

THE CONTRIBUTION OF A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE FACTORS WHEN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

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Abstract

Students' wellbeing and their educational success are playing an increasingly important role in the policies, decisions, and actions of educational administrators. Therefore, the desire to meet students' needs is the driving force behind changes in the school environment, which can lead to a degree of resistance from educational staff who do not always see the merits of the proposed actions. The aim of this development research is to equip educational administrators with a better understanding of the resistance factors, concerns, reactions, and obstacles encountered when implementing change to promote educational success and well-being in a context of diversity. This development research, carried out with partners representing five francophone schools and community organizations involved with youth in four Canadian provinces, members of the RÉVERBÈRE research network. The research resulted in a preliminary report with the aim of developing a questionnaire to determine the presence of resistance, concerns, and organizational obstacles to change. The questionnaire then developed will be used by educational administrators to demystify and better understand the presence and the types of resistance in their institutions with the objective of establishing an initial portrait of their context reality in order to better support their staff members. This tool will consider current changes with a view to well-being, inclusion, and openness to diversity. In this communication, we most of all highlight the contribution of the development research process to the co-construction of the items in the preliminary report and the accumulation of evidence firstly based on research based knowledge, and then, during activities carried out with our partners. Validating items with partners in the field adds relevance to this report and enriches it with concrete examples from their respective environments where changes are taking place. In a context of major change, we will also highlight the benefits of a partnership approach, i.e. research and development, to encourage collaboration between members of the research and practice communities with a view to better understanding the factors of resistance to change in educational context.

Keywords: *Educational change, resistance, development research, inclusion, diversity.*

1. Introduction

The education sector is constantly changing to better support the diversity of learners. Educational changes require efforts and most of all adjustments from the education community, most of all teachers and the different partners involved in childrens' diverse learning and growing needs. These changes are not always easy, and they all too often lead to resistance on the part of educational partners, for a variety of reasons that we seek to better understand. It is through a development research process that this research aspires to better understand factors related to resistance within the educational system., both school and community based, who are trying to meet the diversified needs of students. The aim of this collaborative project is also to promote a better understanding of concerns, reactions and obstacles associated with resistance. To do so, we wish, with our collaborative partners, to develop tools for administrators that would provide insight upon the anatomy of resistance within their organization. This project is part of the

RÉVERBÈRE research network*. Their mandate is to collaborate with various actors of the educational field by starting from their needs and then identify the knowledge gained from current research in order to generate a popularized, synthesized and contextualized product. The presence of resistance, concerns, reactions and obstacles encountered when implementing change for educational success and well-being in a context of diversity are part of this research development. We seek to bring to light the contribution of a collaborative approach to meeting the needs of local players.

2. Literature review

Educational change requires effort, a major investment by the educational community, and the active involvement of teachers (Lomba-Portela et al., 2022). The current context of social diversity calls for a review of past practices (Shields, 2013). Since change is an integral part of today's reality, schools must prepare learners to live in a changing society (Duclos, 2015). Change means the presence of resistance in the environment. According to Rousseau (2012), resistance to change can be defined as the fear of the unknown, losing power and of losing gains. It also involves the lack of relevant information, the real or perceived uselessness of change, the lack of resources and poor timing of the proposed change. For Collette (2021), certain obstacles can hinder the implementation of change like inadequate staff training, a state of comfort or inertia with established practices, or traditions and practices deeply rooted within the organization. Although there are several levers for improving the implementation of change, as identified by Collette (2021), it is essential to be aware of the resistance, concerns, reactions and obstacles encountered in the organization. Through his research, Shwering (2003) proposes to demystify the forces likely to enhance the change process or hinder the desired change. His attributes are largely concerned with the person's own attributes, such as cognitive style, personality, previous experience, ability to organize and plan.

3. Methodology

The research-development methodology (RD) model of Bergeron et al. (2021)[†] has been chosen for this project. This methodology is carried out with the involved partners in five distinct phases: identification of the development idea, innovative solution structuring, prototype developments, prototype improvement, and product dissemination. Since the proposed product is a questionnaire, we superimposed on RD the methodology for questionnaire development proposed by DeVellis (2012).

The first phase of RD for this project consists of identifying development ideas that support solutions for the well-being and educational success of young people in given contexts. As part of the RD process, meetings were held and a proposal was validated with partners. They requested a questionnaire that would support administrators to better understand resistance within their organization. A decision was taken to involve the partners in the various stages of the RD project, according to their respective levels of commitment. This phase identified the central themes related to the research topic. A literature review was conducted and articles selected were those representing resistance as perceived by educational managers. This phase was also associated with DeVellis's (2012) vision of identifying the object of measurement.

The second phase of RD is to structure the solutions by making decisions, while formalizing guidelines for keeping records and developing a product. A collective work of formulation and reformulation of items related to resistance was launched with our partners inspired by themes previously extracted from the scientific literature review. Two types of resistance emerged from the survey: "internal" resistance from individuals, and "external" resistance from the organization. A lengthy process of co-construction led to the identification of items highlighting the resistance experienced by administrators in the field. This phase of the RD is associated with DeVellis's research (2012) of generating a bank of items based on the knowledge gained from past research.

The third phase of RD is the development of prototypes by the team, resulting in a concrete product, in this case a preliminary report. Re-reading, categorizing and modifying enabled new structuration of the items and a first draft of the preliminary report to be drawn up. The partners were able to contribute to this stage by validating existing items. This phase of the RD is associated with determining

* RÉVERBÈRE is a "Réseau de recherche et de valorisation de la recherche pour le bien-être et la réussite" (Research and Valorization Network for Well-Being and Educational Success) The RÉVERBÈRE is a pan-Canadian French-language network of university-community collaborations that aims to develop popularized, synthesized and contextualized products based on a research-and-development approach, and shared on an open-access basis. <https://reverbereeducation.com/>

[†] Bergeron et al. (2021): Research and development at The RÉVERBÈRE, see page 7. https://reverbereeducation-1fc82.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Doc_cadre_Reverbere_2021_Interactif_final1.pdf

the format of the measurement scale and carrying out an initial evaluation of the statement bank with the help of experts from Devellis (2012).

The fourth phase of the prototype improvement in RD allows the team to test the product in partnership with education stakeholders. This phase was carried out with partners. Working in the field, they enriched certain items by bringing in real-life examples from their respective environments, while validating certain items gathered from the review. This phase of the RD is associated with that of determining the format of the measurement scale and carrying out an initial evaluation of the statement bank with the help of experts from Devellis (2012).

The fifth phase of RD remains to be developed, namely that of dissemination. This phase involves disseminating the products, i.e. making the tools available to various partners on the Réverbère website.

3.1. Participants

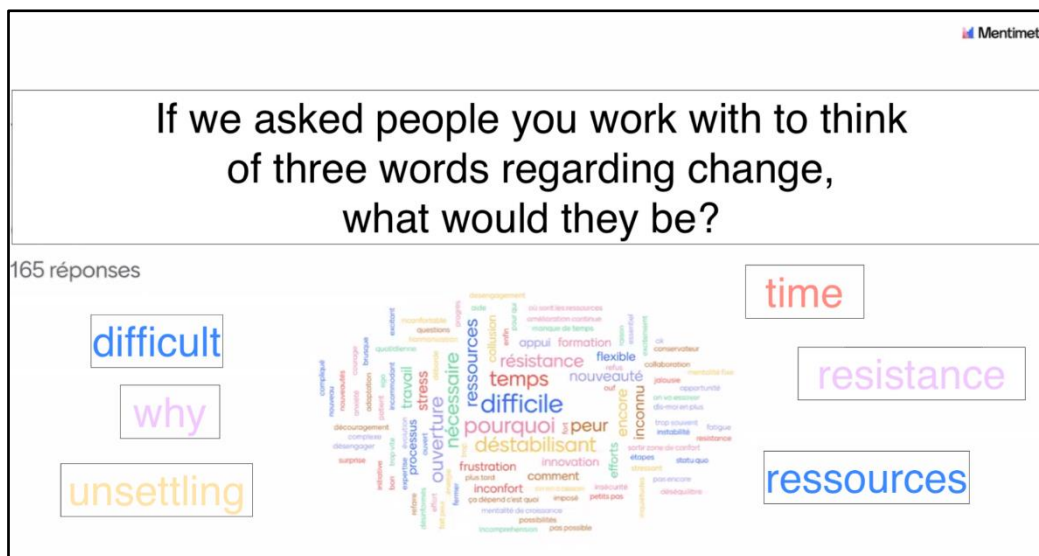
Participants came from school divisions and youth centers for teenagers with special needs in four Canadian provinces: Nova-Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, as well as members of the Réverbère research network. The partners collaborated in all phases of the product's development. A special consultation during a symposium involving an estimated 100 participants coming from various educational fields responded to a Mentimeter survey from our emerging themes on resistance. The team responsible for developing this product includes an after degree student and research assistant, and four researchers from different Canadian universities. Members of the RÉVERBÈRE organizational management team were also involved at different phases to ensure that the product's aim respected the organization's mission well-being and educational success in a context of diversity.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

RD adopts a collaborative approach, which distinguishes it from other types of research, since it is carried out with the people involved in the field (Bergeron et al., 2021). The method of data collection and analysis for RD is an iterative process, as partners collaborate with the research team on an ongoing process. The team obtains results from items in the research-based knowledge review (RBK), but also from data collected from partners and from the Mentimeter done during an educational symposium.

A first stage of analysis of RBK on resistance in organizations led to the identification of items which became a preliminary document of reference. Data was then collected from partners in the four Canadian provinces. Interviews were conducted with partners to validate the items identified, and to add elements to the preliminary report. Data analysis was carried out by the research team and validated with the partners. Figure 1 illustrates the results of the Mentimeter survey done in French. The main themes have been translated in English for the purpose of this article.

Figure 1. Themes emerging from the Mentimeter survey.



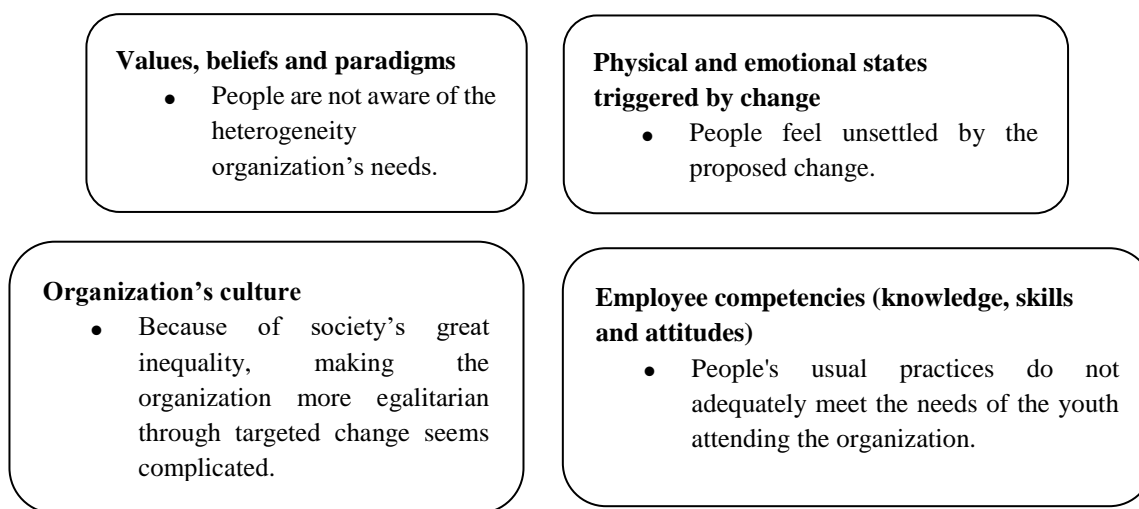
4. Findings

The items that emerged from the collaboration with partners were divided into different categories according to two major types of resistance: individual or organizational. A lengthy process of co-construction, rewriting and restructuring the categories was carried out. This said, it is still an ongoing process and our results are preliminary. They still give us a good insight into the factors, concerns, reactions, and obstacles when implementing change to promote educational success and well-being in a context of diversity. The final stage of the RD process is scheduled for autumn 2024. As we still need to finalize the product, validate it with partners and the RÉVERBÈRE members organizational management team.

4.1. Examples of preliminary items emerging from the RBK

The following are examples of the broad categories and related items identified from the RBK. They also reflect the RÉVERBÈRE mission to promote educational success and well-being in a context of diversity.

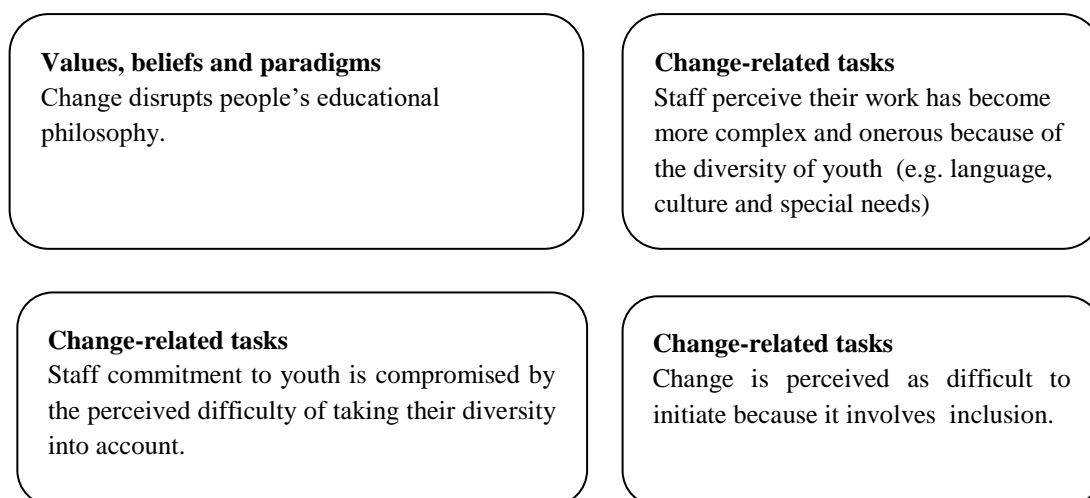
Figure 2. Preliminary items emerging from RBK.



4.2. Examples of preliminary items merging from the activities with partners

The following items were developed in collaboration with our partners and also reflect the RÉVERBÈRE mission to promote educational success and well-being in a context of diversity.

Figure 3. Preliminary items emerging from partners.



5. Discussion, recommendations and conclusions

The knowledge gained from the research and the collaborative approach enabled us to develop an initial preliminary report on the resistance experienced by staff members in the context of change for the well-being and success in educational environments. Although this report is preliminary, several findings emerging from Bergeron *et al.*'s (2021) collaborative RD approach adds value to the research design by bringing together the scientific and practice community. Collaboration involves a diversity of players, enabling complementary backgrounds and expertise, while forming part of a pan-Canadian network. The purpose of the questionnaire for administrators is to demystify the resistance present in the community, with a view to bringing about educational change in the light of current issues. The tool, produced in collaboration with researchers and partners, responds to the educational environment by involving the players concerned by organizational change. Collaboration remains a central asset for the research community and we truly believe that our initiative will bring insight about resistance factors, concerns, reactions, and obstacles encountered when implementing change to promote educational success and well-being in a context of diversity.

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