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Re-conceptualizing Teachers' Change and a Reflexive Habitus

Teachers live in a time of uncertainties with regards to binaries like global/local curriculum; accountability/autonomy; stability/change; objective/subjective debates. These kind of uncertainties can affect teachers' efficacy and eventually the teaching and learning process at classroom level. The question is 'what can be done about it?' I will present the case of a national curriculum reform enactment at school level and discuss the opportunities or spaces of change or transformation utilizing Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" with empirical data from a high school context in Australia. The concept of 'habitus' in Bourdieu's field analysis is that of 'a social world in the biological body'. According to Bourdieu, human beings as active agents, embody the social world and in re-turn reproduce the social structure in which they live. In this context, habitus learns the rules of the field, internalizes them and reproduces the structure. I will, however highlight the generative and creative nature of the habitus which has the ability to adapt to changes or changing circumstances. Phenomena like a change in the field through a democratic process, participation, social support, and critical thinking are found to be working dialectically in order to make the change happen at the ground level.

My study finds that a change in the field calls for a change in the habitus but this change should be through a democratic process from the system level. The democratic process involves negotiating the kind of educational change that can work at the ground level and how today's learners' needs can be met in a global context. Such a change in the field can elicits an active response from schools to participate and engage with the reform. Within the school, teachers' participation in the change process is yet another sign of positive change. Moreover, social support that Bourdieu calls social capital or the social network in the field supports the required change in the field. Critical reflection or critical thinking skills that involves alternative actions, contingency plans, questioning and challenging assumptions and decisions involving the kind of knowledge and skills to impart, are part of a change process. More importantly, critical thinking can enable teachers to live in the uncertainties described above by going beyond the 'either/or' approach to such binaries. Such critical thinking should come from teacher education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Hence a proactive approach and a collaborative culture in the school are found to be effective in transforming the habitus.

Change is inevitable and a proper democratic process in introducing a change in the field with proper support from the system can enable schools to engage with changes in a positive way. At the same time the system should remain open to modifications at the ground level. Teacher education should enable teachers to be able to live and respond to uncertainties with strong self-efficacy.