

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHLAND SCHOOLS: AN APPROACH TO MANAGING CHANGE

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Introduction

This booklet has been written to assist schools with the problematic task of engaging with *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE). Change is stressful; and, like the Domesday book, educational change has become an unavoidable and ubiquitous fact of life. And yet, despite constant innovation, the research suggests that much educational policy is unsuccessful in fundamentally changing practice. Often it is rejected, or more commonly adopted superficially as hard-pressed practitioners tweak their existing practice to meet the basic requirements of the new innovation. Thus worthwhile features of the innovation (for example new ways of engaging with young people) often become lost and change is confined to superficial aspects such as the adoption of new terminology and/or paperwork. This booklet presents an alternative view of innovation and change, which may serve to encourage deeper reflection and improved engagement with changes to policy. It is split into separate sections, which may be read together or in isolation. The booklet is underpinned by the several assumptions:

Change is not necessarily a good thing. *Engagement with innovation may mean no change at all.* What is important is that practitioners *engage meaningfully with innovation*, taking into account *available evidence and research findings*, and weighing up the *pros and cons of the innovation*. This stands in marked contrast to processes where change is rejected through ignorance or prejudice, where change is adopted superficially to 'tick boxes', or where change is adopted uncritically, to the potential detriment of teachers and pupils.

The booklet covers the following key aspects of the educational change associated with the development of CfE.

- A short overview of the current context for change.
- Some thoughts about CfE, and what it means for schools.
- A summary of key insights about the successful management of innovation that have emerged from the Highland experience of innovation since 2002.
- A model (or process) for conceptualizing and implementing change in schools.

Background

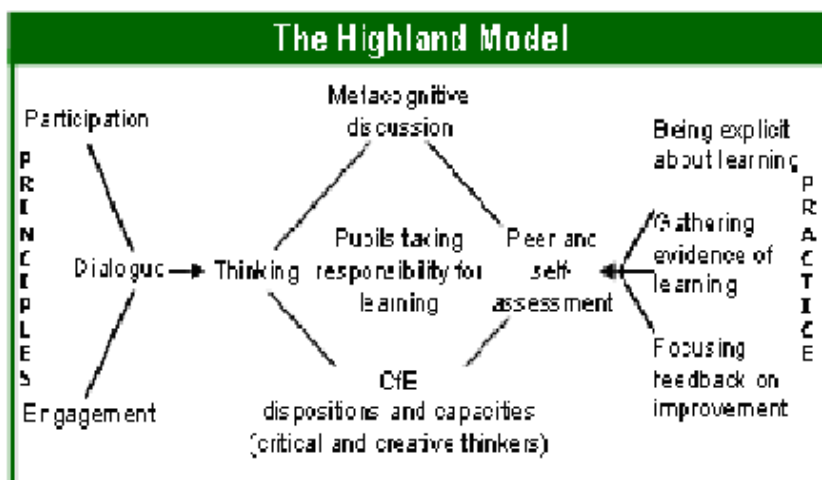
Since 2002, schools in Scotland have been faced with a series of curricular and pedagogical innovations that arguably present new and radical visions of schooling. *Assessment is for Learning* (AifL) has heralded changes to teaching – more effective questioning, more comprehensive feedback and peer/self-assessment – that have placed a renewed emphasis on classroom dialogue and pupil participation, in effect promoting a quality rather than a quantity approach to classroom learning. CfE (has been hailed by its architects as ‘one of the most ambitious programmes of educational change ever undertaken in Scotland’ (Scottish Government, 2008: 8). It seeks to promote the development of the sorts of capacities in young people that are essential to become an effective and well-informed adult. The new curriculum aims to reduce the emphases on content and assessment driven learning that have bedeviled 5-14. In common with AifL, the new curriculum is claimed to be distinctive in that it explicitly moves away from central prescription of curriculum, towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of local school communities. As such, CfE should be seen as an opportunity – rather than a threat – to remold schooling to meet with the aspirations and values of school communities. In this sense, it is helpful to see CfE as a flexible framework for school-based curriculum development, rather than as a new set of prescriptions to be implemented.

Thinking Children ... and Reflective Professionals

The Highland Council has been proactive since 2002 in formulating processes for the enactment of these national policies. In particular, the development of a coordinated model and a set of underpinning principles – *participation, dialogue, engagement* and *thinking* (see figure 1 below) – have been a major feature of the model. This is a ‘distinctive model of effective learning in the context of Curriculum for Excellence in which the principles and practices of formative assessment are used to help students take greater responsibility for their own learning’ (Highland Council 2008: 2); independent thinking and engagement are to be thus achieved through ‘active classroom participation through dialogue’ (ibid: 3).

The model is not just concerned with pedagogy. It applies equally to the processes by which practitioners engage with innovation. High quality teacher/pupil and pupil/pupil dialogue require complementary high quality teacher/teacher professional dialogue. Meaningful teacher professional learning should thus also be underpinned by the four principles, in order that well-thought out and effective classroom practices emerge from any process of school-based curriculum development.

Figure 1 – The Highland Model



Source – Highland Council (2008)

This model has been highly praised around Scotland, and has enjoyed considerable success in many Highland schools in enhancing the learning experiences of both young people and their teachers. In particular, an evaluation (Hayward *et al.* 2008a, b) has identified its effectiveness in fostering critical and creative thinking and promoting self-directed learning. In parallel to the development of the model, a *Future Learning and Teaching* (FLaT) project was established in 2006, following Scottish Executive funding. The project brought together several clusters of schools to explore ways of developing formative assessment (especially peer and self assessment), guided by the Highland model. The FLaT project has been evaluated by a team of researchers from the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde (see below). Further to the work conducted within the FLaT project, 5 Associated Schools Groups (ASGs) were established with government funding in 2006-7 to bring together secondary school teachers. These were established in the following subjects: English; Mathematics; Modern Foreign Languages; Science; and the Social Subjects (Geography, History, Modern Studies). The ASGs, continued into the 207-8 session, and were the focus of a research project conducted by researchers from the Universities of Stirling and the West of Scotland.

The following literature, all of which has been written in response to Highland Council CPD and the development initiatives described above, provides more background about the above developments.

- Various documents that form the Highland CPD Reflection Framework, especially *Making a difference in your school: some perspectives from the*

research on curriculum change, Unit A2, Promoting and Sustaining Change (Priestley 2007)

- Engagement paper 1: Building Teacher learning Communities (Hayward & Boyd 2009a)
- Engagement Paper 2: Sustaining Teacher learning Communities (Hayward & Boyd 2009b)
- Just Making Them Think (Hayward *et al.* 2009c)
- The Social Practices of Curriculum Development in Highland Schools (Priestley *et al.* 2009)
- Teacher learning communities and educational change in Scotland: the Highland experience (Priestley *et al.* in press)

Curriculum for Excellence: challenges and opportunities

In general, there seems to be much more engagement now with CfE than previously. Concerns remain about the type and quality of engagement in many schools. Some of these are attributable to the structure or model chosen for CfE, and some are shaped by existing school structures and cultures. It must be added, that there is a general lack of capacity within the system to deal with curriculum change of this nature. This latter issue is related to the moribund nature of curriculum studies as a field of inquiry (in the universities), and is in part responsible for the design issues alluded to above. I have three broad concerns about CfE, none of which should pose insurmountable problems for schools, so long as the curriculum developers in those schools are aware of them and are prepared to give them some thought.

Curriculum design

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 (SED 1977) was underpinned by the epistemology developed by Paul Hirst (1974). CfE is considerably more eclectic, and this intellectual cherry picking has resulted, in my view, in a lack of coherence (Priestley & Humes, 2010). Thus we have the Four Capacities (arguably a set of process goals linked to purposes of education) alongside the Outcomes and Experiences (an outcomes model of curriculum). There is a great deal of literature that points to the incompatibility of these two approaches (e.g. Kelly 1999, Stenhouse 1975), which is likely to cause problems for schools seeking to innovate. In practice, this tension provides two conflicting starting points for school-based curriculum planning – and indeed early evidence suggests that the Four Capacities are tending to be seen as mantras or slogans, with the real development work emanating from the Outcomes and Experiences. These have been recently described by Keir Bloomer (TESS 2009), one of the architects of

CfE as a 'cul de sac'. I share his view, and will outline the practical problems that ensue from this shortly.

A second issue concerns the place of knowledge. CfE is light on specification of knowledge, and this again is redolent of an amnesia about curriculum theory. Process curricula, for example those advocated by the likes of John Dewey place a high emphasis on the accumulated wisdom of the ages (Dewey 1907), while stressing that the specification of knowledge (i.e. subjects) is not the starting point for curriculum planning. The Four Capacities potentially provide clear statements of purpose and value, from which questions of content can be derived. However, CfE excises knowledge from the curriculum, and its place and form is being left to schools, with some consequences that I shall outline in due course.

A third issue is the question of method. CfE says a lot about pedagogy, but is never specific about this. As with knowledge, method is an issue that should derive from questions of purpose and value. The vagueness of CfE on these issues is leaving the decisions to schools – with some interesting consequences as I shall outline shortly. I wish to note at this point that I would not wish to see CfE specifying content and method in prescriptive terms. However, there should be a framework to provide a process for the specification of both, and CfE is lacking in both respects.

Problems in practice

The *tension between the process and outcomes* elements of CfE plays out in quite predictable ways. The Four Capacities are being held up as aspirational slogans, but teachers do not, in my experience, seem to be doing much with them, particularly in secondary schools. A more common approach is 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. Add to this some tokenistic active learning (AifL strategies and rich tasks), and we have a recipe for business as usual. This is a bleak view of the future of CfE; an 'implementation of the letter' of the new curriculum rather than a 'capture of the [its] spirit' (to quote Mary James, 2007). It is a scenario that I think is highly likely in many schools – a tick-the-box approach, which will result mainly in changes in terminology, while classroom practices continue pretty much in their present form. Of course such decisions will continue to be affected by the existing structures and cultures of schooling, 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 HMIE might want; the continued endorsement through CfE of subjects as the basis for curriculum planning; and school timetabling which will limit attempts to promote active learning.

The *lack of attention to matters of knowledge* seems to be leading to the development of some quite dangerous fallacies. There is a view developing that skills are more important than content, and that content should reflect the desires (as opposed to the needs) of the pupils. Potentially, important knowledge is being excised from the curriculum because it is seen as 'boring', leading to gaps in the knowledge that young people need to become successful learners, responsible citizens, and so on. There also seems to be a tendency to conflate knowledge itself with transmission teaching methods. In some cases, decisions about content seem to be driven by the attainment agenda, taking advantage of the 'flexibility' offered by CfE; low performing departments are literally being abolished (for example the disappearance of Standard Grade subjects like Geography, German and Business Studies in some schools). Questions of knowledge should be addressed through school-based inquiry into purposes, with a starting point of the Four Capacities, but this is often not happening, as schools start with the Outcomes and Experiences.

Linked to this, is the *question of method*. Active learning is being promoted but, as CfE is not specific about what this might be, then there is confusion about what the term constitutes. Where specific approaches to active learning such as cooperative learning and CSP have been promoted in local authority CPD, the potential for confusion is less, but the whole issue is again something that requires more clarity from the centre. The Highland model in particular – with its emphasis on the four principles of *participation, dialogue, engagement and learning* – seems to be an effective antidote to the sorts of fallacies that have developed around Scotland. These include the tendency to view active learning as kinaesthetic learning. Teacher-led approaches and worksheets have been denigrated. Again there is a tendency to conflate issues: confusing low level factual recall and formulaic teaching with what are valid ways of engaging pupils, provided they are done in a way that stimulates cognitive activity.

The way forward

I make a plea here for the Four Capacities to be treated in the aspirational spirit of the 2004 document, *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive 2004). As such they represent a clear set of educational goals that provide a starting point for dialogue about purposes and values. From exploration of purposes and values, it is possible to derive content (including skills development programmes) and methods that are fit for purpose – in other words to foster the development of the Four Capacities.

We should be asking, for example, what sort of content is necessary for someone to become a successful learner, a responsible citizen, etc.? By linking content to purposes, it is possible to include knowledge that is traditionally not considered in schools, for example the development of information literacy. Such an approach allows us to pose questions about method. This includes

pedagogy; defining active learning and developing strategies for this are logical next steps. Method also includes a reflective evaluation of barriers to innovation that exist within the school, including questions about the structure of the school day. In many schools the current timetable is a starting point for the development of CfE, or is simply not questioned; and yet, pedagogies that are active are often difficult to establish when lessons are only 50 minutes in length. Such an approach raises questions about whether the current organisation of the secondary timetable into discrete subjects is the best approach, rather than seeing it as a default starting position. One might then decide, for example, that defragmenting the curriculum for S1-3 (establishing subjects like integrated science and social studies) is a worthwhile enterprise. One might decide that the development of an underpinning philosophy for this phase that is not exam driven is a worth pursuing.

Strategies for the successful management of change

This section of the booklet addresses the issue of successful change. What are the ingredients of a successful policy to implement new policy? The Highland Council publication, *Making a difference in your school: some perspectives from the research on curriculum change, Unit A2, Promoting and Sustaining Change* (Priestley 2007), provides a more detailed overview of this topic. It draws upon key literature and engages the reader through a set of reflective questions. This section has the more modest goal of giving an overview of the features that have emerged from evaluations of successful Highland Council initiatives to engage with AifL and CfE. These include the FLAT project and the teacher networking that took place through the five secondary subject ASGs.

Generative dialogue is a feature of both the FLAT project and the ASGs that has been clearly identified to be a major driver in successful engagement with new policy. This goes beyond the simple dissemination of content, as has often been the case with cascade models of CPD. Generative dialogue involves a process of sense-making – crucial in encouraging teachers to engage with policy – as well as providing the forum for the generation of new ideas. It provides opportunities to engage with the ‘big ideas’, for example the four Highland principles, and to move beyond the unreflective adoption of strategies. It is worth emphasising that CfE does not represent – nor should it – a preset package of strategies or a teacher proof curriculum. It requires intellectual engagement by professional teachers, and a prerequisite for this is generative dialogue. Such dialogue may occur within and without school, and opportunities should be provided for both.

The benefits of formally setting aside time and resourcing in school for collaboration and dialogue and to disseminate ideas have been highlighted by many of the schools participating in the FLAT project. Peer observation of teaching, and subsequent discussion about this have provided valuable

opportunities for staff to discuss issues and improve their practice. Such practice increased collegiality, enhanced staff confidence and enthusiasm, provided the forum to discuss learning and teaching, and generally made teachers feel good about their practice. This seems to be a deficit factor for many of the participating teachers in the ASGs, for example one teacher reporting on the lack of permeation of the Highland model into her school. All of the teachers interviewed in respect of the ASGs suggested that addressing this issue of time and resourcing would significantly enhance their efforts in engaging with AifL and CfE. A related point concerns horizontal structures in schools (or their lack). Emerging evidence suggests that lecturers in colleges of further education are finding engagement with CfE to be easier than their secondary school colleagues. The existence of horizontal professional relations (e.g. lecturers from different departments working together to deliver modules) appears to be a significant factor here. Such relationships are often weak or absent in secondary schools, where professional relationships are either confined to departments, or vertical in nature (i.e. with senior managers)

The establishment of external networks to enable teachers to meet colleagues from other schools, including different sectors, is important in providing new ideas and avoiding innovation becoming inward looking. Such networks may often meet in a semi-formal manner to discuss professional issues such as pedagogy. They require a clear and coherent structure and agenda for these meetings with a clearly identifiable leader and clear channels of communication. Such channels could include email circulation lists and web-based discussion forums (with repositories for resources), although these latter appear to be dependent on a critical mass of users for their ongoing success. Leadership of teacher networks is an important factor in sustaining engagement within the networks. Evidence from the ASGs suggests that there is a need for leaders to combine enthusiasm with the credibility gained from experience and status. Opportunities for dialogue with colleagues from other schools has been widely viewed as instrumental to the success of the FLaT project, in both providing a source of ideas and giving teachers the confidence to try new approaches.

There is a need for access to research findings and other cognitive resources along with time and space to consider how to relate them to one's own situation. These have been provided by the researchers attached to the ASGs, through authority-wide CPD organised by the Education Officer, and via the case studies that emerged from the FLaT project and the previous phase of the ASGs. These resources highlighted the opportunities and challenges encountered by teachers within the Highland region, and were suggested as a powerful means of encouraging other teachers to introduce changes to their practice. Schools should consider designating a person to collate and make available such resources. Linked to this *teachers need to be given time and resources to engage in action research/professional enquiry and reflect on developing their*

practice as part of their CPD. It was noted that many teachers found the structure and focus provided by the ASGs to be useful for this purpose.

Senior management support for experimentation and a culture of professional inquiry is a crucial factor in encouraging innovation. Some of the ASG teachers commented favourably on supportive and facilitative management that provided official permission and encouragement for experimentation with the Highland model. It is interesting to speculate as to how such support might extend to protecting teachers from the potentially risky and harmful demands of external agendas, for example the drive to improve attainment statistics as a measure of school quality.

Small changes can change the classroom climate which then may lead to bigger changes. In many cases, the apparent success of small scale experimentation, underpinned by the 'big ideas' provided by the Highland model, provided further impetus to experiment and innovate.

Listening to pupils and taking account of their perspectives on their education is not only a requirement of legislation, but has proven to be extremely valuable in guiding the development that has taken place within the FLaT project schools.

The role of a designated Highland Development Officer has a major source of impetus for the Highland model. This person played a key role in generating and sharing knowledge about what people were trying in their schools and bringing people together to share ideas and experiences.

[Re]Conceptualising innovation and change

The final section of the booklet draws upon some well established social theory (Archer 1995) to provide a framework for understanding innovation and change. It thus provides a process for engaging with CfE. This process has been formulated through discussions with some of the senior managers of schools participating in the FLaT project and has supported the successful engagement strategies in some of the schools. The process addresses what has widely been seen in the research literature (e.g. Elmore 2004; Supovitz 2008) as an implementation gap as policy translates to practice without a great deal of consideration in many cases of the big ideas that might underpin the policy.



"It doesn't seem to fit very well."

"No matter. The principal said we had no choice."

The cartoon (above) from Jamie MacKenzie's excellent website, <http://fno.org>, presents a cynical – but extremely valid – view of how much educational change is approached. And yet the cartoon also suggests 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; then result is a policy that does not work nor meet its original aspirations, becoming mutated as it translates into practice. For example, CfE has the potential to be a huge opportunity to transform Scotland's schools; or it may disappear without a trace as its main concepts come into conflict with entrenched practices in schools.

An alternative view is to view policies like CfE as sets of ideas or resources, 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 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 (intellectual capital) and is enhanced by collaboration (social capital); 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, augmented by the influx of new ideas from external sources.
- The opportunities and constraints provided by social structures. Social structures are basically the properties of relationships between individuals and groups, for example 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.

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 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 listed in the *Making a difference in your school: some perspectives from the research on curriculum change* booklet. The rest of this paper outlines some reflective generic questions to guide the process of capacity building. These are listed under three headings: *What should the policy achieve?*; *Mapping the Terrain for Change*; and *Building Capacity*.

What should the policy achieve?

In terms of the cartoon on page one, the first two questions are about analysing the item that is being stuffed into the turkey. 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 means. What is meant by the Four Capacities? How might they translate into classroom activity? What methods are best suited to achieve the Four Capacities? What content? What is the balance between curriculum content, assessment and pedagogy? How might CfE provide a framework to support pupil learning?

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. The four Highland principles are a good starting point for this at a classroom level (participation, engagement, dialogue and thinking). However we can go deeper still. The Four Capacities take us a step further, by confronting us with the question of what a young person leaving school should be like. What

sort of skills and attributes should they possess? Information literacy? Decision-making capacities? The ability to think critically and creatively? An alternative view (Biesta 2008) identifies three broad and overlapping purposes of education: qualification; socialisation; and subjectification (or individual growth). To question the relationship and balance between these is a very valid exercise; in recent years the first purpose has become very important, especially in terms of how schooling is evaluated by HMIE and Education Authorities quality improvement systems; however, in placing this qualification emphasis on schooling, have we lost sight of other purposes of education?

Mapping the Terrain for Change

Once we have worked out what the policy is and what we wish to achieve from it, the next step is to analyse the context (the territory), 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?
- *Individuals.* What new skills are required to engage with the change? Which individuals are well placed to play major roles in engaging with the change?

Moreover such analysis may be usefully undertaken at various levels of the system; for example, such mapping could usefully occur within the Education Authority.

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 change?*** 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 the Outcomes and Experiences, but these should

remain as slaves rather than masters of the main purposes of the change; otherwise they have too much potential to distort and derail the initiative. There has to be a suitable balance between top-down management and bottom-up innovation. People should be encouraged to think differently. And, as stressed earlier in this paper, 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 change and the context for change.

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