

**The Master of Education:
A Personal Reflection and Inquiry Into Educational Change**

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Abstract

Educational change is a complex and multi-faceted process. Among other things, it involves changing individuals' beliefs about education. The Master's Program (M.Ed.) has significantly influenced my beliefs about education. It has been a journey of inquiry and has helped me grow as an educator in understanding the educational change. This paper is a synthesis and reflection of what I have learned and experienced during the M.Ed. Program and in what ways this has influenced my understanding of educational change. The paper identifies the key components of educational change, summarizes relevant literature covered during the M.Ed. Program, and provides an opportunity for personal reflection on the professional working reality and educational system in Kosova in general – a system that has been undergoing a large-scale reform.

Introduction

It has been a rewarding and enlightening experience. Writing this Capstone paper has provided me an opportunity to reflect upon my journey throughout the M.Ed. Program and my growth as a practicing educator in understanding my own professional practice. The M.Ed. Program has profoundly influenced my views and understanding of education in general and educational change in particular. Change involves, among other things, changing the beliefs of individuals. Indeed, I may be my own case study on how the beliefs on education may be changed.

Why did I decide to do my M.Ed. Program and why abroad? Upon the completion of the undergraduate program in Kosova, my home country, I realized for the first time that the local educational system was not equipping its graduates with the necessary skills to move into the labor market. I realized that these skills, to name a few, are critical, creative and caring thinking, problem solving and ability to think across disciplinary borders. In spite of the hard work, studies and research that was required for completing my undergraduate program, it was exactly this experience that made me understand that Kosova's educational system needs a change, a change that nurtures the development of an educational system that fits the students it serves rather than continuing the tradition of students adapting to the educational system in place. At that time, I did not have a clear understanding of what kind of change was needed, or what could be done to bring it about.

One of the biggest benefits of doing a Master's Program, in a student oriented and student centered educational system, is the opportunity to reflect and use what was learned as well as critically evaluate whether what one learns is applicable to field of study and to the context. The opportunity to do this M.Ed. Program paved the way for me

to inquire further into what specific changes are needed in the local context in Kosova. The things that I had happened to study and hear about before, such as quality teaching, teacher – student relationships, student centered teaching, problem based learning etc., now were being experienced in reality during my studies. It definitely makes a difference when things are experienced as compared to being exposed to theory alone.

The ‘Capstone’ is defined as the upper most stone in a structure (Guralnik *et al*, 1982), and this Capstone paper is a metaphor and analogy for me. It has enabled me to finally ‘place this stone’ and thus look ahead and find ways to contribute to the educational system I belong to - a system that after the end of conflict in 1999 has been undergoing a large-scale reform. However, understanding educational change is certainly a basic prerequisite to this contribution, since the first step is to know what changes are exactly needed in the system given the particularities of local context and circumstances. The purpose of this paper is to consider the educational change in the Kosova’s educational system that has been shifting from the traditional rote memorization-based system to a modern and learner centered system. This paper is a reflection on how the M.Ed. Program has helped me understand the educational change, will identify the major elements, factors and issues in the educational change as well as will make use of relevant literature covered during the program highlighting the major components in a change and applying it to the Kosovar context. Most of these issues are closely interrelated and are about changing the individuals, their beliefs, and their philosophy on education. This, I believe, is a foundational point for the change that needs to take place.

Philosophy of Education and Foundations of Modern Education

Our beliefs about schooling, education, and teaching are formed by the experiences we have and by what our values are. The experience in the M.Ed. Program

has significantly influenced my beliefs about what education is for and what schools are supposed to do for students and society. The course 'Foundations of Modern Educational Theory and Practice' outlined the framework for me to clearly understand this issue and reflect on my beliefs and values. The course emphasized humanism, naturalism, critical pedagogy, critical thinking to name a few, as being the basic foundations of modern educational theory and practice. My challenge was to explore ideas and examine how each of them relates to the educational practice? Each component is significant in its own way.

The course emphasized that humanism is a doctrine, attitude or way of life that is centered on human interests or values and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason. The interesting insights about classical humanism are that humans should be respected equally and the emphasis is on humans, emphasizing the role of reason in discovering the truth. Developing rational thinking among students and focusing on the core curriculum are the major insights of the humanism. The criticism I have regarding the influence of the classical humanism on education is that it is the arts, musical and drama education that should be given some attention too. I believe that the arts is also important for the overall education of children and their self-worth, confidence, moral development etc. Reason divorced from artistic expression runs the risk of becoming overly mechanical.

During the course discussions, it was emphasized that 'naturalism' describes an approach centered on the nature of the child. Consequently, curriculum, learning theories, assessment strategies, classroom management models, must all be grounded in a thorough naturalistic inquiry into the nature of the child at every stage of his or her development. The issue with this approach is as to whether we can focus on the nature of

the child and still teach values and morals. What about the ethics? An important historical figure of naturalism is Jen Jacques Rousseau. In his early writing, Rousseau contended that man is essentially good, a "noble savage" when in the "state of nature" (the state of all the other animals, and the condition man was in before the creation of civilization and society), and that good people are made unhappy and are corrupted by their experiences in society. Rousseau thought that "everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man", (Gutek, 2004, p. 60).

Critical pedagogy is another foundation of modern educational theory and practice. The term 'critical pedagogy' has traditionally referred to educational theory and teaching and learning practices that are designed to raise the learners' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions. As such critical educators attempt to disrupt the effects of the oppressive regimes of power both in the classroom and in society. Critical pedagogy is particularly concerned with reconfiguring the traditional student-teacher relationships where the teacher is the active agent, the one who knows (everything!), and the students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. This is similar to Paulo Freire's 'banking concept of education', where the educator makes the 'deposits' in the 'educatee' - the passive recipient.

Another important philosophy in the modern educational theory and practice, as emphasized by the respective course, is teaching critical thinking. Critical thinking is a reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do (Normanbhoy, 1997). It helps the individuals to gather, interpret and evaluate the information in order to come to a conclusion or a decision. Critical thinking, in modern

educational theory, is one of the most significant features. It is an important and vital topic in modern education (Schafersman, 1991).

Most educational institutions expect their own staff members to be able to teach students critical thinking skills. “In every course, especially in content of subjects, students should be taught to think logically, analyze and compare, question and evaluate” (Spache and Spache, 1986, as quoted in Kathryn, 1990). It is very important that teaching critical thinking skills is mainstreamed across the curriculum because every teacher should work on enhancing student critical thinking skills and every course should be designed in a way that will offer opportunities for students to enhance critical thinking apart from learning other knowledge and developing other skills such as listening, reading, writing etc. MacKnight (2000) suggests that critical thinking affects all forms of communication – speaking, reading, and writing – and as such can be practiced daily in interaction (p. 1). He further emphasizes that critical thinking is not a separate activity from problem solving, inquiry and collaborative learning (p. 1). Kathryn (1990) quotes Spache and Spache saying that skills taught in isolation do little more than prepare students for tests of isolated skills.

Therefore, no matter what subject we teach and no matter what activities and techniques we use we should always keep in mind that it is the right moment to think about how to develop the higher order thinking skills of students, such as critical thinking. Case (2005) emphasizes the idea of a curriculum embedded approach to teaching critical thinking. Case (2005) states that “we dispute the view that critical thinking is a generic set of skills or processes to be developed independent of content and context. Nor do we believe that critical thinking can adequately be addressed as an add-on to the curriculum” (p. 48). This shows that critical thinking can be taught at every

moment, in every course, in every activity and assignment. This may mean more work for teachers and perhaps harder work too. “It appears to be much easier to teach students to memorize facts and then assess them with multiple choice tests” (Kathryn, p. 1).

So, it all depends on what we as educators, school administrators, policy makers, students and parents value and what our beliefs about schooling and education are. It is very important how these components of the philosophy of education are embodied in the vision, mission, and goals of each educational organization, as well as in the policies of the decision makers. The M.Ed. Program has made me reflect on my values and beliefs about education and has thus enriched them as a result of the experience in the program and the way the program was delivered. This made me consider the values I had brought from my country – lecturing and information processing and having students sit, with little or no collaboration, in groups - and enrich these values with other elements like developing students’ critical thinking skills and other skills to prepare them to live in the increasingly democratic world. It is all a matter of whether we want our students to only be the recipient of the information that teachers serve, this being a very traditional approach, or we want our students to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills, which is a fundamental characteristic of the progressive education movement.

Progressive education

Progressive education is one of the most frequently addressed phenomena in the field of education. The courses in the M.Ed. Program have, all in some way, touched upon the elements of the progressive education. Or, each course itself has demonstrated and applied the elements of progressive education. Some of the key characteristics of the progressive education are learning by doing, project work and problem solving (Gutek, 2005). Dewey was a strong believer in the progressive education. He believed subject

matter should include student interests (Guttek, 2001). This would be crucial to an educational system that is moving away from the traditional educational system, where students were not the focus. Progressive education would be the opposite of a system that sets standards for students to achieve rather than having students develop their existing intellectual skills. Progressive education advocates the idea that students learn through a guided discovery, and this has been clearly demonstrated by the M.Ed. Program.

Dewey strongly supported the concept of the experiential learning (learning by doing), but he also was critical of a completely “free student driven” education as he thought students did not know how to use the learning experience for maximum benefit (Neill, 2005). Dewey’s concept of ‘learning by doing’ has a significant importance for the educational context undergoing reforms. This would mean that schools need to pay more attention to the experiential learning and trying things out in the classroom rather than students being passive listeners and waiting for the teacher to serve them the ready-made information. This is very important for a transmission oriented educational system, which is striving towards joining the rest of the world in transforming the schools and education.

“Dewey rejected the compartmentalized curriculum and the emphasis on the recitation that he had experienced in the elementary school in favour of the experience-based active learning” (Guttek, 2005, p. 338). It is the experience-based learning and being open to new ideas that can create a good basis for educational change. This approach includes sharing of ideas about best practices from other countries. The inquiry and reform cannot be limited to national boundaries (Rohrs & Lenhart, 1995). The M.Ed. Program has emphasized some of these aspects and has provided good examples on how this could be implemented - being open to new ideas and sharing of ideas within the class

and the university, and in the broader context, sharing the ideas on the good practices with the neighboring countries and beyond. Therefore a curriculum that allows the application of these modern ideas, including the experience-based learning as one of the elements of the progressive education, is a precondition to this.

Curriculum

One of the major elements of educational change is curriculum development and review. Curriculum reform is an ongoing process that is aimed at adapting to global developments as well as the developments in the respective society and meeting the needs of that particular society. Therefore, curriculum reform is one of the key elements in the overall reform agenda of a system. There are three significant dimensions in any educational change: resources, methodologies and beliefs (Fullan 1982 as cited by Miller & Seller, 1990, p. 238). They argue that, out of these, it is the beliefs that are most difficult to change because they are the hardest to address during the implementation of the change (p. 238). This is very true for the Kosova's context as well, and usually this results with the resistance of people to make any change, including curriculum change.

When talking about a curriculum change one has to take into consideration the path that has to be followed, which is called *curriculum cycle*. The curriculum cycle involves the following components: orientation, development, implementation and evaluation (Miller & Seller, p. 4). The cycle can start anywhere, however, the most important component is that the *orientation* is recognized as a part of the cycle by curriculum designers and policy makers, yet unfortunately it is left out in many cases. Similarly, the curriculum cycle in Kosova has followed this model, but unfortunately it, too, has to some extent ignored the importance of the curriculum orientation.

Miller and Seller (1990) state that the components of the implementation are: study of the program; identification of resources; role definition; professional development; timelines; communications system; monitoring the implementation. Some educational systems, like the one in Kosova, consider that the implementation of a new curriculum is merely submitting the written curricula to the teachers, without offering the professional development opportunities for teachers as a support to implement the new curriculum. This is the first mistake in the implementation, but the biggest in the entire curriculum cycle as that is where the challenges are: the curriculum can be of a high quality, but if teachers do not have the skills to implement it properly then whole process was not worth while. If teachers are used to lecturing, memorization, and information processing as their only teaching methodology they will definitely have difficulties in implementing a curriculum that has undergone a change in its orientation.

Curriculum orientations

When talking about curriculum, and curriculum cycle, the M.Ed. Program has very well clarified that everything depends on what our orientation to the curriculum is. More specifically, it is the orientation of the policy makers and curriculum designers that matters. Three orientations have been recognized by the literature: transmission, transaction and transformation (Miller & Seller, 1990). Each of these orientations is important in its own way and they should be given the attention they deserve individually.

In the transmission oriented curriculum, the function of education is to transmit facts, skills, and values to students (p. 5). This would mean that there would be little to no interaction between the teacher and the student and the traditional approach to teaching is what we would see happening in the classroom. Thus, the focus is on textbook learning

and the acquisition of some basic skills, and certain cultural values and mores that are important to function in society. (p. 6). Students are passive recipients of the information and they process the information that the “know-it-all” teachers serve to them. This is how I would describe the educational system in Kosova until recently, even though there are changes currently going on in this area as well. This orientation underestimates the development of students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The transaction orientation differs from the transmission orientation in terms of student involvement in the educational process. Students’ capabilities are recognized and they are expected to contribute actively to the classroom learning. In the transaction oriented curriculum, “education is viewed as a dialogue between the student and the curriculum in which the student reconstructs the knowledge through the dialogue process” (p. 6). Here, we see more interaction between the student and the teacher (or curriculum) during the teaching process in the classroom. In this context, the problem solving strategies, project based work etc. will prevail in the classroom. John Dewey’s progressive education philosophy would fit into this framework very well.

Whereas, the transformation oriented curriculum focuses on the social change and the spiritual dimensions of the students. In the transformation position, the curriculum and the student are seen to interpenetrate each other in a holistic manner (Miller & Seller, p. 8). This orientation advocates for a type of education that allows the inner nature of the student to unfold and make connection with the outer world. This orientation pays attention to the moral, psychological and social development of the students, and it considers the student as a whole child rather than as an individual with specific learning needs (p. 9).

Regardless of what kind of curriculum the policy makers mandate and offer to teachers, it is always the teachers who play the key role in the successful implementation of the curriculum. If the orientation of the new curriculum clashes with the orientations of the teachers, resistance is inevitable (p. 285). Fullan (1993) warns about resistance being a normal reaction to change, however, it is important that policy makers are aware of this resistance and that this resistance is addressed appropriately and in due time.

Perhaps, these are the reasons why some educational systems do not make big changes at once in the orientation when doing curriculum redevelopment. They would rather introduce these changes slowly and let the change evolve. This is also the case in the educational context in which I work in, where the process of the curriculum reform is underway. The old curriculum has been largely transmission oriented and has provided conditions for teachers lecturing and students being passive recipients of the information and facts. It is important that the policy makers and curriculum designers in Kosovo have recognized the fact that there is a need for change in the orientation. Thus, the new curriculum is a mixture of a transmission and transaction oriented curriculum. The old curriculum did not seem to focus on developing students' necessary critical thinking and problem solving skills. The expectations for students in school was to memorize the information and then to be able to reproduce it for testing purposes. With some exceptions, of course, this is the bitter reality, which is slowly changing.

However, the new curriculum means that memorizing the information is no longer the only thing that our students do. If we look at the English Language and Literature Grade 6 curriculum, the changes in curriculum orientation are easily noticed. The objectives of the grade 6 English curriculum are:

Develop language skills, gain self-confidence in communication, use language skills communicatively, understand the use of the sound system of English, understand vocabulary related to familiar topics, recognize basic similarities and differences between English and mother tongue, be able to deal with numbers, dates, use technical equipment (tape recorder etc.), recognize and select information, draw conclusions, recognize the importance of culture in their education, understand the customs of their country and compare them with the other countries.

These objectives are evidence for the change in curriculum orientation in Kosova - not all objectives are transmission oriented, anymore. These objectives aim at developing students' critical thinking and problem solving skills and encourage their inquiry and research within the academic discipline. However, as we can see, there is still room for changes towards a more transformational oriented curriculum that would provide the conditions for student and societal transformation and reconstruction, which Kosova is striving towards.

Technology Integration and Student Achievement

An important development in the modern educational systems is integrating technology into education, more specifically in classroom instruction. Technology has been proven to have an impact on the student learning and it is closely related to leadership. I used to consider technology and leadership as two loosely connected components or two totally separate components. The course 'Technology and Leadership' has been a useful tool to prove that technology and leadership are very much interrelated and leadership plays a crucial role in successful technology integration. Further more, it summarized the main issues about leadership and technology and also

outlines some of the issues that were raised for me to follow in my professional practice and professional development throughout my career in future.

It is known that many educational systems are working on integrating technology into all areas of the educational process. Research says that technology has a huge impact on student achievement and enhances student learning, but, one important aspect is whether or not technology is appropriately used or, in the worst case, if it is used at all. Technology integration does indeed hold a remarkable promise for changing the quality of teaching and learning. (Early, 2002). Technology should be focused on the mission of improving education for all students and the aim is not to provide technology, instructional technology more specifically, but it is how we use technology for enhancing student achievement. (Early, 2002).

Some of the major impacts of technology are:

Students, especially those with few advantages in life, learn basic skills better and faster if they have a chance to practice those skills using technology; technology engages students and as a result they spend more time on basic learning tasks than students using traditional approach; technology offers educators a way to individualize curriculum and customise it to the individual student needs; technology decreases absenteeism, lowers drop out rates, motivates more students to continue to college, students who use technology develop self-esteem (Apple Computer Inc., 2002, p. 4)

However, one should ask whether these improvements come ultimately as a result of putting computers in the classroom? Certainly not! A technology oriented change requires more than just providing the modern technology for teachers and students. It requires strong supportive leadership, leadership that understands the change,

is capable of managing it and provides the necessary support to the staff during its implementation.

However, technology integration also brings challenges to the system. The major challenge is training teachers to implement technology successfully, that is, using technology to promote student learning. With schools increasingly investing in technologies for the classroom, there has been a growing realization that these expensive technologies will never be used to their fullest unless teachers are provided professional development to guide them in their use (Grant, 2004, p. 1). Grant (2004) suggests formal (workshops and seminars) and informal (visits, networks, observations, mentoring etc) professional development models for educators who are to implement a new technology in their teaching. The administrators and leaders are not at all excluded.

A particularly important issue that requires more attention is the role of leadership in implementing a technology oriented change. Fullan (2001) emphasizes the five dimensions of leadership that are crucial to making a positive change: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, coherence making. Introducing technology is a change too, a very complex change since it affects the curriculum too, and it requires skills development from teachers. Thus, all these five dimensions are closely linked with the introduction of technology. Moral purpose is perhaps one of the most important dimensions: leaders, and teachers, need to be committed to making a positive change; leaders need to be committed to supporting teachers throughout the change process, and they need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. In others words, they need to be supportive and create a conducive environment for technology integration and implementation of the instructional technology.

Fullan (2001) elaborates six leadership styles: coercive (do what I tell you), authoritative (come with me), affiliative (people come first), democratic (what do you think?), pacesetter (do as I do, now), and coaching (try this) (p. 35). Not all these styles would be recommended for successful change and subsequently successful technology integration. I do not think the coercive style of leadership would contribute much to the implementation of change, including technology integration as a change. It is also important that the leaders create knowledge sharing opportunities within the organization. What worked for one teacher while introducing a technology in the class may also work for other teachers and there may be lessons learned that can be applied to other contexts. Facilitative leadership qualities prove to be more effective in the implementation of a new program or innovative instructional practice that involves technology (Hughes and Zachariah, 2001). Therefore, change requires strong positive leadership that is available for teachers at any time. This also goes for introducing technology into the classroom.

Most organizations invest heavily in technology and possibly in training, but hardly at all in knowledge sharing (Fullan, 2001, p. 79). The knowledge sharing culture cannot be created very easily, not very quickly either. It all depends on what the organizational culture is like. Leaders should make sure that there are peer networks, visitations and frequent workshops where colleagues get together to share knowledge about technology integration in this particular change, or any change in general. There should be investments in changing the culture rather than waiting for the culture to change (Fullan, 2001, p. 85). This shows the importance of having the leaders and administrators focusing on changing the organizational culture, because they are the key people and in the position to do this. Knowledge management brings together three core organizational resources – people, processes and technologies – in order to enable

organizations to use and share information more effectively (Petrides & Nodine, 2003, p.10). Research states that teachers need considerable support to implement a change and this support can easily be secured through knowledge sharing opportunities. Actually, it is even better when there are systems in place to enable knowledge sharing and consequently relationship building.

As the Master's course 'Technology and Leadership' has alluded to, adequate planning is absolutely necessary for successful technology integration. This course has provided enough ideas for planning successful technology oriented change, has emphasized the need for professional development for teachers. Leaders and managers are the ones that should provide these professional development opportunities for those who are to implement the particular technology. For the educational contexts in which technology is new, it is particularly important to pay attention to knowledge creation and sharing and creating networks of teachers who are attempting to introduce the change (Fullan, 2001). Above all, responsibility of leaders, besides supporting, is to be role models for teachers who are attempting to make the change happen. Thus, both the staff who implement the technology oriented change and the leaders have a moral purpose of maximizing student learning. Everything can be achieved as long as all the stakeholders, making the change, keep in mind that they want to "make a difference in the lives of students" (Fullan, 2001, p. 13). That is what really matters in the end.

The 'Technology and Leadership' course, the M.Ed. Program itself, the on-line format of courses and the use of technology in every single course, have helped me understand the role of technology in education, especially in teaching. The educational context in Kosova has not made any substantive step in meaningful technology integration and has to first of all understand what the benefits of integrating technology in

the classroom are. Every educational context has computers at disposal, however, technology integration does not necessarily mean having computers available only. Computers and other technology have to be incorporated into the curriculum through a substantive and comprehensive planning process. In other words, technology should not be brought to schools only so that students will know how to use them, but more importantly, technology should be utilized and integrated in a way that it best supports and increases student academic achievement. It is only a matter of how the educators use the technology provided by the administrators and mandated by policy makers.

However, it is not only technology that educators need. They also need training on how to best implement and utilize this technology. And, as it may be the case in many parts of the worlds, the decision largely depends on the administrators and Ministries of Education. For example, in the educational system of Kosova, every school and university as well has computers and some of other basic technologies available, but there is no systematic approach to integrating this technology in the classroom. This is because, first of all, the curriculum designers have not had this phenomenon in mind during curriculum development. Also, most of the teachers consider computers, and other technology, only as tools every individual needs in life rather than as a tool to facilitate their teaching and student learning. We cannot speak about a meaningful and substantive integration of technology until practitioners are aware of this and accept this idea. The issue is that in some countries like Kosova, professional development for educators is scarce even for general issues in teaching, methodologies, and techniques. Thus, the professional development for specific issues like technology integration would unjustly be considered irrelevant and not a priority.

The rapid changes and developments in technology globally have made technology a necessary and indispensable equipment for the school setting. Teaching approaches such as problem-based learning and other methodologies rooted in the constructivism create an environment conducive for successful technology integration into the culture of the specific educational organization. When talking about integrating technology in the classroom it is crucial to bear in mind that integration should be done in every single aspect: technology should be planned and incorporated in the curriculum – the instructional methodologies should allow space for instructional technology and it should be in the agenda of the professional development of all the teachers and administrators.

Role of Professional Development in Educational Change

Another issue that plays a crucial role in educational change is professional development for practitioners in the field of education at all levels. Why is professional development important in education in general and in educational change in particular? Every classroom is confronted with issues of diversity: race, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, sexuality, disabilities, age, region, and nationality (Butler, 2002). Firstly, this implies that we, as educators, must be sensitive to the needs of diverse learners and plan (and implement) inclusive learning and teaching strategies. Secondly, educators will need to be familiar with the developments and innovations in the modern pedagogy and global developments. In other words, they need to be able to adapt to the changing needs of the people they are serving (students and society in general), and align their teaching with the societal needs and labor market demands. The educators world-wide are thus asked to engage in what is called a ‘continuous professional development and learning’,

for the benefit of the students they serve. However, this depends a lot on their intrinsic motivation for the job they do.

Teaching, like parenting and writing are not an objective practice but a lived dimension of ourselves (Dewey, 1934). Thus, it is very much dependant on how the educators feel about the professional practice, how much they are committed to making a change in the lives of the people they are working with, and how much they are able and willing to change themselves. In order to accomplish this, professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of the teachers is essential. There is a great debate going on about whether professional development opportunities should be mandated or perhaps teachers will need to decide what kind of professional development they need most, and policy makers and managers will need to play their role here in releasing teachers from duty to attend professional development. It is also important that all the members of the organization are offered these opportunities equally, and these opportunities are adapted to the needs of teachers. We cannot deny that teachers should have a say in deciding what kind of professional development is needed, but this has to be in line with the school, district and country professional development policy. Some educational systems like the one in Kosova lack these kind of policies, and there is lack of awareness about the importance of such policies.

It is thus inevitable that all educators should engage in the professional development because “changes in classroom practice invariably require additional knowledge and skills on the part of teachers” (Leithwood *et al.*, p. 149). This is as true as the fact that “almost all school reform and restructuring initiatives assume the need for significant changes in the classroom practice” (p. 149). Research emphasizes a necessity for continuous professional development of all the educators in the system if it is

undergoing an educational change or school restructuring – a professional developed closely linked and guided by research that educators do in their field to connect the theory in the professional development session and practice in their setting.

Action Research and continuing professional development

The Master's course 'Understanding Professional Development and Professional Practice' has been a valuable tool in helping me understand my personal professional practice and in look ahead to my journey in professional development and areas of growth. It very clearly elaborated the connection between research and professional practice and professional development, which for me, before, were either loosely connected or not connected at all. It is widely recognized that research and education development are closely connected and interdependent. Mertler and Charles (2005) state that research is a scientific method of finding answers to problems and questions through systematic and patient investigation (p. 6). They recognize the following types of research: ethnographic research, action research, evaluation research, descriptive research, historical research, correlational research, experimental research, quasi-experimental and causal-comparative research. Among these, action research is the type of research that mostly contributes directly to the educational setting, and more specifically to classroom setting. It is conducted by teachers, administrators and other on-site educators to resolve problems at the local level. Action research is a methodological technique that truly connects theory and practice (Mertler & Charles, p. 247).

The course 'Understanding Professional Development and Professional Practice' has been very valuable in helping me understand and develop my own action research and professional development growth plan. I understood very well that the latter would be achieved through application of the former. This very clearly raised the importance of

the research, and particularly action research, in the continuing professional development. Action Research is used for testing a new product, whether something works or not in our context. For example, a school director can test whether one discipline policy will improve student attendance; or an ESL teacher can see whether one particular teaching methodology will increase student involvement and participation in the class.

The course 'Introduction to Educational Research' has been useful in confirming the importance of research in education. Research plays a significant role in the educational change. Decisions made by teachers, school directors and policy makers need to be informed decisions and grounded on the relevant research done in that field by the researchers or by themselves through action research and other types of research. Educators must make a close link between research and their professional development. In other words, educators will need to, at least, conduct action research as part of their everyday work, and further more, their work needs to be guided by research results. Our place of work, that is, our classroom, our school etc. is too important for us and for the society to leave the research, this type of research in particular, to the others, experts included. We are the ones who can best improve our own work and context.

Thus, research is very important for the development of education and changing the educational practice. However, the challenge is whether the research results are seriously taken into consideration by educators, and those whose job is to ensure the application of research results. They have a challenging task. Warrican (2006) states that "external change agents are faced with the challenge of getting educators to adopt what research finds to be good practice, and often the reluctance by educators to modify their practice is attributed to the way in which the innovation is introduced to them" (p. 1). The resistance has to be challenged until people are convinced about the real solution to the

problem. However, the solution to real-life problems is not necessarily instant or short-term, and action research provides an avenue for pursuing a problem until an acceptable solution is identified or all resources have been expended (Warrican, 2006, p. 2). Action research, thus, is a learning process to enhance the capacities of the individuals and the organization. It is an ongoing process and the end result is the solution to the issue or problem with which we are dealing. No educational system can make substantial changes and improve the services unless research is used and its results are implemented at all the levels of the system. All educators need to be involved in research to improve their own practice and the performance of the organization. But, it is absolutely necessary that they have the time to first reflect on their practice, and then use action research to improve it.

Reflection and reflective practice

Educators are faced with the complexities of the day-to-day life at work and they tend to be the most adequate people to solve those problems themselves. In order to do this, they need to have time to reflect on their work. Fullan (1993) argues that teachers must combine inner and outer world learning emphasizing the importance of periods of solitude which provides space for reflection. “Reflective thought is the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and further conclusion to which it tends” (Dewey as cited by Van Gyn, 1996, p. 105). Schon (1983) has written extensively on the concept of reflection in education. He emphasizes reflection for action, reflection in action and reflection on action as the three types of reflection.

Reflection for action is the thinking that we do before we start the action, we plan how we are going to complete an activity. While, reflection in action is the thinking that we do while we are doing the activity, and we think back about what is going well and

what is not going well in order to find ways to improve it as we go. On the other hand, reflection on action is the thinking that we do after the activity is completed, and we think back over the experience and activity and see what went well and what did not. Then, we look for ways to make the practice better next time. I realized that I had ignored the importance of reflection as a learning tool to make the professional practice better. Providing time for educators to reflect on their practice, on the literature they read and on the professional development they attend, is a crucial step towards improving the educators' and organizational performance. To some extent, it is the job of the administrators and leaders to make sure the educators have this time at disposal.

Educational Leadership and Change Process

Perhaps it has become a cliché to say that we are living in an age of information, knowledge society and a knowledge economy, but it is true that these issues have an impact on developments in education and thus raise the needs for continuous educational reform and school restructuring. One of the major aspects, but not limited to, of the educational change is strong leadership in educational organizations. Like any other change, be it in business or any other system, educational change needs good leadership, not only effective management to complete the educational change. Thus, efficient management and strong leadership are a precondition for a change in the educational organizations.

Before starting my Master's Project, I could not clearly make the distinction between leadership and management. To me, both of them had the same or very similar meaning. Leadership is inspiring and mobilizing the others towards achieving a desired goal. This means that you do not necessarily have to be a manager in order to become a leader. Leadership can occur at all levels of management, and not necessarily by the

senior management only. This means that all members of the organization can be in a position to offer leadership to the members of the organization. This is also known as distributed leadership, or even as teacher leadership.

The course 'Leadership in Educational Organizations' has brought to my attention two types of changes. Leithwood *et al* (1999) describe that the instructional leadership "focuses attention on what school researchers refer to as 'first order' changes" (p. 25). What are these changes and are they important in the school restructuring? Leithwood *et al.* (1999) suggest that these changes are the necessary elements of any reform strategy likely to have pay-offs for students (p. 25). They further explain that "forms of instruction designed to teach for understanding are examples of first order changes" (p. 25).

What are the second order changes about then? Leithwood *et al* (1999) describe that the second order changes "require a form of leadership that is sensitive to organization building: developing shared vision, creating productive work cultures, distributing leadership to others etc" (p. 25). The second order changes do not seem to be appropriate for an instructional leadership styles. It is clear that the transformational leadership is the leadership style that can/should be applied in here. "Transformational forms of leadership are especially attuned for the influence of, for example, organizational structure and culture" (Leithwood *et al*, 1999, p. 25).

Thus, we are talking about the changes in the classroom, as the first order changes, and the changes in the culture of the organization and structures, as the second order changes. However, both of these types of changes are very much connected and dependant on each other. If we want to change the teaching in the classroom, we perhaps would need to work on changing the culture of the organization. It is evident that both the first and second order changes are significant and needed/required for educational reform.

However, Leithwood *et al.* (1999) urge that the exclusive focus on the first order changes is an explanation for the failure of change initiatives (p.25). Yes, the first order changes are necessary in a reform/restructuring initiative but “attention to the second order changes is essential to the survival of the first order changes” (p.25).

One other aspect that I have observed in Kosova’s educational context is that individual teachers are willing to make changes in their classroom, however, there is a large need for changing the school and university culture as well, and this emphasizes the necessity of applying the transformational leadership in Kosova’s context. Fullan (1993) suggests that “You cannot mandate what matters” relating to the necessity of giving people the chance to be part of what is good for the school. “Most change efforts fail when leaders take an innovation that has worked well in one area of the organization and attempt to roll it out to the entire organization” (Wheatley, M., 2000, p. 342). This shows that what works in one area may not work in the other, and that the characteristics of the respective issue, context need to be taken into consideration.

Leadership styles

“For better or worse, change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key” (Fullan, 2001, p. 1). This is a statement that all players in the education system should bear in mind, particularly the educational leaders and managers. Leaders of today require much more than just managing people, managing the resources their organization has, and finding a way to spend those resources. Senge (1990) states that the new leaders of today are “designers, stewards, and teachers” (p. 340). Thus, leaders are those who work with people in order to help them be more effective and efficient in achieving the goals of the organization they are working with. They should be

influencing the people they are working with to enhance their skills and contribute to making their organization better than it is.

There are different types of leadership that literature recognizes. Leithwood *et al* (1999) talk about Instructional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Moral Leadership, Participative Leadership, Managerial Leadership, and Contingent Leadership. The participative leadership style is also referred to in the literature as shared or teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is not only giving teachers the possibility of decision making and giving them power. It is a mistake to think that teacher leadership is about application of bottom-up power (Giddens, 1984 as cited by Frost and Durrant, 2003, p. 174). It rather emphasizes the collegial dimension, which implies responsibility, mutual accountability and collaboration (p. 174). So, it is about having teachers involved beyond the instruction in the classroom - in other issues of organizational change and reform. Fullan (2001) refers to this type of leadership as democratic leadership (p. 35).

Every teacher can take a leadership role in their own school by contributing to the collective decision making. When talking about teacher leadership we are talking about formal and informal teacher leadership. Teachers can be given a formal leadership role, for example, in running a committee in the school, delivering a workshop for the colleagues etc. However, the informal teacher leadership is when teachers use their skills and knowledge to influence their own peers, colleagues in the school in order to help them develop capacities, solve a problem and implement a change in their practice. In order to do this, the organization must have the information sharing deeply embodied into its own culture. Further more, organizations need systems that ensure this exchange of experiences and information sharing.

Instructional leadership is focusing on the improvement of the instruction in the classroom. The attention of the leaders focuses on the behavior of the teachers as they engage in the activities directly affecting the growth of students (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999, p. 8). It is quite evident that all educational organizations are aiming at improving the quality of the education they offer to their student customers. It is understandable that increasing the quality of education requires focus on organizational, policies, structures etc., however focusing on classroom instruction is a direct step towards improving the student achievement.

Transformational leadership style is considered to be a very efficient way of transforming organizations. It is in a way distributing leadership to the other members of the organization. Leithwood *et al.* (1999) state that “this form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of the organization members” (p. 9). It is that type of leadership that inspires the others and is a source of power for them and provides intellectual stimulation of those who are led to contribute to the change or restructuring effort. These are only several types of leadership styles that the literature recognizes but it is crucial for every type of leader to have a vision for their organization apart from transcribing to one or more of these types.

Importance of vision

Every educational organization has a written vision and mission statement. Some organizations do this in a more comprehensive and formal way, while others do it because of policy requirements. Vision building is a process that at first glance seems to be a formal procedure that all organizations have to go through, however, in itself is very valuable to the process. Senge (1990) maintains that a vision proceeds success and serves as the overall concept and the compelling force of the organization. A vision

encompasses the core values of the organization and what the organization will look like and strive towards achieving.

In order to have the vision succeed, organizational leaders need to use a collegial vision-building model. It means that leaders need to involve all the members of the organization in vision building. If we are thinking about a vision as a vision that embodies the values of the organization, then this vision will need to reflect the values of all the members of that organization. It is so because the organization will be successful only as long as the members of the organization are committed to the vision of the organization. They cannot be committed to the vision if they have not been involved in developing it. The vision has to reflect their values as well. Therefore, a widely shared and agreed upon vision, and the resulting goals, are crucial to the success of the organization. I think that Kosova's educational organization has failed in paying the necessary attention to the vision and the vision building processes. In other words, there is no systems in place that ensure the vision building by involving all members and all stakeholders of the organization. Things will develop based on the vision, and when there is not one in place nothing can direct the process in the right direction.

Conclusion

The knowledge and experience that I have gained in the M.Ed. Program will serve as a foundation to understanding educational systems, and has grounded the basis for my understanding of the educational change. I see that the educational system I work in needs to go through a change process. Given the importance and breadth of the change process, this program has managed to only introduce me to the main aspects of educational change. Thus, it has paved the way for me to develop a personal professional development agenda for myself and continue the process of inquiry into educational

change through studies and, more importantly, research as a key tool for individual professional development and learning, and further more, connect the theory learned in the studies with my own professional practice.

Educational change is a comprehensive and a complex process that educational institutions will need to go through at some stage. The process of educational change is about improving the overall capacity of the organization to better serve its vision and deliver quality services to the students in schools and universities since they are key players in the educational system. As educators and as a society, we in Kosova want members of our society to be informed, skilled, wise, moral and ethical. We also have a deep-seated belief that the schools can inculcate these values. Like teachers, the public looks to the curriculum, particularly to the content and modes of teaching, as the primary source of learning that produces informed, skilled, wise, moral and ethical members of society. It is thus important that we do not consider the student as an individual who has learning needs only and has come to us for 'treatment'. We should consider students as human beings, we should consider a student as a whole child or person with his/her moral, and psychological needs too. Kosova's educational organizations should certainly not treat their students differently than this.

Our schools need to be reformed to empower and liberate, as well as train and prepare, people who will live and work in the post modern world. It is very much the case in the educational system where I work. The developments in the last two decades have made it difficult for the educational system in Kosova, among the other aspects of life, to progress in offering quality services and quality education. It was rather a matter of survival. The system is still trying to recover and improve the delivery of services.

Thus, the policy makers in Kosova have initiated the process of reforming the school curricula and offer in-service training for teachers in schools in order to reform their teaching and move towards a learner-centered approach. Similar training has been offered to the school administrators about developing their managerial and leadership capacities in order to be able to adapt to the learner-centered philosophy that is evolving in their educational organizations. But, for large-scale reforms, like the one that Kosova's educational system has launched, there is a need for more substantive and longer training at all levels, as well as systems and a culture that nurtures the information and knowledge sharing. In other words, the concept of the continuing professional development has to be embodied into the culture of the system. A five-day training for teachers and directors is not enough to make adequate changes in the classroom. Further more, there is a need for changing people, and their beliefs about schooling and education.

This educational system needs to work on ensuring that the learner-centered approach is being implemented in both school and university classroom. In other words, the system needs to make sure that the teacher-centered approach and traditional way of lecturing as the only, or the main, teaching methodology is no longer a norm. When it is said that the educational system should be student centered it is meant that the policies, leadership, teaching, and professional development for teachers too should be tailored to the needs of the students. The aim is to provide conditions for developing students' higher order thinking skills and equip them with the skills for real life situations. Having students sit in groups is not all what change is all about. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, change in Kosova's educational system has been identified with having students sitting in groups. There should be changes in the approach, the philosophy towards

education and teaching firstly. And, secondly, a change in the actual work in the school or university classroom should occur too, meaning that teacher-student relationships should change, the nature of the assignments should be tackling higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, and not only focus on recognition and comprehension. Before doing the M.Ed. Program, my values, or because of lack of awareness, were focusing on the levels of recognition and comprehension in the education process. However, the experience in the M.Ed. Program has significantly enriched these values by orienting me towards focusing to the higher levels of thinking in education and schooling.

It is quite clear that change is about people and people are the ones that make that happen as much as systems, mechanisms, policies, resources, and infrastructure. Not very much will happen if people do not see the benefits of change, or if they refuse to change their current situation or the status quo. Thus, it is crucial that change leaders have a critical mass of change agents that support that change, and this is very important if we want to make measurable and visible changes in the organization or system, even though change is sometimes invisible, especially for the people inside it. However, changes are possible to be seen in retrospect. When I look at the changes that have happened to the Kosova's education system over the last 6 years, after the end of the conflict in 1999, it is quite clear that a huge progress has been made, even though I have not seen those changes as they were taking place, having lived and having been educated in that system myself. The M.Ed. program has helped me understand the educational changes Kosova's system has gone and is going through.

All the components of the educational change that this paper emphasizes - teaching, curriculum, technology integration, leadership and management - should be tailored to, and should have student achievement as their primary goal. Even though the

Kosova's educational system has made significant progress towards these types of reforms in education, there are still things to be done. Above all, changes introduced need to be sustainable. Change is an ongoing process and Kosova certainly has to follow this logic, because it still substantively lags behind the Western Europe and North American educational system. More experiences from an international context are needed in order to break the isolation Kosova has been facing for decades. It is great being able to be part of the change process in Kosova and bring to this process these valuable insights gained in the Master's Program!

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