-changing society (Hargreaves, 2003). The changes and new realities lead the gaze inexorably towards the teachers. Day states that "teachers are potentially the most important asset in the notion of a learning society" (Day, 2001:495). Introducing educational innovations in schools and classrooms is a demanding task (Fullan, 1990; Little, 1999; Miles, 1998). Teachers have to acquire new knowledge and skills they are unlikely to have gained in their own education or in their previous classroom work (Day, 2000; Penlington, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Researchers have suggested that changes in teaching practices must be complemented by changes at the school level; individual learning must be complemented by organizational learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Elmore, 2004). But innovation is not a mandate. Innovation occurs in a context, a "breeding ground" that allows people to think and develop the best projects to promote quality learning in students (Fullan, 2008). Educational innovation can be understood as a form of professional development (Adey, 2006; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Muijs, Day, Harris, & Lindsay, 2004; Osborn, 2006). From this point of view this research aims to provide information about the processes of educational innovation being developed in Spanish schools. The present research has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport of Spain to our research team. The goals that guide us in this investigation are: 1. Analyze, from the standpoint of teachers, as well as external agents of innovation (consultants, inspectors, advisors) conditions that facilitate or hinder the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational innovations. 2. Analyze the characteristics and processes that take place in schools that develop innovative projects in education. 3. Identify and characterize the issues on which educational innovations are developed in

Spain 4. Know the impact of projects of educational innovation in students, teachers and schools.

Method

We have used different procedures for collecting information:

- Questionnaire: We have designed and implemented two types of questionnaires. The first is aimed at teachers involved in projects of educational innovation, and was answered by 911 projects for educational innovation in Spain. The second questionnaire was sent to school inspectors, advisers, as well as counselors. It was answered by 167 external agents.
- Focus groups: We have 36 focus groups. There were 18 focus groups in which teachers from different educational levels involved in the development of innovation projects in their schools. The 18 discussion groups correspond to different regions of Spain. There were also 18 focus groups with external agents to the innovation (consultants, advisors and inspectors).
- Case Study: We have developed 8 case studies of projects of educational innovation in different regions in Spain.

Expected Outcomes

Conclusions are:

- * The attitude of commitment of head teacher and the involvement of teachers is a part of the aspects that guarantee the success of any innovation.
- * There is a growing interest to integrate the innovation projects in the dynamics of schools.
- * A good climate in the school promotes the initiation, development and achievement of desired outcomes of the projects being undertaken.
- * The changes and results are often welcomed. It is generally recognized that the effort made it worthwhile.
- * Sometimes, participation in institutional projects does not mean more than the institutionalization of an earlier initiative that had been developed in schools.
- * There is no single source in the initiation of innovations, even within the same institution.
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