MAKING THE MOST OF THE *CURRICULUM REVIEW*: SOME REFLECTIONS ON SUPPORTING AND SUSTAINING CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The 2004 review of Scotland's school curriculum offers the potential for radical change in the education of young people, placing a greater emphasis than at present on learners and learning. If realised, it presents greater scope for innovative teaching, flexibility in provision, less overcrowding and a potential challenge to the entrenched subject paradigm in secondary education. This paper does not offer a critique of or even a detailed commentary on the Curriculum Review, the principles of which I broadly support. Instead it is concerned with the issue of sustainability. Despite the good intentions inherent in the review, fundamental curriculum change in Scotland may be no more than a chimera, blocked by the structural conservatism of the schooling system. The paper draws together some of the recent theoretical and empirical literature on curriculum change, examining some of the issues that may impact on this latest attempt to reform the curriculum and suggesting a model for change that may facilitate long lasting and deeply rooted change.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade or so we have witnessed what Levin (1998) has described as an epidemic of education reform. Such trends are worldwide and are certainly not limited to Scotland. Much of this reform has been characterised by a top-down, centre-periphery model of dissemination, described by Goodson (2003; *xiii*) as 'brutal restructuring' delivered in 'ignorance or defiance of teachers' beliefs and missions'. This style of policy dissemination has been criticised for creating upheaval in the short term while tending to fail to inculcate long-term change, for example as eloquently encapsulated by Larry Cuban's hurricane metaphor:

> 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: 2).

Recent debate in the field of curriculum studies suggests that centrally initiated curriculum change is unlikely to be successful unless it actively engages the 'practitioners who are the foot-soldiers of every reform aimed at improving student outcomes' (Cuban, 1998: 459). Moreover the form which innovation takes in practice is to a large extent dependent on the attitudes and values of these practitioners, notably teachers. A particularly problematic feature of the centre-periphery strategy is that it tends to disregard the power that teachers have to mediate change. External reform initiatives develop in a dialectical fashion (Helsby and McCulloch, 1997), reflecting the dynamic two-way relationship between the initiative in question, and the context for enactment, including the local change agents. In effect, 'schools change reforms as much as reforms change schools' (Cuban, 1998: 455).

There are encouraging signs of late that policymakers are heeding such messages. In Scotland the ongoing *Assessment is for Learning* initiative (Hallam, *et al.,* 2004; Hayward, *et al.,* 2004) has engaged with research in this respect, and the recent *Curriculum Review* (SEED, 2004a; SEED, 2004b) seems to promise an approach to curriculum development that more actively engages practitioners. This paper briefly examines the approaches that have traditionally driven centrally initiated curriculum

change, and the issues and problems inherent in these. It develops a theoretical model for understanding the processes of change within schools, drawing upon literature from the field of curriculum change. The model focuses upon a range of factors that are involved in successful change and considers the contextual inhibitors that may act as barriers to enactment. In the context of the *Curriculum Review*, it provides a framework that may be used by policy-makers planning, supporting and sustaining curricular or pedagogic innovation.

THE *CURRICULUM REVIEW*: THE WAY FORWARD?

The *Curriculum Review* may herald a bright new dawn for Scotland's schools, for teachers, and most importantly for the pupils for whom school education exists. The review talks of potentially radical changes, including:

- the removal of overcrowding to enable the promotion of active learning and the 'time and space for innovative and creative teaching and learning' (SEED, 2004a);

- a defragmentation of learning and the facilitation of connections between different curricular areas (especially in the secondary curriculum);

- a reiteration of the *Assessment is for Learning* message that assessment should be an integral part of any learning process with a primary function of promoting learning; it should not be solely an end point towards which all learning is teleologically directed.

The Review is an admirable statement of intent. However, if it is not to become another relic littering the scrap yard of failed curriculum initiatives, care and attention need to be given to the strategies for ensuring its successful enactment. The Scottish Executive needs look no further than its own positive experience at inculcating successful change; according to the Minister, Peter Peacock, 'the *Assessment is for Learning* programme has been very successful in developing teachers' skills in assessing children's learning and using the assessment process to help learning' (SEED, 2004b). The promotion of coordinated projects should be an inherent part of the curriculum innovation strategy. Projects supported and funded by the centre, but driven by empowered teachers with the necessary space for manoeuvre, will allow for the genuine development and enactment of a worthwhile school curriculum to meet the needs of learners. Such projects will allow for practitioners to develop teaching and learning in ways that reflect the shared values of the education system and that fully account for differences in local context.

It is worth reflecting for a few moments on the future legacy of the *Curriculum Review*. Larry Cuban (1998) provides a useful framework for this. Will the new curriculum be *effective*? Cuban reminds us that the measure of many reforms is calculated according to potentially spurious measures such as test results and comparisons of data between countries. Put baldly, how will Scotland fare on the international league tables? I suggest that the use of such a measure will change little, and continue the practices of assessment-dominated learning, to the detriment of education. Or will be new curriculum be *popular*? Popularity (or populism?) has driven policy in the past, often in the absence of supporting research evidence. The measures proposed in the new curriculum may be unpopular in the short term, as they represent a challenge to existing norms and cultures; it is important that short term fluctuations in popularity do not derail the proposed reforms. Alternatively, will the reforms be *faithful* to the designs of the architects? Cuban suggests that truly successful reforms often fail to conform to a 'fidelity standard'. In the case of the review, I suggest that we should be ready to accept that enactment may go in new, and even unexpected, directions that 'diverge considerably from what policymakers, administrators and researchers would prize' (Cuban 1998: 459). We

need to reconfigure teachers as professionals, rather than seeing them as technicians, as 'unselfconscious classroom drones' (Ball, 2001: 226), simply delivering a prescribed curriculum in an uncritical manner, and impoverishing teaching and learning as a result.

Cuban suggests two additional (or alternative) standards for judging the success of an innovation. The first of these is *adaptiveness*; put simply, to what extent does an innovation allow practitioners scope for 'inventiveness (and) active problem solving' (Cuban, 1998: 459)? In Cuban's view, this criterion is an essential precondition for a fifth measure: *longevity*. In schools, 'where so many innovations last no longer than warm breath on a cold window' (*op cit*: 460), the true criterion of success is the durability of the reform. I add another criterion to Cuban's five: that of *embeddedness*. This concerns the extent to which an innovation genuinely impacts upon practice, thus closing the gap between the described and enacted curricula. I suggest that the challenge facing Scotland is to move beyond the statement of intent represented by the *Curriculum Review*, 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 model presented in this paper, provides a heuristic tool for managing such a process of change.

CURRICULUM CHANGE

Broadly speaking there are three main models for managing curricular and/or pedagogic innovation, where the initial impetus is provided by central policy-makers.

- *The compliance model:* policymakers formulate a prescriptive set of curriculum statements, perhaps following consultation, and mandate schools to implement the changes, often with the backing of specific legislation and enforced by inspection. The 1988 National Curriculum in England and Wales is an example of this sort of curriculum reform (e.g. Kelly, 1990; Lawton, 1996).

- *The guidance model:* typically a set of broad, non-mandatory guidelines emerges following a period of consultation; these are then implemented (often gradually) in schools. Such guidelines often have a strong normative element, and while not compulsory, are often difficult for schools to ignore, especially in the face of the potential for negative inspection reports. The Scottish *5–14* framework fits this model (e.g. Simpson and Goulder, 1997; Swann and Brown, 1997).

- *The adaptation model:* school-based curriculum development emerges from a source of central impetus (e.g. ideas, funding). Typically schools are provided with a loose framework and encouraged to experiment. Enactment may be monitored through the life of the projects (action plans, evaluation reports etc.). Examples of this type of development include TVEI (e.g. Yeomans, 1996) and the recent *Assessment is for Learning* programme in Scotland (e.g. Hallam, *et al.,* 2004; Hayward, *et al.,* 2004).

Compliance

The National Curriculum in England and Wales was introduced by Kenneth Baker's Education Reform Act of 1988. It was hailed by its protagonists as being radical and visionary. The Baker speech of June 1987 to the *Society of Education Officers*, for example, referred to the radical reforms that may ''be unwelcome to those who value what is traditional and familiar' (Lawton and Chitty, 1988: 2) and it is clear that the initiative represented a new direction in many respects: certainly in terms of its objectives-based, linear structure it was the first of its kind. However critics

preferred terms such as 'untried' rather than 'radical', pointing to the lack of any sort of empirical or research basis for the curriculum. Kelly (1990: 66) in particular was overtly critical of the whole approach, alleging that 'the National Curriculum has sprung fully formed from the head of Mr. Baker, like the goddess Athene from the head of Zeus'.

The problems faced by teachers implementing this curriculum were legion, and have been well documented (e.g. Kelly, 1990; Lawton, 1996); they led to ultimately to the changes heralded by the Dearing review. The Final Report stated that:

> the work on slimming down the statutory content of the programmes of study, must, however, include teachers and headteachers so that the new curricula can be grounded in the realities of the classroom and school planning and management (Dearing, 1994: 39).

This realization reflected the realities of five years of implementation; despite the prescriptive nature of the curricular straitjacket, and the huge upheavals caused by its introduction, subsequent research has made clear that the calm of the ocean floor remained in many respects unruffled (Cuban, 1984), and that, in short, it was business as usual in many classrooms. Osborn, *et al*. (1997: 57) point to various teacher responses to the National Curriculum, including outright resistance, and what they term creative mediation; the tendency for teachers to 'filter change through their own values, which are in turn influenced by gender, social class, previous experience in the classroom, professional training and other historical and biographical factors'. They identify several types of creative mediation, including:

- protective mediation: protecting children from what teachers see as the worst effects of the National Curriculum (e.g. not referring to SATs but integrating them into teaching);

- conspiratorial mediation: where teachers work together to subvert the curriculum via selective implementation and/or strategic compliance and impression management (for OFSTED).

According to Bowe and Ball (1992) such tendencies increase in departments with high capacity (e.g. teacher experience of responding to change), high commitment (e.g. firmly held subject paradigms) and a history of curriculum innovation.

The experience of prescription afforded by the national curriculum thus suggests that such a model is ineffective. It is likely that it neither produces the reforms envisaged by policy-makers, as judged by the criteria of 'fidelity' (Cuban, 1998) to the original specifications, nor does it encourage meaningful and directed change in practice; conversely it seems to encourage reaction, often determined by prior practice and expectations.

Guidance

5–14 was initiated in the period following the launch of England's National Curriculum, and in many ways lessons were learned from the experience south of the border. The issue of the curriculum guidelines was preceded by a period of consultation. The guidelines are not compulsory, although as previously stated have been adopted in most schools and have tended to become the norm, encouraged by inspections and local authority policy. Initial evaluation was encouraging, suggesting that teachers welcomed the new curriculum (Goulder, *et al.,* 1994; Harlen and Malcolm, 1994), but subsequent research has suggested that the curriculum has been less than popular with many teachers, slow in implementation and only partially internalised by practitioners (Simpson and Goulder, 1997; Swann and Brown, 1997). By 2002 (eight years after their introduction, and following a revision in 2000), 'not all primary and secondary schools… [had]… fully or even partially implemented them' (SEED, 2002a).

Lack of progress, often attributed to a lack of support and additional guidance, has been reported by many teachers, especially in secondary schools. For example, the following three comments were elicited from secondary teachers in response to the SEED *Social Subjects Assessment of Achievement* questionnaire (SEED, 2002b):

> Pressures from other parts of the curriculum and lack of assessment exemplification have meant that the desired progress in the development of 5-14 courses has not been achieved.

> The 5–14 National Guidelines are not adequate. They are far too vague. There needs to be a national assessment bank of items which would bring consistency across social subjects.

> I cannot help thinking that some national support materials for ES 5–14 would have been at least as effective as use of valuable resources. Most departments still have to re-invent the wheel with little local authority support – after more than a decade[2], no one has produced national assessment items or exemplar materials, which is a disgrace.

According to the review of the questionnaire responses, 'fully a third of the S2 teachers, averaged over the three topics in this outcome, admitted to feeling 'not at all well prepared' to teach the topics' (*ibid*: paragraph 6.3.5).

My recent school-based research on *5–14*[1] supports these conclusions (Priestley 2003). One finding concerns strategic compliance with the curriculum, what Sparkes (cited in John 2002) has referred to as 'strategic rhetoric'. This mirrors the conspiratorial mediation noted by Osborn, *et al*. (1997) in England; it refers to the tendency for teachers to adapt the new curriculum in the light of their prior practice, and is cynically exemplified by one teacher participating in the research:

> I think and you'll find it with most Scottish (subject deleted) departments that what we've done is adapted units of work we've been doing for years, you know. I mean these things are tried and tested and I don't have any qualms about doing that (social subjects teacher, Hillview High School, 2003).

It is possible to conclude from this type of evidence that the guidance model also fails to encourage sustained change in schools. The compliance model provides impetus, but may engender various forms of resistance. On the other hand the guidance model may encourage resistance, while at the same time failing to provide the impetus conceivably provided by the compliance model. In both cases, a sense of ownership of the curriculum is likely to be missing. Paechter (1995: 50) suggests that: 'teachers are more likely to be committed to an innovation if they are able to recognise their contribution to its inception'. This is clearly missing in *5–14*, which like its counterpart in England is still symptomatic of the thinking that is currently underpinning much global curriculum development (Helsby and McCulloch, 1997; Priestley, 2002). It is a technical-rational framework, concerned with the specification of content and objectives. Despite its 'voluntarist' nature, it is a top-down, centre-periphery reform (Swann and Brown, 1997), which tends to assume that such specification is unproblematic.

Adaptation

Such assumptions ignore the power that teachers have to mediate change. Teachers may largely ignore a reform, especially one that is not compulsory. Or they may, as we have seen, even work actively to subvert it.

The research evidence from the last decade or so strongly suggests that major curriculum reform should conform more strongly to the adaptation model. This model accepts that the initial impetus for reform, such as guidelines and cognitive resources based on research (Hammersley, 2002), may come from central sources
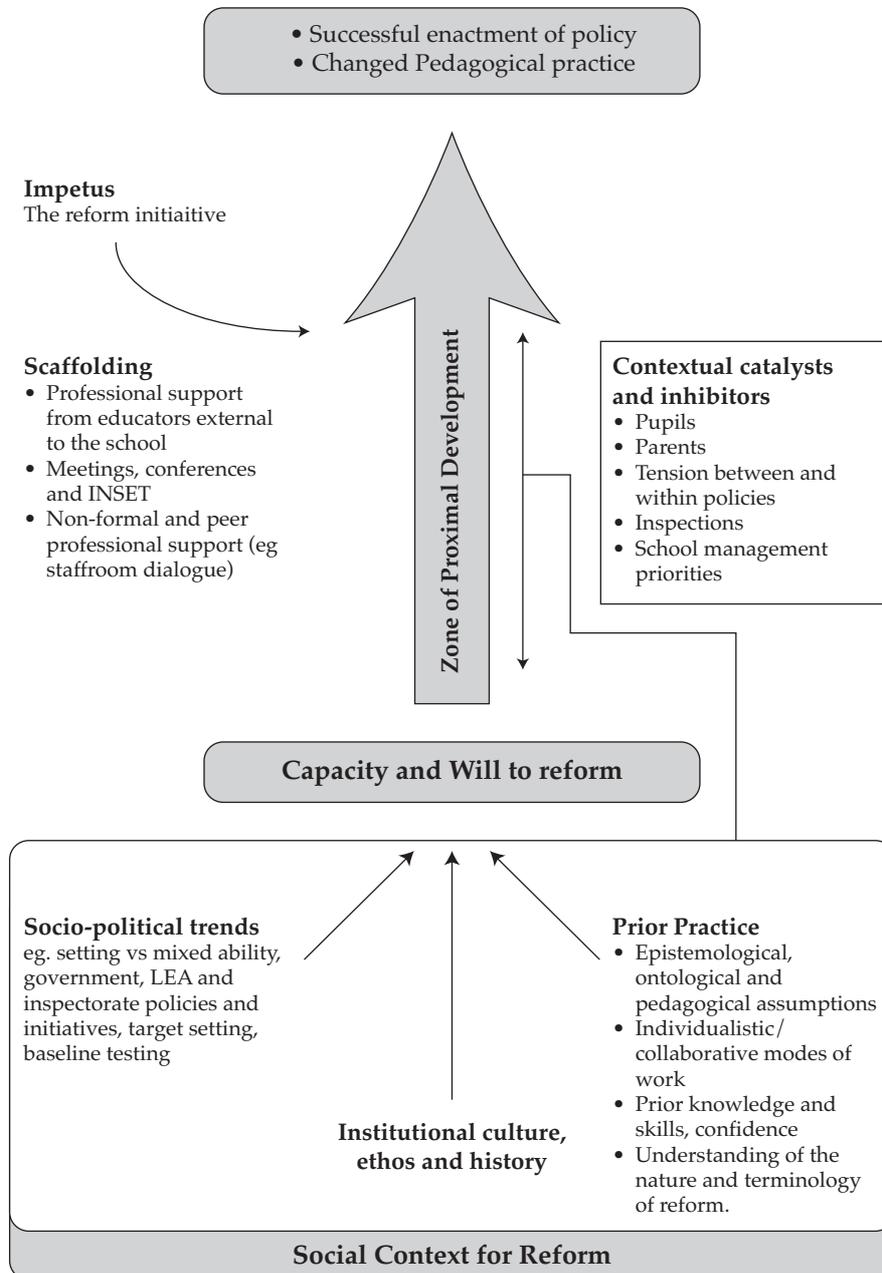
such as government, but that 'reform is ultimately futile if teachers do not understand and own the reform in question' (Hayward, *et al.*, 2004: 413). Much recent research and theorizing supports the notion that curriculum planners must take account of and encourage teacher agency, if they wish to see successful and long lasting change. Boreham's (2004) work on organizational learning suggests that successful change is more likely if spaces are opened for dialogue and the creation of shared meaning, if power relations are reconstituted in favour of the people enacting the change, and if cultural tools (e.g. policy documents produced by practitioners) are available to guide the process. The recent *Assessment is for Learning* project in Scotland provides another good example of this process of practitioner agency (Hallam, *et al.,* 2004; Hayward, *et al.,* 2004). This approach combined impetus in the form of government policy guidance with support in the form of resources and time. Most importantly it succeeded in fully engaging teachers in the aims and strategies associated with the project. Many writers (e.g. Goodson, 1988; Hargreaves, 1997) have commented upon the need to take into account local factors or the institutional logics of any reform (Young, 1998): these include the life histories, attitudes and preconceptions of teachers and even students, all of which have the potential to affect the manner in which the curriculum is taught and learned. Practitioners are in a unique position to do this, possessing expert knowledge of contexts that policy-makers may lack. As Hargreaves (1997) has noted, teachers don't merely deliver; they develop, define and interpret.

This is not to suggest that official curricula do not impact on the practices of teachers and students; nor does it imply that impetus in the form of central guidance is unnecessary. Helsby and McCulloch (1997) have written of the two-way nature of the dynamic relationship between the official curriculum and teachers' practice. Appreciation of this dialectical relationship helps us to comprehend how the shared epistemological traditions referred to by Esland (1971) and Boreham (2004), or 'social epistemologies', in the words of Popkewitz (1997), develop in schools and thus affect how curricula are actually enacted. Nevertheless policy intentions, the intrinsic logics (Young 1998), of a curriculum innovation represent merely one of a multiplicity of factors that affect teachers' 'zones of enactment' (Spillane, 1999). Cowley and Williamson (1998), in comparing implementation of English and Australian national/state curricula, list a number of factors that determine the success or otherwise of a curriculum development. They include: teacher choice and autonomy in directing the innovation; the existence of new resources; the availability of professional development for teachers; appropriate support from school management and regional advisory staff; and time and space for teachers to reflect upon the changes. Perhaps most importantly, the existence of a genuinely collaborative atmosphere and dialogue between professionals (both within and without the school) seems to be a crucial factor in facilitating reform (Spillane, 1999 – see the 6 Ps model for further details). However dialogue alone is not enough. 'Dialogue is both constitutive of social order and potentially disintegrative' (Boreham, 2004: 321); it can be destructive if it lacks direction, and thus there is a need for central impetus and the creation of spaces and tools to encourage constructive dialogue. The following model for change (see figure 1) shows how this might take place.

A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

In Gadamerian terms, educational change involves not just the present horizon, but also the past horizon, namely the past trajectories that have brought the teachers to where they are (Gadamer, 1977). The model focuses on a range of factors that are involved in successful change and considers the contextual inhibitors that may act as barriers to enactment. It provides a framework which may be used by policy-makers planning curriculum or pedagogical innovation. The model has several key features:

Figure 1: A Model For Understanding Curriculum Change

- Successful enactment of policy
- Changed Pedagogical practice

Impetus
The reform initiaitive

Scaffolding
- Professional support from educators external to the school
- Meetings, conferences and INSET
- Non-formal and peer professional support (eg staffroom dialogue)

Zone of Proximal Development

Contextual catalysts and inhibitors
- Pupils
- Parents
- Tension between and within policies
- Inspections
- School management priorities

Capacity and Will to reform

Socio-political trends
eg. setting vs mixed ability, government, LEA and inspectorate policies and initiatives, target setting, baseline testing

Prior Practice
- Epistemological, ontological and pedagogical assumptions
- Individualistic/ collaborative modes of work
- Prior knowledge and skills, confidence
- Understanding of the nature and terminology of reform.

Institutional culture, ethos and history

Social Context for Reform

Within this model, those responsible for enacting change (e.g. teachers) are constructed as learners, rather than as passive conduits of someone else's policy. The use of the terms *scaffolding* and *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) is redolent of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theories of learning, including the notion that learners need support in order that they may negotiate the ZPD inherent in any new learning situation. The model also emphasises the social/dialogic nature of learning, in the Vygotskian tradition.

The model is predicated around a need to understand the social context within which reform takes root and within which teachers operate. Olson (2002) stresses that attempts to reform teaching must take account of this social context, and indeed, in many cases an attempt at innovation must seek to either modify that social context, or even to construct a new social ground for reform. According to Olson, teacher tradition is a powerful and often shared experience, and not one to be overcome easily. As Popkewitz reminds us, educational discourses are, like all discourses, 'historically constructed over time, and through a weaving of multiple historical trajectories' (Popkewitz, 1997: 149), and once established are difficult to challenge. The development of spaces in which new and shared forms of knowledge can develop (Boreham, 2004) is an important feature of the model. Social context includes prior practice, which is bound up with questions of epistemology and ontology (for instance teacher identity), institutional culture and the socio-political climate within which teaching takes place.

The *will* and *capacity* to reform (Spillane, 1999) are important determinants of whether reform will be successfully enacted. Whether these exist in good measure will depend largely on the totality of past horizons represented by the social context, and by how these interact with the present horizon represented by the innovation and its support mechanisms.

Motivation (especially that which is intrinsic) is an important factor in any change; according to Hargreaves (1994), 'without desire teaching becomes arid and empty. It loses meaning'. Reform that is disconnected from the social world of the teacher is unlikely to inspire motivation. Capacity is equally important; teachers must clearly understand reform and have the prerequisite skills to put it into place, if they are to enact it successfully. Doyle and Ponder (1977) provide a helpful typology for understanding why teachers may choose to enact a reform. Their 'practicality ethic' is determined by three factors: instrumentality (i.e. ease of use); congruence (does it fit with their values?); and cost (how risky is the innovation?). Congruence fits into the social context for reform within the model; cost and instrumentality relate more closely to the contextual catalysts and inhibitors and the impetus/scaffolding inherent in any reform process. All three factors will inevitably impact on the will and capacity to reform.

The model takes account of the contextual catalysts and inhibitors, which emerge from the social context. These factors may promote successful enactment, or act as a barrier to success. Although they are contextual factors, they are identified separately from the social context because of the explicit effect that they have on the enactment of reform, and because they are potentially subject to external influence, operating thus as levers to change the overall context. A good example of this emerged in the *Assessment is for Learning* pilot (Hayward, *et al.,* 2004). Some of the teachers taking part in the pilot expressed anxiety about their proposed changes falling foul of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), clearly identifying the organisation as inhibiting change in assessment practice. However it is easy to see how HMIE could become a catalyst to promote the same changes; positive public statements and encouragement of innovation in inspection reports could achieve this. Clearly HMIE is readily identifiable as emerging from this context for reform as a potential catalyst or inhibitor. Moreover, its status as either a catalyst or an inhibitor is modifiable, and its influence feeds back into the overall social context,

influencing for example the confidence of teachers. Therefore contextual catalysts and inhibitors are shown on the model as specific factors both emerging from and feeding back into the social context, and impacting in clearly identifiable ways on the enactment of the reform in question.

The nature of the impetus for innovation (i.e. the reform policy) and the scaffolding (i.e. the support mechanisms) are crucial to determining whether the innovation will be enacted successfully. A clear understanding of the social context and especially of the specific catalysts and inhibitors will enable the architects of any innovation to facilitate enactment, both at the policy design phase, and through providing appropriate scaffolding through the enactment phase. This could, for example, be through the establishment and maintenance of the sorts of professional peer support mechanisms identified by Spillane (1999).

Scotland's 2004 *Curriculum Review* presents many opportunities. It comes at a time when school management is being reformed following the McCrone agreement; new, flatter structures of school organisation potentially create an environment where curriculum innovation and especially new forms of provision may thrive. It is a timely opportunity for policymakers to drive forward the participation, social justice and inclusion agendas in new and meaningful ways that benefit learners in our schools. Moreover, following the successful *Assessment is for Learning* programme, there is emerging evidence within Scotland of the effectiveness of teachers in (and enthusiasm) taking forward a policy issue in interesting ways suited to local contexts. There is a balance to find between central impetus and support on the one hand, and professional trust in practitioners on the other. The first part of this equation may be easier than the second, as it is largely a case of resourcing. The second part requires a leap of faith by policymakers, by the local authorities and by the inspectorate. This has to be facilitated by an acceptance that 'strategies that depend on the teacher's ability to adapt and implement reform invite the teacher's engagement rather than resistance' (Johns, 2002: 382) and that 'the potency of external incentives and opportunities for learning in changing the core of practice is dependent in great part on teachers' zones of enactment' (Spillane, 1999: 170).

NOTES

1. This is my ongoing doctoral research project, *The Social Subjects in 5–14: the processes of change*. The project has taken the form of a series of linked case studies, comprising semi-structured interviews with teachers and managers in 4 secondary schools. The generation and analysis of data is ongoing, and will be more fully reported elsewhere. Please note that Hillview High School is a pseudonym.
2. These have subsequently been produced (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2003).

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