Making a difference in your school: some perspectives from the research on curriculum change

Dr Mark Priestley
The Stirling Institute of Education
University of Stirling

Introduction

This booklet has been written to accompany the CPD Reflection Pack for Highland Schools. The booklet is split into four sections, each of which can be read on its own if necessary; however each section will be clearer if read in combination with the other sections. The sections are as follows:

- A rationale for changing the way we currently do things. As with much in the field of education, such a position is inevitably subjective and reflects my views about schooling.
- A short theoretical overview of some of the principles that underpin change in social settings. Again, this section reflects my own philosophical position, but is well grounded in relevant social theory.
- An overview of research findings in relation to promoting and sustaining successful change in schools, including summary of the key factors that schools could account for when planning change.
- Guidance for additional reading

Sections 1-3 are accompanied by reflective questions, based loosely upon a set of generic 'change' questions developed by House and McQuillan (1998).

It has been said that educational research papers are written in arcane and abstract theoretical language and do not take account of the 'gritty materialities' (Apple 2000) found in the real world, and encountered daily by practitioners in schools. There may be an element of truth in this, but there are also many valid and useful insights to be gained from education research, and practice that is uninformed by such insights is impoverished as a result. This booklet advocates a 'cognitive resources' (Hammersley 2002) approach to using the findings of research; such a view suggests that such findings should inform rather than dictate practice, and that there is a considerable role for the professional judgement of informed practitioners in deciding the form that change should take. I therefore seek in the booklet to provide practical insights from the research on curriculum change that may be used in schools and departments to promote sustainable and long-lasting change.

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Rationale for change

A Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE) comes at a crucial time for Scotland's schools. It follows hard on the heels of the largely successful *Assessment is for Learning* (AifL) and signals a change in direction in terms of the priorities and structures of school education; this in my view offers a major opportunity for improving the educational prospects and life chances of many of our young people. The identification of the four purposes of the 3-18 curriculum (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors) is radical in that these state the key underlying aims of education. This potentially highlights the processes of learning rather than, as has become all too common, the specification of narrow outcomes of attainment.

Do we need more change? The last fifteen years has after all been characterised by what Levin (1998) described as an epidemic of change. The results of much of this have been felt in schools across Scotland, as work has intensified, as paperwork and bureaucracy have increased, and as teachers have felt increasingly disempowered and professionally marginalised. Surely more change is the last thing that teachers and pupils need now?

I would argue against such a view; I suggest that change is needed and that AifL and ACfE are welcome developments. Much of the change of the last fifteen years, while well-intentioned, has been limited in its achievement of espoused goals and subject to often unhelpful unintended consequences. As vividly described by the American educator Larry Cuban, centrally initiated reform can often be seen in terms of a hurricane at sea:

> 'Hurricane winds sweep across the sea tossing up twenty foot waves; a fathom below the surface turbulent waters swirl while on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm' (Cuban, 1984, p. 2).

Cuban's metaphor is apt in many ways. Teachers are familiar with the stress and extra workload created by reform initiatives. They can point to the changes in paperwork and procedures that have resulted from them. But can they place their hands on their hearts and say that learning in our classrooms has improved or even fundamentally changed as a result of the many reform initiatives? Indeed in many senses, measures to raise standards through accountability (such as performance indicators and the comparison of the results of testing) have been retrogressive, encouraging a content-driven teach-to-the-test approach and reducing the amount of time available for learning. This has been termed Campbell's Law:

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'the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor' (Macdonald 2000).

It is a placing of the assessment cart before the educational horse, and a mixing-up of the ends and means of education; thus what should be a *means* of gauging pupil progress (i.e. summative assessment) becomes the main *end* of education, and teaching methodologies are distorted as a result of this.

It is in the light of failed and distorted reform initiatives that I welcome AifL and ACfE. Firstly I welcome the emphasis on pupil learning. There is clearly a danger that strategies such as the formative assessment methods promoted as part of AifL become ends in their own right. A superficial adoption of a set of strategies such as traffic lighting will not on its own improve pupil learning, especially if their adoption is done only to satisfy a checklist of current educational practice and because of a perception that it will keep the HMIe wolf from the door. Pupil learning will be improved through a reflective analysis of the reasons why the strategies are important, and how they may benefit learners. The four purposes of ACfE are a helpful starting point here. Asking how a particular strategy helps to promote these is useful when planning a programme of teaching. At the level of day-to-day practice, the following principles may also be useful points of reference.

- **Engagement.** To what extent do the strategies encourage young people, especially reluctant learners, to engage with the lesson material, activities and concepts?
- **Participation.** What opportunities exist for pupils to actively participate? To make decisions about their own learning that in turn help make it relevant to them? Are there opportunities for young people to practise citizenship in the classroom?
- **Dialogue.** It is widely accepted that people learn through dialogue with other learners, and yet in many classrooms dialogue is limited. We learn through listening to the ideas of others, and through having to defend our own ideas, which are modified in the process. Such learning is often deeper than the learning that takes place through memorization. According to Howard Gardner (1992) a great deal of classroom activity is ineffective because it does not challenge deeper underlying intuitive notions of what is right (even where these are plainly incorrect); learners quickly forget their 'official' school learning once the exam is past, falling back on more atavistic explanations.
- **Thinking.** How does the activity promote the development of creative and critical thinking? What opportunities are there for problem-solving?

Attention to these principles will facilitate the development of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

Lastly I welcome the recognition that 'schools change reforms as much as reforms change schools' (Cuban 1998: 455). ACfE is radical and exciting in that it seeks to build upon the success of AifL, heralding a move towards, what Reeves (2006: 3) has referred to as the 'new professionalism'. This 'reasserts the case for a greater measure of professional autonomy in the form of distributed or shared leadership'; in short greater engagement in decision-making at a school and departmental level by the people who make change happen, 'the practitioners who are the foot-soldiers of every reform aimed at improving student outcomes' (Cuban 1998: 459). The AifL pilot formative assessment project is thoroughly discussed and evaluated elsewhere (e.g. Hayward *et al* 2004; Hallam *et al* 2004). I do not intend to discuss the implementation methodology here in detail; it suffices to say that it was widely welcomed by participating teachers, and enjoyed a wide degree of success.

The ingredients of this, and other key factors that have been shown to encourage the development of new curriculum initiatives, will be discussed in later in this booklet. I will also address some of the structural and cultural barriers to change that arise in the Scottish context. First, I will develop a short overview of a theoretical perspective that seeks to explain why change does or does not occur. In other words why do many reforms last only 'as long as warm breath on a cold window' (Cuban 1998)?

Reflective questions
- What is satisfactory about existing practice?
- In what areas are changes desirable?
- Will changes make a difference in the long run:
    - to pupil learning?
    - to teachers' work?

The nature of change

The critical realist social theory of Margaret Archer and Roy Bhaskar (e.g. Archer 1988; Archer 1995; Bhaskar 1998) provides a helpful theoretical framework for understanding how and why change occurs (or fails to occur) in social settings. Schools are good examples of dynamic social systems. The form that change takes is heavily influenced by the motives and actions of individuals and groups within the

school. For example a group of staff who are sympathetic to pupil-centred approaches to teaching may smooth the introduction of an initiative such as the AifL formative assessment. Nevertheless causal factors that originate from outside the school also play a part in determining how and why change happens; in the case of AifL, the SEED policy and associated resources may encourage take up of the policy, whereas an overcrowded exam syllabus may act to slow down its introduction.

There are several key features to this view of change that I shall follow Bhaskar (1998) in calling the *Transformational Model of Social Action*.

- It is the actions of people that lead to social transformation. This is especially the case in respect of those who are closest to the arena where change is enacted.
- Human actions do not occur in a vacuum, but are always preceded by and influenced by the existence of cultures (e.g. existing ideas) and structures (e.g. the self-interest and power that are properties of relationships between individuals and organisations).
- Change may occur when the introduction of new ideas creates dissonance that stimulates socio-cultural interaction. Nevertheless, new ideas may not lead to change; they may be rejected, or modified beyond recognition to fit with existing norms and practices. In short humans mediate change; they act according to existing ways of doing things, and to serve their own personal and professional interests, and may indeed, as reflexive individuals act against their own interests in support of more general goals (for example to protect the interests of pupils).

In more concrete terms, ACfE presents opportunities for radical innovation in schools, but such opportunities may not be realised if there is sufficient tension with existing norms and practices. If new ideas conflict with existing notions of what is right and proper, threaten the self-interest or power of important groups and individuals, or are difficult to operationalise in current settings, then they may be modified beyond recognition or be rejected. Thus innovation in pedagogy may be hindered by the existing need to teach to examination syllabi, or by perceptions that they may lead to negative inspection reports.

Doyle and Ponder (1977) provide a helpful typology to categorise the sorts of things that impact on whether change will be successful or not in schools. Their *Practicality Ethic* suggests that innovations are most likely to be successful in schools if they satisfy three conditions:

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- **Congruence**. The suggested changes are congruent with the values of the practitioners engaged in enacting them. Research suggests that the formative assessment aspect of AifL was largely in tune with the values of the participating teachers (e.g. Hayward *et al* 2004; Hallam *et al* 2004; Priestley and Sime 2005). This occurred despite the fact that many teachers were rightly sceptical in the early days of the project of what they saw as 'yet another change'. There is no reason to think that ACfE will be different once it gets going, although there are clearly caveats here: ACfE is much wider in scope than AifL and many teachers are suspicious of the suggested implications in some areas (e.g. the future role of subjects as a mechanism for organising learning).

- **Instrumentality**. In other words, are the innovations easy to enact? Many worthy innovations over the years have foundered on the rocks of existing school structures; for example time-consuming teaching methodologies are simply not practical when weighed against the constraints of exam syllabi, overcrowded curricula and the structure of the school day. Of course instrumentality can be manufactured; any reforms need to be accompanied by initiatives to create an environment where they will easily bed in. Relevant factors include the production of clear guidance, attention to structural barriers and the allocation of sufficient time for planning.

- **Cost/benefit**. Innovation is more likely to be successful where benefits are perceived to outweigh costs. For example, where reforms are accompanied by high profile accountability systems that discourage risk taking, then practitioners are likely to be cautious in their enactment. The experience of AifL suggests that perceptions of the HMIe reaction to change (whether true or not) were a substantial inhibitor to change. The participative pedagogy that will be promoted as part of ACfE is less likely to become widespread when exams continue to cast such a long shadow over the secondary school curriculum, and where teachers naturally worry about the implications of poor exam results; in such a scenario, the tried and tested approaches to coaching pupils through exams are likely to remain as attractive options.

Given that teachers mediate change in schools, and given that many factors make change problematic, it is helpful to look at what makes change initiatives successful. There is a wealth of worldwide literature on this topic, and the next section will examine some of the main themes that have emerged from this.

Reflective questions
- What structural factors (e.g. timetabling) facilitate change?
- What structural factors inhibit change?

- How does change fit with existing practices and routines?
- Is it harder than current practice? If so, what support can the school provide to make things easier?
- What risks are associated with the change?
- What political forces:
  - favour the innovation?
  - are opposed to it?
- Will the innovation create new political forces either for or against? If so, how can these be dealt with?
  - What motivation is there for teachers and students to attempt such change?
  - With what other values and assumptions in the school culture might the innovation interact and how might it change these?

Research findings; key themes from successful change

As already noted, the traditional and commonly accepted fundamentals of schooling are remarkable for their persistence in the face of widespread efforts to change them. Spillane (1999: 143) describes teaching as a 'technology which appears especially resilient to change', and Cuban (1984: 2) refers to a 'stubborn continuity in the character of instruction'. Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest that education reform over the years has been unsuccessful at changing the grammar of schooling; in other words the fundamental axioms and structures that underpin schooling, for example classrooms, didactic pedagogies and the familiar technologies of teaching.

Writing in the context of Scotland's 5-14 curriculum guidelines, Swann and Brown have drawn attention to the persistent failure of reform initiatives.

> Past records for curriculum initiatives show extraordinarily modest levels of pedagogical implementation, in part because curriculum innovators have failed to start 'where the teachers are'. The extent to which curriculum initiatives have an impact on teachers' thinking at classroom level is profoundly important given a world-wide trend towards the introduction of national curricula (Swann and Brown 1997: 91).

Eisner (1992) suggests a number of stability factors that explain the apparent lack of change in schooling. These include strongly internalised images of teachers' roles and attachment to familiar routines. According to Eisner, 'teaching is the only profession

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I can think of in which professional socialization begins at age five' (Eisner 1996: 6). Other factors include: the professional isolation of teachers (who often work behind closed doors); poor quality in-service training, often run by people who are removed from the real world of teaching, and who fail to appreciate the complexities of the teaching context; conservative attitudes on the part of parents and pupils; the distance between policymakers and practitioners; and unhelpful top-down notions of change that position teachers as technicians carrying out someone else's policy.

Eisner also identifies the organisation of schools and learning as an issue that prevents change; 'one of the most problematic factors in the organisation of schools is the fact that they are structurally fragmented' (Eisner 1992: 618).

> 'There is no occupation . . in which the workers must change jobs every fifty minutes, move to another location, and work under the direction of another supervisor. Yet this is precisely what we ask of adolescents, hoping, at the same time, to provide them with a coherent educational program' (ibid).

The research evidence suggests that the challenge in successfully enacting a reform is to move beyond the statements of intent typically represented by curriculum documents, to genuine, meaningful, deep-seated and long-lasting change in curriculum provision, pedagogy, the role of the teacher, and the place of the learner. To achieve this, a long term strategy of change management is needed.

The degree of central direction of the curriculum is a relatively recent phenomenon. For instance, the notion of a 'national (or core) curriculum was mooted in the 1930s, but was rejected as smacking of totalitarianism' (Kelly 1990: 25). There existed a large amount of resistance to such centralism from within the teaching profession, and even from within government: typical of this stance is the statement by Sir John Maud, the Permanent Secretary to the English Minister of Education in the immediate post-war years, who said that 'perhaps the most essential freedom of the teacher is to decide what to teach and how to teach it' (quoted in Lawrence 1992: 13). The notion of a National Curriculum existed, but the political will to impose one did not; the assumption that curriculum was best left to schools, and that the 'minister knows nowt' (George Tomlinson, quoted in Lawton 1980: 31) was to remain to a large extent until the 1980s despite the increasing levels of debate upon the issue. Even as late as 1980, English Education Minister Mark Carlisle was able to state that:

> 'it is the individual schools that shape the curriculum for each pupil. Neither the government nor the local authorities should specify in detail what the schools should teach. This is for schools to determine' (quoted by Kelly 1990: 123).

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Within such an environment, many teachers were able to practise the sorts of school-based curriculum development advocated by Lawrence Stenhouse (1975). However from the 1980s, governments have increasingly sought to regulate the school curriculum. England's National Curriculum has been mirrored to some extent in Scotland by 5-14, and schools have been increasingly faced with heavy-duty accountability mechanisms, increased paperwork and more central direction of their work. In effect the pendulum has swung from one end of the spectrum to the other. According to Lieberman and Miller (1999: 59),

> 'policies from the state, the district, and at the school level can indeed encourage change, but they cannot make it happen; only teachers can. If teachers do not understand the change or think it is reasonable, or if they do not have the time to learn and try out new ideas, the change will not happen'.

Recent policies such as AifL have gone some way towards recognizing this dual nature of change, acknowledging that successful initiatives should combine top-down and bottom-up approaches. The remainder of this section will deal in more detail with how this is covered in the literature. It must be stressed that there are no easy recipes or Blue Peter solutions; I would concur with the complexity theorists (e.g. Fullan 1993; Hoban 2002) that social contexts like schools are just too complex, with too many variables and too many unknowns, for anyone to be able to micro-manage change. What follows is a discussion of factors that have helped to make change constructive and sustainable in many authentic contexts, although perhaps not always what was intended by the architects of particular innovations. Instead, I describe processes through which practitioners and policy-makers can engage with the uncertain business of change.

An important aspect of many successful change initiatives is **central impetus**. This is part of the top-down aspect of innovation. There is little doubt that constructive and coherent policy, supported by good resourcing, is an essential ingredient of change. Hayward *et al* (2004) noted the importance of the AifL framework, which provided guidance for schools without being over-prescriptive. Similarly Skilbeck (1998) recognized the value of the support provided by external agencies in the Schools Cultural Studies Project in Northern Ireland (a project to tackle sectarianism). There are a number of caveats to bear in mind here.

Many writers have warned of the power of teachers to subvert policy that is over-prescriptive. For example, Osborn *et al* (1997) documented the creative mediation of national policy in primary schools in England in response to the prescriptive National Curriculum. They noted the tendency of teachers to filter changes through the lenses provided by their own values and existing practices, leading in many ways to a

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major subversion of policy. The point is that, not only is rigidly prescription ineffective in bringing about change, but responses to it can lead to distorted teaching and learning as teachers act creatively to fulfil the demands placed on them by it. It is thus better to provide enabling guidelines, supported by decent resources and good CPD, than a straitjacket that constrains creative action, creates burdens and risks for teachers, and devalues the professionals who have to carry out the reforms.

Related to this are the dangers posed by changing and conflicting policies (Giacquinta 1998). Central policy needs to be coherent and consistent, and too often worthwhile reforms are undermined by contradictions within and between policies. To some extent, at least in perception, this was the case within the AifL formative assessment pilot (Hayward *et al* 2004) where, for example, changes in pedagogy were seen by some teachers as risky in the light of local authority policies on the use of national assessments and the fear of negative HMIe inspections.

Reflective questions
- What conflicting demands are placed on teachers by different national, local and school policies?
- What principles should influence decisions about how to prioritise when policies conflict with one another?

A second key ingredient is the role of **leadership**. Many writers have stressed that this is a vital factor in promoting and sustaining change. Sarason (1990) emphasises the importance of strong leaders. Allen and Glickman (1998) and McLaughlin (1998) point to the role of the head teacher, and similarly Ball (1987) highlights the importance of leaders' commitment to change. Conversely Hayward *et al* (2004) illustrated the difficulties that are caused when strong leadership and support are not present.

So what constitutes an effective leader? Much of the literature points to a collegial figure rather than an authoritarian leader. For instance House and McQuillan (1998) point to vision, an ability to secure funds, commitment and an ability to bring people together (enablement) as hallmarks of a good leader. They suggest that a good leader provides political permission and official sanction for change.

Allen and Glickman (1998) writing about the US League of Professional Schools, point to a number of features of effective school principals:

- The enabler rather than fixer
- Models what's important
- Exhibits trust and respect for teachers
- Encourages involvement from all.

They cite similar research by Blase and Blase (1994), which found that good principals:

- Encouraged authentic collaboration
- Supported experimentation and innovation by teachers.
- Modelled professional behaviour
- Supported shared governance.
- Involved students in governance.

Much of the literature is clear that facilitative leadership (trust, democratic structures, autonomy, innovation, risk taking) contributes to teachers' sense of efficacy and involvement (Blase 1998).

Local authority support for initiatives is also important (e.g. training of teachers and managers, and protection from outside pressures that militate against change). However, there is a balance to be achieved here too. According to Fink and Stoll (1998) bureaucratic school districts are less effective at promoting change. This is a conclusion supported by Sarason (1990).

Reflective questions
- How, and in what contexts can the values associated with the innovation be modelled?
- What messages are being sent to staff from local authority and school managers in relation to the change?
- What leadership practices facilitate change? What leadership practices inhibit it?

Distributed leadership has been shown to be powerful lever to develop innovation. This is basically about designating non-promoted practitioners as leaders of change initiatives. Miles (1998) talks of the importance of empowering teachers. Blase (1998) highlights the importance of teachers' political participation in the decision-making process, a conclusion supported by Smyth *et al* (1998) and Cowley and Williamson

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(1998). Priestley and Sime (2005), in their evaluation of a primary school's AifL project, found that the roles of two teachers, who led the assessment working party, had given real impetus to the project and helped the staff to own the initiative.

Linked to this is **teacher autonomy**. Many successful reforms have succeeded because they engendered professional trust, and a genuine shift in power to those at the chalk face. Ball (1987: 15) sums up the difficulties involved in such ways of working, stating 'in no other organisation are notions of hierarchy and equality, democracy and coercion forced to co-exist in the same close proximity.'

Veteran education change researcher Matthew Miles (1998: 49), talking about a series of research projects in America, states:

> 'We needed to reject the statement that the user is simply engaged in obedient execution of the instructions on a canned product. Rather the person in a school is working in a constructivist, sense-making mode to bring coherence to a new idea/practice, during the process of recasting it and connecting it to the immediate working context'

He calls for the creation of national/large scale projects that are locally grounded, and which draw upon the local expertise of teachers. Others agree. According to Skilbeck (1998: 137) 'the bizarre notion of "teacher proof" curriculum is easily dismissed and in any case is inconsistent with policies designed to establish teaching on the basis of professional knowledge and capability'. House and McQuillan (1998) believe that teacher autonomy is crucial to change, and that mandating makes much change impossible as it limits experimentation and creativity. Allen and Glickman (1998), drawing on their work with the League of Professional Schools, firmly believe that teachers must be at the heart of change. Sarason (1990) calls for a change in the balance of power.

Reflective questions
- Are teaching staff given opportunities to lead changes? How much autonomy do they have?
- How much autonomy and choice do teachers have in relation to this change?
- Where does the school draw the line between over-prescription and allowing teachers to opt out of the change? Who decides?

Of course teacher autonomy is useless, even unhelpful, if teachers continue to work in isolation, unsupported by ideas and resources. In such cases existing, safe practice

is likely to be adhered to, and often uncritically. **Collaboration** is important, creating space and time for generative dialogue and peer observation of teaching (Howes *et al* 2005; Priestley and Sime 2005). Siskin (1994) points to the effectiveness of what she calls 'bonded' departments (with a high degree of collaboration and shared decision-making) in facing challenges in secondary schools.

She also highlights the need to extend networks within school. Howes *et al* (2005) suggest that in many schools (especially large secondary schools) there is a need to weaken institutional boundaries. Siskin's (1994) research found that teachers often have more contact with colleagues in the same subject in other schools, than they do with colleagues in different subjects within their own school. McLaughlin (1998) and Miller (1998) call for the group rather than the individual to become the change agent.

Regular **dialogue** has been shown to reduce professional isolation (Smyth *et al* 1998). Similarly Helsby (1999) stresses the importance of collaboration and dialogue in the development of TVEI in the 1980s. Dialogue strengthens local professional communities, and allows change to take account of the prior experiences and achievements of teachers (Ruddock 1991); when these communities don't exist change is often superficial.

Reflective questions
- Are spaces available for professional dialogue?
- What can the school do to open up such spaces and encourage collaboration and dialogue (e.g. funding, processes)?
- What are the mechanisms for giving feedback to teachers?

House and McQuillan (1998) point to the importance of **links with outside organisations** (for example researchers and development officers). This was a successful feature of AifL (Hayward *et al* 2004). Networking is important, and provides opportunities for CPD and an influx of new ideas (Miller 1998). Outsiders help in this process as they bring a fresh perspective. Howes *et al* (2005: 140) describe how 'teacher learning in such contexts was stimulated by the generation and social interruption of data'; in other words becoming the critical incident that stimulates reflection on practice and potentially changing practices. The US Coalition of Essential Schools is a good example of a network that does this (Allen and Glickman 1998).

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A systematic approach to **professional enquiry** has been shown in much of the research to be effective in inculcating sustainable change. Reeves and Boreham (2006), in their study of organisational learning in a Scottish education authority, articulate clearly how this can take place. Collaboration, dialogue, autonomous decision-making and professional reflection are part of the model for change. Lieberman and Miller (1999: 62) describe how strong professional communities are built when principals and staff enhance their resources by reinforcing a climate of support and respect for teachers' work and by pursuing a continuous cycle of innovation, feedback and redesign in curriculum, instruction and assessment'.

This is not a new approach, as shown by McLaughlin's (1998: 73) discussion of the Rand Change Agent Study in the 1970s:

'local implementation was revealed as a process of mutual adaptation between program or program precepts and local realities. Sometimes this adaptation meant dilution or derailment of project objectives. Other times these local responses provided important local knowledge and modification'.

This of course requires a willingness by policy-makers to accept that local adaptation (Priestley 2005) may lead to unexpected outcomes. The key to successful change is enabling teacher engagement with and reflection on the innovation in question. According to House and McQuillan (1998: 206),

'(teachers') beliefs and attitudes about teaching are deeply affected when they experience and reflect upon their own growth: that is, when they come to understand the impact of an innovation through their own lived experience. In turn, teachers lend a critical degree of meaning and viability to an innovation through their own efforts to make sense of it'.

Such reflection is needed if reculturing (Fullan 1993) to is accompany a change initiative. Sarason (1990) warns that willlingness to embrace alternatives is a prerequisite of any change. He believes, as does Eisner (1996), that many professionals are trammelled by their professional training; professional socialisation is thus a key factor impeding change, and school cultures reinforce this.

> 'The problem inheres in .. (the) unreflective acceptance of assumptions and axioms that seem so obviously right, natural and proper, that to question them is to question your reality.' This means that solutions to problems are simply variations on past themes (Sarason 1990: 148).

Howes *et al* (2005: 135) see the enabling of space for **personal and group reflection** that are enabled by professional enquiry as being the key to this issue: 'in such a process, taken-for-granted assumptions can be and are recognised and questioned, prejudices subject to reflection, and the value of structures questioned and addressed.'

Good **CPD** is essential to support this process of teacher learning (Spillane 1999; 2002). Again AifL (Hayward *et al* 2004; Hallam *et al* 2004) provides an exemplary model. The AifL formative assessment pilot dispensed with notions of cascade CPD; instead teachers were provided with ideas and encouraged to experiment. Regular recall meetings took place, and dialogue was sustained with colleagues. Funding was linked to the production of action plans and reports. The emphasis was about developing the will and capacity to engage with change (Spillane 1999). It is worth noting that some researchers (e.g. Miles 1998) advocate specific **training in the management of change**. The role of research needs to be taken into account here. Martyn Hammersley (2002) has criticised the tendency of policy-makers to use research findings to justify the imposition of practices on teachers; this is an engineering conception of the role of research, where research findings are often cherry-picked to justify existing policy. Hammersley advocates a **cognitive resources approach to using research** findings, whereby practitioners are aware of findings and use them reflectively to inform practice.

Reflective questions
- Is the change linked to CPD time?
- Is the change being fully disseminated to teachers, including discussion of underpinning rationales?
- Are CPD sessions being followed up? In other words, what mechanisms exist to promote the professional enquiry process (e.g. action planning, reviews, funding)?

- Does CPD draw upon outside perspectives (e.g. teachers at other schools who have already worked on the change)?
- Does CPD include the management of change?
- How are teachers given access to relevant research findings (e.g. a regular newsletter, access to books and journals etc.)?

A final factor concerns **time**. There are two dimensions to this:

- Ensuring that change initiatives are given a suitably long time scale for enactment. This is a common theme in the research. Miles (1998) advocates an evolutionary approach to change, to enable the development of trust and rapport. Fink and Stoll (1998) suggest that change needs to be paced. Other authors call for long time scales (e.g. Sarason 1990; Howes *et al* 2005). This allows teachers to think big, but start small.
- Providing sufficient time for professional dialogue during the enactment phase. Many worthy reforms have fallen by the wayside because time has not been made available for dialogue and planning. Most teachers will remember being inspired at a course, only to see it gradually slip from their consciousness as the realities of school impinged on their time. Smyth *et al* (1998) see time to plan as a crucial factor in ensuring the success of any reform.

Both issues are important, and policy-makers need to resist the demands of those who see education reform in terms of instant results and quick fix solutions (for example recent responses to ACfE in the media).

Reflective questions
- Has sufficient time been set aside for development?
- Is time available for ongoing evaluation?
- Is time available to teachers to engage in development and evaluation?
- Does the change project cover a sufficiently long time scale?

The above discussion largely concerns the factors that schools can and must take into account when dealing with change. Clearly there are also messages here for policy makers, both at a national and local authority level. Good resourcing is vital, especially to create the time and space for dialogue and collaboration. There should be professional trust in teachers, who after all constitute a highly educated professional workforce. Most important, there needs to be systematic consideration given to the

sorts of structural factors that constrain practice. These include the national assessment system, especially that which governs external exams, and accountability mechanisms. Such features of the education system potentially constrain change, and should be carefully examined for the sorts of contradictions between and within policies that have been discussed previously.

Nevertheless there is considerable scope for school managers and teachers to plan for sustainable change. I hope that the information and reflective questions provided in this booklet provide a starting point for practitioners who are embarking on the processes of change that will inevitably come as schools engage with *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

Further reading

The above discussion of research findings has necessarily only dipped into the huge volume of research that is available on this subject. It does, I hope, give a flavour of the main themes that have emerged from this literature. Much of the research is American; journals such as *Teachers College Record* and the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* contain much scholarly work on education change. Of particular note is the *International Handbook of Educational Change, Part One* (Hargreaves *et al* 1998), which contains a thorough overview of much of the work in this field by some key authors. British education is less well served in this respect. The work of Gill Helsby (Helsby 1999; Helsby and McCullough 1997) provides some useful perspectives into the ways in which schools and teachers reacted to a centrally imposed and prescriptive curriculum (the National Curriculum), as well as exploring earlier responses to a more teacher-centred approach (TVEI). The latter title is an edited collection containing works by various authors. Jean Ruddock's (1991) book, *Innovation and Change* gives a good overview of the subject. The *Curriculum Journal* is a good source of research articles.

Scotland is even less well served, although recent work by Jenny Reeves (e.g. Reeves and Forde 2004; Reeves 2006, Reeves and Boreham 2006) is changing this situation. There is also emerging literature about the change processes involved with AifL (e.g. Hallam *et al* 2004; Hayward *et al* 2004; Hayward and Hedges 2005; Hutchinson and Hayward 2005; Priestley and Sime 2005).

Any discussion of education change would not be complete without mention of Michael Fullan, whose books have achieved a popular cult status. In my view, these books (e.g. 1993) provide many useful insights into the change processes that occur in schools,

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but tend to concentrate on aspirational slogans, rather than practical strategies for managing change. I believe that the literature that forms the focus of this paper is thus more useful to teachers and managers seeking to ensure that the enactment of a particular reform is constructive and sustained.

Readers should refer to the references below for further information about additional reading.

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