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THE AFFORDANCES OF CHANGE LABORATORIES FOR IMPROVED SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT OF IN-SERVICE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Abstract:

The leitmotif underpinning this paper is the affordances of third-generation and nascent fourth-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a research lens, when analyzing complex systems such as teacher professional development. The context is a design-based research study on short learning programmes (SLP's) for science teachers. The SLP's focus on teacher professional development to contextualize science curriculum themes through the infusion of indigenous knowledge. In the SLP's inquiry learning, cooperative learning and self-directed learning are emphasized. The data showed that, although the teachers benefited from the SLP's, and were both more capable and enthusiastic to engage in transformed teaching practices after the intervention, transfer of the newly acquired knowledge and skills to the classroom did not take place in many cases. This led to the formulation of the research question underpinning this paper: how can the impact and sustainability of well-designed SLP's be ensured? Third-generation CHAT provided insights into the tensions that negatively impacted on the realization of the activity system's 'object'. The 'contradiction of control'- a phrase referring to the fact that different stakeholders had different views and impact on the object- prompted the authors to start planning the implementation of Change Laboratories, and the utilization of fourth-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. For example, many teachers indicated that the expectations of principals and parents that they should 'teach to the test' incited them to fall back on transmission-mode approaches, at the expense of the more learner-centered approaches that they were introduced to during the SLP's. Change Laboratories provide a space where all stakeholders engage in expansive learning, and attempt to come to a shared understanding of the object. By shifting the gaze to fourth generation CHAT, where all stakeholders are seen as different activity systems, researchers might gain insight in how tensions that corrode the realization of the object could be reduced. The paper concludes by providing a number of design principles for such Change Laboratories, such as that the elements of cooperative learning should be guiding the discourse.

Keywords:

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, teacher professional development, indigenous knowledge, self-directed learning, expansive learning, social interdependence theory, cooperative learning, Change Laboratories

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