



The role of context in teachers' concerns about the implementation of an innovative curriculum



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers showed intense concerns at all six Stages of Concern.
- Relevant experience could affect the teachers' concerns at different stages.
- Disagreements were found between the teachers' concerns and the Concerns Based Adoption Model.
- Additional contextual factors could account for the teachers' concerns.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined teachers' concerns about the introduction of Liberal Studies, a new interdisciplinary subject for all senior secondary students in Hong Kong. A modified version of the Stages of Concern questionnaire and follow-up interviews were used to collect responses from teachers, who showed serious concern in all six stages: Informational, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration and Refocusing. The findings differed from the description offered by the Concerns Based Adoption Model. It is suggested that contextual factors (school administration, the nature of innovation and culture) must be taken into account in evaluating teachers' concerns about an innovation.

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1. Introduction

In the last few decades, large scale education reforms in different parts of the world have resulted in mixed outcomes (Fullan, 2000, 2009). Fullan (2007, p. 86) identified factors affecting the implementation of changes brought about by education reforms. Teachers as the agents of reform play a crucial role in the implementation process (Fullan, 2007, p. 96) and display a variety of reactions to the change. While some may embrace change and see it as an opportunity to make a difference in education, others may doubt its effectiveness and see it as a threat to their profession. Thus the concerns, which are defined as the composite representation of feelings, perceptions and thoughts about changes (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1977, p. 5), affect how teachers respond to innovation.

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Based on the works of Fuller (1969) and Fuller and Brown (1975), Hall et al. (Hall & Hord, 1987, 2001; Hall, Wallace, & Dossett, 1973) developed a theoretical framework known as the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) to describe, explain and predict the concerns of teachers through the adoption of innovation process. In CBAM, change is a process and the adoption process can be divided into different stages. Seven Stages of Concern (SoC) about education innovation were identified and a SoC questionnaire was developed as a diagnostic tool (Hall et al., 1977).

The model has been applied in many education innovation studies (see the review by Anderson, 1997). Despite its widespread use, further studies are warranted to refine the model to deal with the complexity of the change process. Hall and Hord (1987) recognized that context may facilitate or limit the change process. However they contended that skillful change facilitators can overcome the limitation to make change successful. They believed that context is not a determining factor for change to be successful. Previous attempts had tried to link contextual factors such as school climate and teachers' psychological state (Evans & Hopkins, 1988), and organizational-culture (Fennell, 1992) to teachers'

concerns. However their results were confounded by methodological problems (Anderson, 1997). Thus more research is needed to investigate the role of context in the model, particularly how teachers' concerns are being shaped by the contextual factor.

In CBAM, one of the basic assumptions is that concerns of an individual follow a developmental growth pattern from one stage to another. However, studies such as those by Bailey and Palsha (1992) and Cheung and Yip (2004) found that the SoC questionnaire had psychometric problems and the developmental nature of concern is not supported by their data. Thus it is worthwhile to reexamine the factor structure of the SoC questionnaire and the growth pattern of the stages of concern.

Professional development programs are often provided to facilitate change. However, not all professional development programs are effective (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Guskey, 1986). Addressing the concerns of teachers is one of the principles for an effective professional development program (Hall & Hord, 2001). While professional development may resolve some of the teachers' concerns, it may also intensify other types of concern (Anderson, 1997; Overbaugh & Lu, 2008). Thus it is necessary to understand the interaction between professional development and SoC in order to inform the needs of the professional development program (Bitan-Friedlander, Dreyfus, & Milgrom, 2004; Hall, 2013).

The introduction of a new interdisciplinary subject in the Hong Kong senior secondary curriculum in 2009 offered an opportunity to examine the various issues and questions of CBAM raised in previous studies (Anderson, 1997; Hall, 2013). In particular the present study focused on three areas mentioned in the above paragraphs, namely, (1) the role of context in CBAM, (2) the factor structure of the SoC questionnaire and the growth pattern of the stages of concern, and (3) how the concerns inform the needs of training programs.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First we review CBAM models and the issues arising from previous studies. The Hong Kong innovation, its background and the professional development of the teachers are described in Section 3. Section 4 discusses the research questions and the methodology used to examine the teachers' concerns. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses and findings are presented in Sections 5 and 6. By synthesizing both of these results in the discussion Section 7, we then use the qualitative results to explain the quantitative findings in answering the research questions. Finally, the conclusion highlights the implications of the findings for the CBAM and professional development programs.

2. The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM)

2.1. The development

The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is a theoretical framework developed by Hall et al., to study teachers' concerns (Hall et al., 1977; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hall et al., 1973). It was based on the work by Fuller (1969) who, using the concept of concerns, studied how student teachers respond to change as they start their teaching career. As experience increases, teachers' concerns progress through three phases: the pre-teaching phase (non-concern), the early teaching phase (concern with self) and late concern (concern with pupils) (Fuller, 1969). This concept was later revised to include four stages: pre-teaching concerns (unrelated concern), early concerns about survival (self concern), teaching situation concerns (task concern) and concerns about pupils (impact concern) (Fuller & Brown, 1975). The concerns of teachers in adopting an innovation are quite similar to those of early career teachers as identified by Fuller (Hall et al., 1973).

In CBAM, change is a process rather than an event. Change evolves from individuals and then extends to the institutions concerned. Change is also a highly personal experience that will bring about developmental growth in feelings and skills. Hall and Hord (1987) found that the concerns of teachers in adopting an innovation can be categorized into seven Stages of Concern (SoC): Awareness, Informational, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration and Refocusing. These stages can be grouped into four categories in parallel with Fuller's four stages of concern: unrelated concern (Awareness), self concern (Informational and Personal), task concern (Management) and impact concern (Consequence, Collaboration and Refocusing). The researchers also concluded that the concerns of teachers evolve in a logical progression. Teachers who are informed of the change but have not yet started implementing the innovation have a higher intensity of self concern. This focus shifts to task concern when teachers start to implement the innovation. As teachers gain more experience with the innovation, their attention will be drawn to the effect of the change on students and the means to improve the change. Thus, experienced users have intense impact concern. Hall et al. (1977) developed a 35-item SoC questionnaire as a diagnostic tool to measure the intensity of concerns at various stages.

2.2. Studies using CBAM

The SoC questionnaire has been used to evaluate and understand the affective and behavioral changes in individuals facing education innovations, and to develop professional development programs to support education innovation (See George, Hall and Stiegelbauer, 2008 for a complete review). In a study by Bitan-Friedlander et al. (2004), they found that at the end of a two-year training program to integrate inquiry skills into science teaching, five types of concern profiles emerged in 19 participants, from challenging the need of training to accepting and improving the innovation. They suggested that the interaction between trainers and teachers must be adjusted according to the teachers' concerns so that the participants may eventually reach the stage of adoption of the innovation. In another study Overbaugh and Lu (2008) found that a training course on integration of instructional technology into curriculum for 377 teachers in elementary and secondary schools helped resolve self concern but increased impact concern. The researchers believed that the training course fulfilled its goals of providing information and operational strategies of the innovation. There was no need to worry about the teachers' collaboration concerns since the teachers were already working with each other and were receptive of the innovation. The studies by Bitan-Friedlander et al. (2004) and Overbaugh and Lu (2008) illustrate the use of SoC to determine the needs of the professional development program.

In using the SoC questionnaire to measure the teachers' concerns, it was sometimes necessary to modify the stages of concern to fit the data better. For instance, Bailey and Palsha (1992) found that a five-stage model described the concerns better than the seven-stage CBAM. They suggested that the Awareness stage be combined with the Informational stage and proposed the integration of the Refocusing and Consequence stages into an impact stage. Other studies by Van den Berg (1993), Cheung, Hattie, and Ng (2001) and Cheung and Yip (2004) also found that their data fit alternate models better than Hall's seven-stage model. The alternate models were derived from Hall's model by combining or creating new stages. Some items of the SoC were modified, deleted or added to suit the context of the studies. The variety of adjustments made to the SoC questionnaire in order to fit the data shows that the adoption of innovation is a complex process. The SoC might depend on other factors such as the cultural contextual factors and

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