

Steele, E. (2007). *A qualitative study of how urban teachers sustain change in turbulent times.*
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Abstract

Over the last twenty years there has been increased interest in facilitating and sustaining change in education systems. The bulk of past research has focused on systems change with little insight into the role of individual educators as change agents. The purpose of this study was to examine the role individual teachers play in creating and sustaining change in large urban school districts. This study focused on how teachers in a system, that was made turbulent by both the neighborhood environment it existed in and the ever changing environment of the large urban district it was a part of, manifested change and sustainability.

Multiple noteworthy studies have been completed to identify the characteristics and qualities of successful change initiatives. More recently researchers have begun to turn their attention to the human elements of change that occur within systems change. These studies have revealed the importance of collaboration, professional development, available resources, and system supports to facilitate teachers in change. However, further knowledge is needed to understand how individuals build capacity for change and what the causal factors are that drive teachers to sustain their new practices. In addition, there is a need to discover when it is that teachers begin to plan for sustaining change. This study sought to answer one question. How do teachers sustain change in turbulent times? The study design was qualitative and involved the analysis of in-depth interviews conducted during the last year of a three year Reading First change initiative, archival data, and field observations.

It was found that teachers sustain what is within their power to sustain. The larger the support system for sustaining changes, the broader teachers plan for sustaining it. In this instance, teachers had a very small support system remaining after the withdrawal of grant funds. Their vision for sustaining change was limited by the withdrawal of most support structures put in place by the funding provided by Reading First. Their system of support was further narrowed by the termination of key positions within the implementation system by the district. Due to the narrowing of the support system teachers began to plan for sustaining by looking to the collaborative network formed through school based professional development as the most viable system of support. They also looked at the success of their new practices and choose from those which they had the power to sustain and which they did not. Teachers created a mindset of what was within their power and collected needed resources to sustain valued new practices. As one teacher stated, "I think that every reading series that I have ever worked with has given me new understandings. I have pulled certain things from them that I still use today" (Ms. Damas, second grade teacher).

The study also supported previous findings about the importance of professional development as a tool to create change and sustainability. This is especially true when the professional development is based in school need and teacher support. In this study the professional development came in the form of structured, researched based opportunities, informal and formal coaching, and team meetings. An important area of study was the use of data to shape instructional practices. Data used were in the form of DIBELS assessment, classroom observations, state mandated tests, and program fidelity