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Change Agent Strategy for Dissemination

Several excellent reviews of the general education change and innovation literature exist, although these are too comprehensive to describe here (Miles, 1964; Bennis, Benne and Chin, 1969; Maguire, 1970; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein, 1971; Glaser et al, 1976). This literature indicates that a widely adopted strategy for planned development and dissemination of curriculum innovations has been the Research, Development and Diffusion (RD&D) model (Havelock, 1969). This empirical-rational strategy involves the initial development of teacher-proof curriculum packages followed by mass dissemination which assumes that teachers' adaptation and translation problems have been largely anticipated and accommodated. The RD&D strategy, however, has recently provoked increasing skepticism because teachers and schools often have failed to adopt new curriculum materials, to implement them in ways envisaged by the developers, or to continue their use for a sustained period (Fullan, 1972; CERI, 1973). These problems have led Hoyle (1970) to the conclusion that the manner in which an innovation is introduced is as important to its effectiveness as the qualities of the innovation itself.

As an alternative to the RD&D model, numerous writers have advocated that dissemination of innovation be achieved through people referred to as *change agents* or *linkage agents* (e.g., Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958; Havelock, 1970; Hoyle, 1970; Bolam, 1976). According to Havelock (1975, p. 327), change agents are simply "people who can work in the middle between research and practice". The role of change agents in dissemination, then, would be to provide important consultative and collaborative links between curriculum development groups and school teachers and administrators. The essential merit claimed for the use of change agents in dissemination of innovations is that it is more effective than the RD&D strategy in promoting teachers' receptivity to innovations.

Nash and Culbertson (1977) have identified three defining characteristics of change agents. First change agents focus their activities on the

improvement of individual or institutional performance. Second change agents use knowledge or knowledge-based products and services as key methods for their improvement activities. Third change agents perform boundary-spanning roles in order to connect those engaged in change with needed knowledge-based products (including ideas, findings, programmes, practices and training materials).

Various writers have delineated several conceptually distinct roles which might be played by change agents (see Havelock and Lingwood, 1973; Piele, 1975; Butler and Paisley, 1978). These include *resource finders* (who collect, organise and analyse information), *process helpers* (who plan, manager conflicts and analyse problems) and *solution givers* (who market and implement). It should be emphasised, however, that most of the literature dealing with change agent roles has been theoretical and conceptual, and systematic study of change agent roles has been limited to a very small number of case studies (e.g., Louis, 1977) and empirical investigations (e.g., Madey and Baker, 1979).

Application of Strategy

A recent Australian example of the application of the change agent strategy is the dissemination strategy associated with a major innovation in law-related education at the secondary school level, namely, the High School Education Law Project (HELP). This dissemination strategy involved the mounting of a two-week inservice course aimed at training people who would become change agents responsible for school-level and regional dissemination. A principal purpose of the present paper is to provide descriptive information about the ways in which the change agent strategy was applied in the dissemination of HELP. A second main purpose is to provide some preliminary evaluative information about the effectiveness of the change agent strategy during the first few months of its implementation.

Development and Dissemination of HELP

The High School Education Law Project (HELP) - funded jointly by the Law Foundation of New South Wales and the national Curriculum Development Centre - has involved the development of teaching resources in law-related education for use in secondary schools. Furthermore, although there has been a wide variety of resources developed overseas (Davison, 1977) HELP can be considered especially important because it is the first major project in Australia in law-related education at the school level.

During 1975 and 1976, the Law Foundation of N.S.W. sponsored the production of *Legal Eagle,* a flexible publication in newspaper format which provided law-related resource material for teachers in many different subject areas (e.g., commerce, general studies, social studies, personal development). As it was recognised that law-related education should involve more than legal information, *Legal Eagle* was organised around the understanding of various law-related issues and basic concepts.

Following favourable reactions from teachers involved in trying out *Legal Eagle* in schools during 1975 and 1976, HELP was established in

1977 when the Curriculum Development Centre agreed to co-fund the project. At the same time, the N.S.W. Department of Education seconded a teacher to work on the project along with the two qualified lawyers employed by the Law Foundation. During 1977, HELP staff developed a Year 10 study unit called *Moving On . . .* (covering topics like workers' compensation, taxation, unemployment, industrial relations) which was trialled in approximately 30 secondary schools throughout N.S.W. Evaluation activities associated with these field trials have been described in detail elsewhere (Fraser and Smith, 1980a, b, c).

Feedback information obtained by interview and questionnaire survey during the trialling of *Moving On . . .* was used as a basis for rewriting matertials for final publication during 1978 and 1979. In particular, it was decided to break up the material contained in the single *Moving On . . .* unit into thematic units called *Eaglebooks,* so that teachers of different subjects in different schools would have more flexibility in selecting and using the materials. Each *Eaglebook* contains numerous case studies, games and exercises for students, and incorporates fundamental concepts like the way laws are made, the role of courts, the differences between criminal and civil law and the part played by the Constitution in Australia's federal system of government. Also, each *Eaglebook* is accompanied by a teachers' manual providing additional background information about the law and suggested classroom strategies. The four titles in the *Eaglebook* series are "Jobs and the Law" (taxation, workers' compensation, apprenticeship, unions), "The Family and the Law" (marriage, children, separation), "Environment and the Law" (resource management, pollution, increasing technology) and "Consumer Protection" (contracts, trade practices, hire purchase). The *Eaglebook* series is published in Sydney by CCH Australia Limited.

As noted previously, the major strategy for dissemination of ideas about HELP to teachers was to train a group of people to act as change agents in law-related education. This involved a two-week inservice course, which was held at the University of New South Wales in July 1978, for those who would subsequently be responsible for further dissemination at the school level. The course was organised by HELP personnel and funded through the Schools Commission State Teacher Development Program. While a comprehensive portrayal of the activities and discussions occurring during this two-week course is provided elsewhere (Fraser and Smith, 1980c), the paragraphs below provide a brief description of the nature of the course.

Inservice Course for Change Agents

Two major foci during the first week of the two-week inservice course were familiarisation with various aspects of the law and experience with classroom strategies and techniques in law-related education. The inservice course involved participants in looking at a variety of materials, teaching methods and community resources in law-related education. For example, participants toured Parliament House, a prison and law courts, and met various people including judges and representatives from the Consumer Affairs Department and the Attorney-General's Department. Participants tried out many of the types of classroom activities likely to be useful in

law-related education including mock trials, simulation games, role plays and discussion techniques.

In the second week of the course, the focus shifted gradually to preparing participants for their later roles as change agents. Consequently course time was devoted to participants planning their future activities as change agents in law-related education at the school and regional levels. For example, this included planning ways of informing other teachers about law-related education, and ways in which programmes incorporating law-related education could be developed or extended within the participants' own schools.

Course organisers deliberately attempted to provide links from one day's activities to the next, often with planning sessions for one day occurring late on the preceding day. Small group work was employed often during the course in order to provide maximum opportunity for discussion and interaction. In addition addresses were given and workshops were led by a number of visiting speakers including the Director of Studies for the N.S.W. Department of Education, Chairman of the Law Reform Commission, and a teacher from a Teacher Centre in South Australia.

The course involved a total of 40 participants, who were carefully selected on the basis of interest and prior involvement in law-related education, in addition to four members of the HELP team and a course consultant. The majority of these participants were from N.S.W., although six came from other parts of Australia (two from South Australia and one each from the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Western Australia). The N.S.W. participants came from every suburban and country region in the state, and included representatives from both government and independent schools. While the majority of participants were practising secondary school teachers, some were employed as consultants with State Departments of Education. Participants represented a variety of teaching areas including English, history, commerce, geography, social studies, home economics, personal development and general studies.

Questionnaire Survey

One approach to evaluating the effectiveness of the inservice course involved a questionnaire survey of participants' opinions at the completion of the course. This questionnaire was based both on ideas identified by the course organisers prior to the course and on salient issues which emerged during formal and informal discussions throughout the course. The questionnaire included the following areas which are briefly discussed in turn below:
(i) organisation of the course, (ii) time allocation in the course, (iii) changes in awareness and understanding, (iv) overall ratings of the whole course, (v) commitment to future plans and (vi) additional open-ended comments. It should be noted that most questionnaire items sought not only a structured response requiring the choice of an alternative but also provided space for extra comments. The questionnaire was responded to anonymously by 31 of the 40 participants at the end of the last day of the course. Only a brief discussion of selected questionnaire items is provided below, although all items are discussed in detail in Fraser and Smith's (1980c) report.

(i) Organisation of the course. The first set of questionnaire items involved participants' ratings of seven aspects of the organisation of the course using the responses of Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory and Not Satisfactory. Two organisational aspects which were rated very favourably were general course organisation and contributions made by resource people. In fact, approximately two-thirds of respondents chose the Highly Satisfactory response for these items. Furthermore, in the space for extra comment, several people noted that the value of the contribution made by the different resource people varied markedly, while another respondent commented on the desirability of introducing the resource people earlier in the course. On the other hand more unfavourable reactions were recorded about the adequacy of pre-course information (rated as Not Satisfactory by nine respondents) and of the way that participants' and organisers' expectations for the course were clarified at the beginning of the course (rated as Not Satisfactory by eight participants).

(ii) Time allocation in the course. The items in the second section of the questionnaire were aimed at gauging participants' opinions about time allocation in the course using the responses of Too Long, About Right and Too Short. As many as 26 out of the 31 participants felt that the duration of 10 days for the course was About Right. Participants tended to consider the proportion of time devoted to visits and excursions too short, and the proportion devoted to active involvement in role plays and discussions too long. In fact, the proportion of time devoted to visits and excursions was considered Too Long by no-one and Too Short by 18 people. Also several respondents added extra comments about the desirability of extending the court visits.

(iii) Changes in awareness and understanding. Items in the third section of the questionnaire dealt with changes during the course in participants' awareness and understanding about 14 important issues in law-related education. These issues were derived from priorities perceived by the course organisers and by teachers involved previously in trialling *Moving On . . .* While some of these items refer to the role of change agent as innovative classroom teacher (e.g., Items 3 and 5), other items refer to the role of change agent as inservice educator (e.g., Item 8). Table 1 lists a sample of these items and shows the number of respondents choosing each of four alternative responses (Decrease, No Change, Some Increase and Large Increase).

In interpreting the results shown in Table 1, two important points should be borne in mind. First, as no questionnaire was administered as a pretest prior to the inservice course, these items relied on participants' ability to assess their levels of awareness and understanding prior to the course and then to indicate changes in these during the course. One important reason for not employing a pretest questionnaire is simply that many of the important issues covered were unknown prior to the course and only emerged during the course (see Stake, 1975, 1976). Second, the items in Table 1 are intended to assess changes in awareness and understanding as distinct from absolute levels. For this reason, it is possible that some participants could report no change simply because their level of awareness or understanding was already quite high prior to the inservice course.

Table 1. Changes in Awareness and Understanding about Law-Related Education

Number Choosing

Questionnaire Item	Decrease (1)	No Change (2)	Some Increase (3)	Large Increase (4)
1. Awareness of the aims of law-related education	0	1	5	25
2. Understanding and knowledge of the law and legal principles	0	2	16	13
3. Competence in classroom methods and approaches relevant in law-related education	0	1	12	17
4. Awareness of available sources and resources in law-related education	0	0	12	19
5. Awareness of ways of evaluating student progress in law-related education	0	8	16	7
6. Awareness of ways of incorporating law-related education into existing curriculum patterns in N.S.W. schools	0	0	7	24
7. Confidence in own ability to develop law-related education programmes	0	2	8	21
8. Confidence in own ability to run an inservice course on law-related education in own region	0	3	16	22

An overview of the results in Table 1 indicates that the ratings given to different items were fairly similar. Participants tended to report either Some Increase or a Large Increase in awareness or understanding on each aspect. For Item 5 (awareness of ways of evaluating student progress in law-related education), however, responses were less favourable, with eight respondents reporting No Change, 16 reporting Some Increase and seven reporting a Large Increase. This finding is noteworthy since it reflects teacher concern with evaluation and suggests that this important area was catered for inadequately during the inservice course.

(iv) Overall ratings of whole course. The next three items in the questionnaire sought an overall rating (or summative evaluation) of the whole course on the criteria of worth, enjoyment, and applicability to the teaching situation. Out of 31 respondents, all rated the course as valuable (27 as Highly Valuable and four as Valuable), all rated it as enjoyable (25 as Highly Enjoyable and six as Enjoyable) and 30 rated it as relevant to the teaching situation (20 as Highly Relevant, 10 as Relevant and one as Not Relevant). These results show that the course was rated very favourably.

(v) Commitment to future plans. An important attitudinal aim of the course for change agents was that participants develop commitment to becoming involved in promoting law-related education in the future. Results in Table 2 for items in the last section of the questionnaire indicate that a high degree of commitment was reported by participants. In fact, out of 31 people, all reported that they definitely intended to introduce or extend law-related education at their own schools, all reported that they definitely intended to inform teachers from other schools about law-related education, and 29 reported that they definitely intended to support and assist teachers in other schools to develop law-related education programmes. Although the sample came from a select population, these extremely high levels of expressed commitment were greater than those expected and hoped for by the course organisers.

Table 2. Commitment to Future Plans

Questionnaire Item	Number Choosing Yes	No
I definitely intend to introduce or extend law-related education at my own school	31	0
I definitely intend to inform teachers from other schools about law-related education	31	0
I definitely intend to support and assist teachers in other schools to develop law-related education programmes for their schools	29	2

Another open-ended questionnaire item sought further comments about participants' specific future plans for law-related education. A couple of participants reported a desire to provide parents with some instruction in relevant law-related topics; another participant intended to make a submission for an "approved study" course in law-related education at his/her school; another planned to seek release from teaching duties in order to visit other schools to address staff about law-related education; another planned to write a letter to the Regional Director of Education suggesting appointment of consultants in law-related education.

(vi) *Additional open-ended comments.* The last item in the questionnaire was open-ended and sought any additional comments about the course. Numerous participants answered this question simply by reiterating how valuable they had found the course, especially the opportunity it provided to work together with other teachers. Other participants answered this question by stating specific course shortcomings or suggested improvements. The various criticisms or improvements identified by particular people included: the provision of relevant background information at the beginning of the course for those teachers who had never taught law-related education; devoting more time to excursions to courts, etc.; less emphasis on what appeared to be promotion of sale of HELP materials; more time given to planning and organising future activities; lists of resources for law-related education; and including teachers from a broader range of teaching subjects.

Effectiveness of Change Agent Strategy

A complete evaluation of the use of the change agent strategy in the dissemination of HELP is a complex and time-consuming task which would involve examining the diffusion process in schools over several years. While this important task currently continues to engage the attention of the present writers, some useful evaluative information is already available.

An initial source of evaluative information comes from the questionnaire survey which gauged change agents' opinions about the two-week inservice course. This survey revealed that change agents increased in awareness and understanding of numerous important issues in law-related education, and reported strong commitment to becoming involved in the future in promoting law-related education at the school and regional levels. Although positive attitudes and strong commitment at the end of an inservice course do not necessarily guarantee desireable future action, an absence of such attitudes and commitment would have rendered the ultimate success of the change agent strategy most unlikely. Consequently the presence of favourable attitudes and strong commitment at the end of the two-week course provides at least some initial evidence that the change agent strategy was working out relatively effectively in its early stages.

A second important step in evaluating the change agent strategy involved following participants up later to ascertain the extent to which the commitment towards promoting law-related education expressed at the end of the course was translated into action during the subsequent few months. Such information was collected three *months* later at a follow-up weekend conference attended by participants at the original two-week conference. It was found that all change agents had been involved in some way during the previous three months in planning and implementing dissemination activities in their own schools and regions. Since participants at the two-week course had been involved in dissemination only in a minimal way prior to the course, the amount of dissemination activities engaged in after the course could be taken as an index of the effectiveness of the change agent strategy. For example, the group of change agents collectively had planned or already run a series of 40 regional one-day inservice courses involving over 800 teachers throughout

suburban and country areas of N.S.W. Also change agents had written large numbers of letters about law-related education to regional schools, N.S.W. Department of Education administrators (e.g., regional directors, inspectors, curriculum consultants), various associations (e.g., parents' and citizens' associations, regional social science associations, local law associations) and school teaching staffs. Also change agents had organised for dozens of secondary school classes to implement law-related education programmes. While some of these programmes had been planned for the following school year, most were already operational by the time of the follow-up inservice weekend. Taken together, the vast amount of activities implemented by the group of change agents during this time attests to the success of the use of the change agent strategy in the first few months after the two-week inservice course.

While the evidence accumulated so far is encouraging, further research is needed into the diffusion process which occurs in schools over the next few years. In particular, it would be of interest to follow up everyone concerned during 1978 in the two-stage dissemination strategy to investigate the actual programmes implemented and teaching approaches being followed. Nevertheless reporting of available descriptive and evaluative information at this time hopefully might create interest and provide guidance to others involved in curriculum dissemination programs which might employ the change agent strategy.

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