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IS DESIGN THINKING THE KEY TO A SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL REFORM FRAMEWORK IN QUEBEC?

Educational organizations are increasingly faced with demanding societal, cultural, technological, economic, and political changes (Beabout, 2012; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Fullan, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). They must be able to adapt in order to meet these changing demands and needs. Scholars agree that sustainable educational reform can be achieved when the people leading the reform avoid top-down, prescriptive change frameworks and, as intermediaries, engage multiple stakeholders around shared visions (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018; Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005; Stroh, 2015; Senge, 2006). The value of sharing authority across levels of reform not only achieves reforms that are appropriately designed for local contexts, but this approach also empowers practitioners. NEXTschool is an innovative change initiative that is currently in a design and exploratory stage with various local schools in Quebec. It utilizes design thinking (Liedtka et al., 2017) to ensure that educational partners in their local school contexts are driving and designing context-specific reform. Design thinking is the process of empathetically understanding and defining a problem, ideating, prototyping, and testing designs in an iterative effort to improve a solution ("A Place for Explorers", n.d.; "Design Thinking for Educators", n.d.; "IDEO", n.d.). It is built on dispersed authority with expert facilitators but no expert knowledge-holder. This enables multiple iterations that do not require validation from a central source (Liedtka et al., 2017). NEXTschool aims to initiate effective and sustainable educational change by creating relevant and differentiated curricula over which stakeholders feel shared ownership towards context-appropriate reforms in schools. Importantly, reforms in the past failed to appreciate local contexts, include all stakeholders (especially students), nurture effective collaboration, and thoroughly support participants (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Louis, 2010; Mitra, 2003; Zimmerman, 2006). By employing design thinking, the NEXTschool framework theoretically sets itself up for success in these areas where others have failed. This presentation will engage viewers in a mock design sprint and reveal highlights of the NEXTschool process to date.