

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE OR BUSINESS AS USUAL?¹

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Resumo

O Currículo para a Excelência na Escócia (CfE) é um bom exemplo de uma nova espécie de currículo nacional; um modelo curricular que procura combinar a prescrição governamental de cima para baixo com o desenvolvimento curricular baseado na escola, pelos profissionais do ensino, de baixo para cima. No entanto, ao desenvolver uma renovada visão dos professores como agentes da mudança e relaxar a prescrição do currículo, o CfE atraiu críticas por ser vago em termos de conteúdo, e pela abordagem de mistura e combinação e aparente desenho ateuórico. Este artigo constitui uma crítica ao CfE, e propõe um processo através do qual os praticantes atribuem sentido e adotam o novo currículo.

Palavras-chave: Currículo para a Excelência (CfE); Professores; Crítica; Currículo.

Abstract

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is a good example of a new breed of national curriculum; a curricular model that seeks to combine top-down government prescription with bottom-up school-based curriculum development by teaching professionals. However, in developing a renewed view of teachers as agents of change and relaxing curriculum prescription, CfE has attracted criticism for its vagueness in terms of content and for a mix-and-match approach and seemingly atheoretical design.

¹ Artigo publicado originalmente na *Scottish Educational Review* (42 (1)) em 2010. Agradecemos ao autor Dr. Mark Priestley e ao editor da revista, Prof. Ian Smith, a permissão para publicação deste artigo no presente número da Revista Interacções.



This paper engages in a critique of CfE, and proposes a process by which practitioners may make sense of and enact the new curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum for Excellence (CfE); Teachers; Criticism; Curriculum.

“Curriculum for Excellence is designed to transform education in Scotland, for all leading to better outcomes children and young people” (Scottish Government, 2009: 4)

'Innovation after innovation has been introduced into school after school, but the overwhelming number of them disappear without a fingerprint.' (Cuban, 1988: 86)

Introduction

The last ten years have witnessed the development of a new breed of national curriculum, at least across the Anglophone world. Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), while exhibiting some idiosyncratic features, is fairly typical of this policy trajectory. The *New Zealand Curriculum* and recent changes to England's *National Curriculum* provide parallel examples of this emergence of a set of common trends in curriculum prescription. Such curricula seek to combine what is claimed to be the best features of top-down and bottom-up approaches to curriculum planning. Their architects claim that they provide both central guidance for schools, thus ensuring the maintenance of national standards, and sufficient flexibility for schools and teachers to take account of local needs in designing programmes of education. The following extract, from the Ministerial Response to the 2004 *Curriculum for Excellence* proposals, typifies this approach:

“Schools and education authorities will continue to be accountable for the decisions they take about the curriculum they offer, with expectations that they will use arrangements creatively and flexibly and in ways which raise levels of achievement and attainment for all young people. (Scottish Executive 2004: 10)”.

This curricular model, with its renewed emphasis on the professional input of teachers as developers of the curriculum, has emerged at a time when capacity for school-based curriculum development is arguably limited. There is a rich vein of British literature in the field of curriculum development, with roots in the early part of the 20th

century (for example, Lawton 1975; Stenhouse 1975; Kelly 1986, 1999). Curriculum studies remains a thriving field of study in some parts of the world such as North America, where the reconceptualisation of the field, exemplified by the work of William Pinar (e.g. Pinar *et al.* 1995), *inter alia*, is prominent. In continental Europe, there is a vibrant tradition of Didaktik (e.g; Hopmann 2003), which may be seen as fulfilling similar functions as curriculum studies in Anglo-American education systems. However, in the UK, curriculum studies has become relatively moribund since the 1980s (Moore, 2006; Priestley & Humes, in press), in contrast to the situation elsewhere. In part, this may be attributed to the tendency for curriculum policy to become more prescriptive since the advent of England's National Curriculum in 1988; consequently, teachers have come to be seen more as technicians implementing preset policy (Ball 2008; Biesta 2010) than as professionals creatively mediating flexible policy frameworks (Supovitz 2008).

Developments such as CfE, through their renewed emphasis on teachers as agents of change, have exposed the current paucity of curriculum theory, across policymaking, practitioner and academic communities, and this in turn has led to a lack of capacity to deal with the issues that such curricula throw up as they are translated from policy to practice. This lack of capacity is manifested at a number of levels. In terms of the development of policy at a macro level, an atheoretical perspective can lead to curriculum policy that lacks coherence, a mix-and-match approach that combines different curricular models, potentially creating difficult tensions for those charged with enacting policy. With Walter Humes, I have more fully explored these contradictions and tensions elsewhere (Priestley & Humes in press). At the meso and micro levels of curriculum enactment, an atheoretical perspective potentially denies local policymakers and practitioners the conceptual tools to make sense of policy, and reconcile it with local needs and contingencies in a manner that is educational. I use the term 'educational' deliberately: as a contrast to curriculum decision-making that is instrumental – for example being based upon the demands of a narrow attainment agenda driven by league tables; and/or in contrast with traditional imperatives – for instance a desire to maintain current patterns of practice even where these are in tension with the aims of new curriculum policy. Finally, the declining status of curriculum studies in the universities, where the focus has narrowed to encompass mainly the development of pedagogy and the evaluation of policy initiatives, is evident in the stark absence of critique of new curricular policy. CfE, for instance, was launched in 2004, and yet academic articles about it are scarce nearly six years later.



This paper focuses upon one particular area of theoretical concern with this new breed of curriculum. It relates to what Supovitz (2008) has named the implementation gap – the problematic issue of translation from prescribed policy to enacted practice. In addressing this problem, and with the audience of this journal in mind, I draw upon CfE as an exemplar, although many of my conclusions will apply more widely given the generic and ubiquitous nature of this model of curriculum. I first analyse some key features of CfE, drawing parallels with developments elsewhere and explaining how such curricula potentially create problems within this process of translation. I frame my arguments against an assumption, well-supported by the educational change literature (e.g. Tyack & Cuban 1995), that curriculum development is a process as well as a product, and moreover, a process that relies upon the professional judgment and agency of practitioners. This mediation of policy is dependent on the values, beliefs and prior experience of practitioners, as well as the contingencies of the social settings in which they work. This phenomenon, whereby policies mutate as they migrate from setting to setting – termed iterative refraction by Supovitz (2008) – is also well-established in educational change literature (e.g. Sarason 1990; Eisner 1992; Cuban 1998).

I argue in the paper that CfE, as a typical example of this new type of curriculum, and in common with its more prescriptive predecessors, fails to take account of these insights, framed as it is in terms of outcomes and products. I further argue that this lack of attention to processes has a number of key consequences in terms of how practitioners enact the curriculum. I conclude the paper by positing a process for engagement with CfE; this process has been recently trialed with teachers in several schools (secondary and primary) and shows some promise in terms of facilitating engagement with the big ideas of CfE and promulgating genuine innovation.

I end this brief introduction with three caveats. First, this is not a research paper, although it potentially sets an agenda for research. Instead, the paper is an attempt to open up academic and professional dialogue on an issue which is currently under-theorised and under-researched, and as such, I offer a number of views that are personal. Second, the question ‘transformational change or business as usual?’ in the title does not apply that transformational change is a good, or indeed necessary; the title may simply be seen to reflect the oft-stated claim that CfE aims to bring about such change, and that, in its current form, the likelihood of such a goal being met is open to some doubt. Finally, while the new curriculum is to be welcomed in many respects, particularly for its renewed emphasis on developing pedagogy and its encouragement

of flexible provision to enable this, we should not lose sight of the necessity for public intellectuals to offer a constructive critique of public policy. This paper, therefore, offers both criticism of the new curriculum, and constructive suggestions for its development in schools.

Curriculum for Excellence and Elsewhere – Common Trends

The new breed of national curriculum, exemplified by CfE, manifests several common design features. First, such curricula exemplify a set of inter-related and parallel trends in worldwide policy-making, which have been recently documented by Michael Young (e.g. 2009: 1). These are: ‘the introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks; the shift to learning outcomes; and the move from subject specific to generic curriculum criteria’. I do not propose to comment here on the first trend, as it is largely tangential to the arguments that I will pursue in this paper. However, the second and third trends are highly relevant to these arguments, with the potential to generate some quite interesting consequences as curriculum policy is translated into practice in schools. The recourse to an outcomes model of curriculum encourages, in my view, a particular type of instrumental approach to curriculum development; moreover, the lack of specification of content in the new curricula, combined with a lack of conceptual tools and processes for deriving such content from curricular aims, potentially leads to some quite interesting consequences in respect of how knowledge is framed and conceptualised in schools. I will expand upon both issues in the next section of the paper.

Second, they purport to place the learner at the heart of schooling. New Zealand, which has developed four new national curricula since the 1980s, is typical of this trend. Curriculum guidance issued in 2009 makes the following statements, the tone of which will be familiar to Scottish readers.

“If the standards and the curriculum are to make a difference for students, we need to keep each learner and their learning at the centre of all levels of decision making.

It’s also important for teachers to focus on increasing their students’ capacity to learn. How successful students are in achieving goals that matter to them depends on a positive disposition towards learning and on being able to think critically, manage themselves, set goals, overcome obstacles, and get al.ong with



others. Active involvement in the assessment of their learning is a key to this” (Ministry of Education 2009)”.

Biesta (2009) refers to this trend as the ‘learnification’ of education. According to Biesta, this tendency reflects an unproblematised acceptance that learning is a good and a failure to address educational questions such as ‘what are we learning?’ and ‘why are we learning it?’.

Third, the new curriculum models come packaged in proselytizing rhetoric that should be of concern in an era when teacher autonomy and professionalism have been deeply eroded by managerial forms of quality improvement (Smyth & Shacklock 1998; Ball 2008) and outcomes steering (Biesta 2004), and especially given that these new curricula purport to re-establish teacher autonomy in curriculum making. The following extract found on England’s Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website provides an extreme example of such rhetoric, but one that perhaps well illustrates the new tendency for educational policy to be framed as a set of common-sense orthodoxies, to which all should aspire.

“The curriculum should be treasured. There should be real pride in our curriculum: the learning that the nation has decided to set before its young. Teachers, parents, employers, the media and the public should all see the curriculum as something to embrace, support and celebrate. Most of all, young people should relish the opportunity for discovery and achievement that the curriculum offers” (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2008)

Such an approach will again strike a chord with those currently engaged in implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*, and is, in my opinion, highly damaging to the teacher professional autonomy and the systemic flexibility that the new curricula claim to be promoting.

Policy into Practice: Knowledge and Method, Outcomes and Processes

In terms of how policy translates into practice, I have three broad concerns about CfE. These relate to the following:

The specification of the curriculum as outcomes, sequenced into levels.

The comparative lack of specification of content within the new curriculum.

The vagueness of specification in terms of method (or pedagogy).

None of these should pose insurmountable problems for schools, as the general directions set by CfE are constructive and flexible. However, they require a certain level of capacity and a clear curricular vision amongst curriculum developers in schools, as well as an awareness of the shortcomings of the new curriculum. Emerging evidence from the early implementation of the curriculum suggests otherwise; although I must stress that much of what is discussed in the ensuing sections is informed by anecdotal evidence, and that there is an urgent need for rigorous academic research to inform the future development of this important policy initiative.

Outcomes

The curriculum model adopted for CfE is problematic, and symptomatic of a general amnesia in respect of the curriculum theory that arguably underpinned earlier developments. For example, the development of Standard Grade following the Munn Report (Scottish Education Department, 1977) was underpinned by the epistemology developed by Paul Hirst (1974). CfE is considerably more eclectic, and this intellectual cherry picking has resulted in a lack of coherence. For example, CfE provides simultaneous starting points for curriculum development in the Four Capacities and the Outcomes and Experiences. The former are perhaps redolent of a process curriculum, providing broad curricular purposes about the sorts of young people that an educational system should develop (although this is also contested by Biesta who sees the capacities in more narrowly instrumental terms as products – for example, see Biesta 2008). The Four Capacities are clearly not perfect; they overtly focus on an individualistic notion of the good citizen, for example, and moreover one that is narrowly predicated on social responsibility rather than political activism (ibid). Nevertheless, and this is an argument that I pursue later in this paper, they offer a broad set of purposes of education that may be used by practitioners to derive content and methods that are fit for purpose. Conversely, CfE offers a different starting point for curriculum development in the Outcomes and Experiences; these are more likely to encourage, as was clearly evident in the development of 5-14 (Swann & Brown 1997), what Cuban (1988) terms first order changes; modifications to epiphenomenal features of schooling, such as paperwork and procedures, with an emphasis on improving the efficiency of existing structures, mechanisms and social practices. Such changes contrast sharply with the model of transformational change that is clearly espoused by



CfE; arguably second order changes to the fundamental structures, mechanisms and social practices that comprise the 'core of schooling' (Elmore 2004).

There is a great deal of literature that points to the incompatibility of these two approaches (e.g. Kelly 1999, Stenhouse 1975; Priestley & Humes in press). Such incompatibility is likely to cause problems for schools seeking to innovate, and indeed regular visitors to Scotland's schools will be currently witnessing this tension between the process and outcomes elements of CfE playing out in a particular way, with fairly predictable consequences. An archetypal response to the new curriculum is as follows. The Four Capacities take on the status of aspirational slogans or mantras, clearly visible on posters in classrooms and corridors; however, beyond this, they are not commonly informing curricular innovation, and are not generally seen as a starting point for curriculum development. A more common approach seems to be to start with an audit of the Outcomes and Experiences, comparing existing practice with the new prescriptions. This then enables decisions to be made about what needs to be 'tweaked' to meet the requirements of the new curriculum. Such an approach has serious limitations, with today's questions being addressed using yesterday's answers. Consequently, decisions will likely be affected by the existing structures and cultures of schools, which CfE seems to be doing little to address. These include the attainment agenda (as a result of the continued use of attainment statistics to evaluate schools), perceptions of what Her Majesty's Inspectors and education authority Quality Improvement Officers might want, the continued endorsement by CfE of subjects as the basis for curriculum planning, and school timetabling which will limit attempts to promote active learning. This latter issue is a key problematic in secondary schools, where the ubiquitous 53 minute period will continue to act as a barrier to the collaborative, experiential and dialogical methods for learning that CfE arguably espouses. This is a bleak view of the future of CfE, but one that I think is highly likely in many schools – a tick-the-box approach, which will result only in changes in terminology, while classroom practices continue pretty much in their present form.

Content

A second issue concerns the place of knowledge. CfE, in common with other new curricula in the Anglophone world, is light on specification of content (Young 2008, 2009), and this again is redolent of an amnesia about curriculum theory. Process curricula, for example those advocated by the likes of John Dewey, can place a high

emphasis on the accumulated wisdom of the ages (Dewey 1907), while stressing that the specification of content (i.e. subjects) is not the starting point for curriculum planning. In common with many process curricula, I am not advocating an essentialist view of certain types of knowledge, although I do recognize the importance of content and suggest that there should be clear processes for deriving such content from the curriculum. The Four Capacities potentially provide clear statements of purpose and value, from which questions of content may be addressed. However, CfE tends to excise content from the curriculum, and does not explicitly provide such a process. The Outcomes and Experiences are framed in very general terms, and the place and form that content might take is being largely left to schools, with some fairly predictable consequences. I briefly outline some of the emerging, and to date largely anecdotal, trends below.

First, the lack of attention to matters of content seems to be leading to the development of some quite dangerous fallacies. There seems to be a view developing in some quarters that skills are more important than knowledge – that it does not really matter what is taught, as long as young people are developing skills. Michael Young (e.g. 2008) has critiqued the development of such tendencies, which appear to oversimplify and dichotomise the complex relationship between knowledge and skills, obscuring the relationship between different forms of knowledge (for example knowing that and knowing how – Pring 1976). A second, and perhaps related tendency, is a belief that content should reflect the desires (as opposed to the needs) of the pupils. Potentially, important content will disappear from the curriculum because it is seen as uninteresting for pupils, leading to gaps in the knowledge that young people need to become successful learners, responsible citizens, and so on. Conversely, other areas of knowledge are overdone, because of their intrinsic interest – for example, the nazification of the History curriculum is a well-known phenomenon throughout Scotland. In some cases, decisions about content seem to be driven by the attainment agenda, taking advantage of the ‘flexibility’ offered by CfE; there is a potential for low performing departments to be literally abolished, solving the problem that they negatively affect a school’s position on ‘unofficial’ comparator league tables. For example, in various schools, subjects such as History, Geography and Business Studies have been dropped at Higher because of weak examination results. In general, however, the loose and flexible nature of knowledge specification in CfE will most likely result in continuation of existing patterns of provision, as course content is audited against the Outcomes and Experiences, and minimalist changes made in response.



This is, of course, quite different from a process where questions about the knowledge required for a young person in a fast changing society are addressed through school-based inquiry into the purposes of education, with a starting point of the Four Capacities.

Method

A third issue is the question of method. *Curriculum for Excellence* does not systematically explore the area of pedagogy, the discussion remaining largely at the level of broad and largely undefined terms. There is little specific discussion in the *Building the Curriculum* series of documents (e.g. Scottish Government 2008), for example, of how dialogical and experiential forms of learning might contribute to the development of the Four Capacities, or of how particular pedagogical approaches might contribute to the development of the sorts of skills required for adult life. For instance, the curriculum might explore more thoroughly how the practice of social decision-making in authentic school contexts might help to foster responsible citizenship and effective contribution, two of the Four Capacities, as was the case in Posch's (2000) account of how school children in Austria contributed to changes to legislation relating to energy conservation. A second example lies in the frequent use of the term 'active learning' in the CfE documentation; this is never systematically unpacked, and there are consequently wide variations in the way in which this term is understood and enacted in practice. A particular concern must lie in the potential for this term to be equated narrowly with kinaesthetic modes of learning, rather than being given a broader definition in terms of cognitive, behavioural and social dimensions of learning (Watkins *et al.* 2007). A further emerging trend is a tendency for teacher-led approaches and worksheets to be denigrated as 'not active'. This seems to be a conflation of issues, confusing low level factual recall and formulaic teaching, with valid ways of engaging young people. Well-constructed worksheets and competent teacher exposition of a topic both have the potential to stimulate cognitive activity, and may thus be viewed as active learning in a cognitive sense. These, of course, become yet more powerful, when combined, for example, with dialogue, encouraging active learning in a social sense.

There is a wealth of theoretical and empirical literature (e.g. Gardner 1991) which makes the case for linking particular (e.g. social constructivist) approaches to pedagogy with particular outcomes (e.g. the development of critical thinking skills). One

might expect a set of curricular guidelines for schools to explore such insights, perhaps showing clearly the underpinning principles for participative pedagogies. These could include sustained consideration of the respective roles of dialogue, experience and metacognition in promoting learning. As with knowledge, method is an issue that should derive from questions of purpose and value – and, going back to my previous point about the conflicting starting points provided by the Four Capacities and the Outcomes and Experiences, the former provide the best starting point for this process of curriculum development.

Negotiating the Curricular Minefield

The final section of the paper articulates a process through which school-based practitioners might engage with curricula such as CfE. This process has been formulated through discussions with some of the senior managers of schools participating in a Highland Council Future Learning and Teaching (FlaT) project (Priestley *et al.*, in press) and has supported successful engagement strategies in several primary and secondary schools. The process addresses the implementation gap as policy translates to practice, by paying explicit attention to how the big ideas that underpin the policy articulate with the local structural and cultural factors that might impact on its enactment. I also make the assumption here that those engaging with curricular innovation are cognizant with what a great deal of research has informed us about successful educational change (e.g. Elmore 2004; Supovitz 2008; Priestley *et al.* in press). This includes attention to factors such as facilitative leadership, teacher autonomy (underpinned by trust), the use of distributed leadership, and the making of space and time for generative dialogue, whence practitioners are able to make sense of new policy.

I also suggest here that we should be looking at change in a different way. Policies often represent opportunities to enhance practice, but more often than not they are forced into contexts where they do not easily fit, the result, as I have already suggested, often being a new policy seamlessly assimilated into current ways of doing in many schools, with minor tweaks to existing practices and changes to terminology. An alternative view is to view policies like CfE as sets of ideas or resources, new cultural forms which come into contact with existing cultures and practices. It is inevitable that such ideas will mutate as they transmit through the education system and this should be seen as a potentially positive process; teachers should be creatively



mediating policy ideas as they work them to suit their immediate context. Change (and indeed continuity, which may be more appropriate in many settings) is brought about through the *social interaction* of individuals, who are influenced by the following.

Their prior experiences, knowledge and motivations. Individual *agency* is dependent on the extent to which these combine to form what might be termed cultural software (Balkin 1998) and is enhanced by collaboration; in other words the extent to which people can bring creative ideas into practice and share these with others.

The opportunities and constraints provided by existing *culture*, or in other words the shared ideas, knowledge and values that are prevalent in the social setting where the change is to happen.

The opportunities and constraints provided by *social* and *material structures*. Social structures are basically the emergent properties of relationships between individuals and groups, notably power. For instance, the role of headteacher will carry more opportunities for social action than the role of classroom teacher, and explicit senior management support for an initiative may add to the agency of those teachers charged with carrying it out. The physical layout of the school, as well as access to material resources, will also impact on the form that innovation takes.

In order to engage successfully with a new and complex policy like CfE, there needs to be capacity within the education system. There are two main dimensions to this:

Empowered and engaged teachers and managers will respond to change creatively from a wide range of repertoires. Disempowered and/or uninformed individuals will respond narrowly, often to avoid risk.

Cultural and structural barriers to change need to be identified and addressed. Catalysts to change may be identified and enhanced.

Both dimensions imply attention to the key ingredients for successful engagement with change identified in the educational change literature, for example that listed above. Most of all, schools need to develop processes for engagement, especially if these are lacking in the policy itself. The rest of this paper outlines some reflective generic questions to guide this process. These are listed under three

headings: *What should the policy achieve; Mapping the terrain for change; and Building capacity.*

What should the policy achieve?

The first two questions are about analysing the new cultural forms represented by changed policy. The first question is obvious, but is often not addressed fully.

What is the nature of the change initiative? For example, in the case of CfE one might ask what it actually means. What is meant by the Four Capacities? Linked to this is a separate question. *What are we trying to achieve in the light of the change initiative?* This relates to deeper questions about the purposes of education as well as to dialogue about the values that are integral to particular schools. The Four Capacities of CfE offer a good starting point for these questions by confronting us with the question of what a young person leaving school should be like. However, they need substantive and critical sense-making by practitioners. Critical school-based enquiry into the curriculum purposes leads to further questions. What sort of skills and attributes should young people develop? Information literacy? Decision-making capacities? The ability to think critically and creatively? An alternative view of educational purposes (Biesta 2009) is useful in extending debate around the Four Capacities. Biesta identifies three broad and overlapping functions of education: qualification; socialisation; and subjectification (becoming a human being). To question the relationship and balance between these is a very valid exercise; in recent years the first purpose (particularly a narrow 'skills for work' variant of it) has become very important, especially in terms of how schooling is evaluated within inspection systems and education authority quality improvement procedures. However, in placing this qualification emphasis on schooling, have we lost sight of other purposes of education?

Once practitioners have engaged with the above conceptual issues, the next steps are to engage methodologically with the new curriculum. There are two main dimensions to this: knowledge and pedagogy. I have already suggested that lack of attention to matters of knowledge within curricular models such as CfE is likely in many cases to be addressed through continuation of existing practices. However, this may be obviated to some extent through a systematic and reflexive engagement with content/knowledge at a school planning level, through the posing of a question: what types of knowledge do young people need to meet the goals set out in the new policy (in this case the realisation of the Four Capacities)? The second issue, that of



pedagogy, may be similarly addressed. Practitioners should ask how the curricular goals might they translate into classroom activity: what methods are best suited to achieve the Four Capacities? For example, what sorts of activities might foster the decision-making capacity required of an effective citizen? How might formative assessment be utilised to develop the sorts of metacognitive capacities required for successful learning? How might dialogical learning promote a deep-seated understanding (as opposed to a superficial rote learning) of relevant concepts and content.

Mapping the Terrain for Change

Once practitioners have worked out what the policy is, what they wish to achieve from it, and what methods and content are applicable, the next step is to analyse the context, into which the change is being introduced. This will, of course, vary from school to school. The first question here is about what might impede change: what are the barriers to change? A second question links to this: what are the factors in our school which might facilitate change?

These can be analysed at three levels:

Culture. For example, one might ask what existing notions of practice exist in this area, and how these complement and conflict with the new policy. What resources (e.g. research findings) might be useful?

Structure. What relationships exist within the change context (roles, internal and external connections)? What existing systems may influence enactment of the new ideas (including external systems such as exams)? How might classroom and school geography affect enactment?

Agency. What new skills are required to engage with the change? Which individuals are well placed to play major roles in engaging with the change?

Furthermore, such analysis may be usefully undertaken at various levels of the system; for example, such mapping could useful occur within the education authority. It must be stressed that many of the factors that impact on the subsequent course of an innovation might not be immediately discernible, or indeed might be unknowable. Some may be obvious to actors, but lie outside of their control. However, this is not to deny the value and utility of such an exercise; partial knowledge is more desirable than



ignorance in such matters, and unhelpful unintended consequences are best dealt with from a position of reflexivity.

Building capacity

The final question concerns the next steps, once teachers are clear about the purposes of the new initiative and once the terrain for change has been mapped. *What needs to be done to facilitate engagement with the innovation?* Such action may include changing school systems (e.g. timetabling arrangements), setting up working parties and designating key staff to take the initiative forward, allocating resources, providing additional CPD, creating networks and other spaces for dialogue and altering physical spaces (e.g. bringing previously separate departments together in one workspace). At this stage, attention should be given to accountability, and to the Outcomes and Experiences. However, these should remain as slaves rather than masters of the main purposes of the change; a post hoc audit once change is underway, rather than the drivers of change, with all their potential for unintended consequences. Moreover, it should be emphasised that just doing nothing or falling back on vague notions of existing 'best practice' prevent meaningful engagement with innovation.

Concluding Thoughts

Rejecting change in favour of established practice is fine, so long as it comes as a result of a process of meaningful engagement with both the innovation and the context for change. We cannot anticipate all of the contextual factors that might impact on the trajectory of an innovation. However, we can undertake a situational analysis that reduces the impact of the often unhelpful unintended and unexpected outcomes that so often bedevil conscientious attempts to engage with new policy. Such an analysis promises better engagement by practitioners with policies for reform, and the possibility of better understanding of both the policy itself and the context within which it is to be embedded. The key point here is that there needs to be a clearly articulated process for engaging with innovation brought about by externally initiated policy.

The processes described above are not merely theoretical. While they have their roots in the social theory of Margaret Archer (e.g. 1995), the technicalities of which I have not explored in this short paper, they also have an emerging empirical basis. First, they are also partly grounded in practical discussions with teachers and



managers in Highland Council schools, as indicated above. Second, and perhaps more significant, they have been more recently trialled in whole school In-Service Training with teachers grappling with the complexities of CfE. The early signs are promising. The approach has proved to be popular with teachers, who have welcomed its challenging but practice-focused nature. Moreover, the approach has stimulated critical and creative thinking and debate about the new curriculum, eliciting a level of engagement that had not hitherto been the case in these particular schools.

In the words of Bertrand Russell,

“The teacher, like the artist, the philosopher and the man of letters, can only perform his work adequately if he feels himself to be an individual directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority” (cited in Kelly 1999: viii).

Let us use the opportunity created by *Curriculum for Excellence* to foster such conditions; but let us do so in a structured manner that provides clear processes to stimulate such creative impulses.

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