

## BORDER ZONES AND SYSTEMS THINKING: ARTICULATION AND AMBIVALENCE IN S1 AND S2

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### SYNOPSIS

In Scotland we are beginning to see the articulation of the various levels of education into a national framework, from pre-school to post-school. This framework, I argue, is being driven largely by efficiency criteria and by concerns about the fragmenting effects of an increasingly consumerist culture. The primary-secondary 'divide' represents but one contentious area in this re-structuring of education. This is not to say, however, that the government's concerns about S1 and S2 are driven by the efficiency criterion alone: there have indeed been important educational arguments put forward for reform at this stage, but I argue that these educational arguments alone do not suffice as the reason for the government's current concerns about the primary-S1 'divide'. This particular divide is but one of a number which are in the process of being articulated or bridged. In considering it I shall refer to the recent document *Achieving Success in S1/S2*. Using this document as a reference point, I seek to prompt further debate about the re-structuring of Scottish education into an integrated framework, and about the cultural, economic and intellectual reasons which may lie behind it.

### INTRODUCTION

Education is caught within conflicting cultural and economic forces. Contemporary culture is increasingly typified by difference, by the weakening of traditional classifications of time and space, and by the fragmentation of many kinds of relationships. On the other hand, the quest for efficiency in the welfare state has led to greater control and standardization over the products and processes of education, at all levels. Education is caught between the forces of fragmentation in the culture and the centralising tendencies of government. In order to illustrate this, I consider two recent educational policy papers from the SOEID, namely *Achieving Success in S1/S2* and *Setting Targets: raising standards in school*, with the emphasis very much on the former. On the face of it, *Achieving Success in S1/S2* is a somewhat unremarkable document when compared to *Learning and Teaching in the First and Second Year of the Scottish Secondary School* (SED, 1986); and when placed alongside *Education 10-14* (Consultative Committee on the Curriculum, 1986) it pales into insignificance. One of its themes is 'targets', and this allows the logical connection to be made between it and the government's more recent and controversial *Setting Targets: raising standards in schools*, published in 1998. I intend to elaborate upon the correspondence between the two documents, and I shall relate both of them to contemporary cultural and economic trends. It is not the purpose here to pass judgement on these policies — there has been no shortage of opinion on them<sup>1</sup> — rather it is to argue that, like all contemporary policy documents, they are signs of the times (Hartley, 1994), and I shall attempt to make some of these signs explicit.<sup>2</sup>

### CONTEMPORARY CULTURE: THE DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL AND THE RISE OF UNCERTAINTY

It is said that we live in an age of uncertainty (Melucci, 1996). In a sense this is a trite statement: all times have been uncertain, and chance and fate can always make their mark when we least expect it. But what sets current uncertainties apart from

others is that our scientific endeavours over the past two hundred years have had the intention of removing uncertainty. Science, after all, is there to explain and to predict. The disciplines which the Enlightenment spawned were meant to produce progress, based on reason. Life could be made better. Paradoxically, life now seems more uncertain than it has ever been.

Put simply, our relationships to work, to others and to ourselves are becoming ever more tenuous and temporary. For example, employment contracts become more short-term, and the notion of a lifelong career is fast disappearing. Relationships to families and to partners now fracture more easily, and social roles are becoming more blurred and uncertain. So the bonds which bind us to jobs and to each other are weakening. We trust each other less and less: witness the burgeoning market in personal, car and burglar alarms; and in this age of uncertainty the insurance industry is booming. Even our relationship with ourselves is rendered uncertain, for this is the age of the self, of reflection, of identity-seeking. But ironically, one of the few things which most of us agree on is that we should all celebrate and reveal our individualism, our difference from each other. Indeed, a number of important sociological titles have caught the mood: *The Society of Individuals* (Elias, 1991); *Alone Again* (Bauman, 1994); *Life in Fragments* (Bauman, 1995).

Society is dividing in another way. For the socially 'included', their concerns turn on which style to choose: to eat meat, or not to; to smoke, or not to; to go for a full-cholesterol breakfast, or not to; to support the environmentalists, or the asset-strippers; and so on. For the poor, their concern is survival, not style. There are growing inequalities of wealth. In 1992, the least wealthy 50 per cent owned only six per cent of the wealth in the United Kingdom, down from 12 per cent in 1976. The most wealthy 10 per cent in 1976 owned 57 per cent of the wealth, but this rose to 65 per cent in 1992 (Central Statistical Office, 1995: Table 5.23). At least one in three children in Scotland, and a higher proportion of the under-fives, is growing up in a household where income support is the main source of income, giving Scotland one of the highest child-poverty rates in the European Union (Long *et al.*, 1996; McCormick and Leicester, 1998). But 'poverty' has now almost been written out of the social policy lexicon: in its stead is its euphemism: 'social exclusion' (Scottish Office, 1998a).

How has this state of affairs come about? Why are we losing a sense of the social, and why do so many of us suffer so-called identity-crises? That this should be so seems strange, for are we not now supposed to belong to the global village, or to the global society? I suggest two general answers. The first is to do with one dimension of contemporary capitalism: consumption. By the mid-1960s, it became clear to the more far-sighted corporations that there was a limit to the number of material goods which consumers would buy. This was by no means a new problem. Earlier, it had been solved by what the Americans called the 'customization' of products: that is, the production of a range of options for a given product. Even so, business knew that eventually the market had to be expanded in order to fuel further demand. Gradually, therefore, we began to see the commodification of culture: of entertainment, sport, tourism, fashion; and, waiting in the wings, of education.

Just as the shelf-life of material products was limited, so too is that of cultural products. In order to encourage us to change these cultural products, advertisers constantly seek to unsituate us, to render our identities as problematic, so that we will go out and re-make or re-symbolise ourselves and create a new identity. Reflection is a big issue these days, from the reflective practitioner to the reflective consumer. Thus it is that superficiality, ephemerality, difference and existential uncertainty are increasingly the marks of contemporary society, or at least for that sector of society who can afford to consume. So the message is this: if you are uncertain about yourself, then you have a range of options. Go to the shopping

mall rather than to the church; or seek solace—and pay for it—in the burgeoning therapy industry; or embrace ‘new age’ solutions: cults, astrology and religious fundamentalism.

As if these cultural uncertainties and social divisions were not enough, within the universities there is no less certainty. Nearly all knowledge codes and canons are, so to say, under fire (Lyotard, 1984). The disciplinary certainties and the subject identities which most of us were educated into are weakening rapidly. New subjects form and reform, and there is fierce resistance to these changes. Academics have a strong subject identity, and they fight to retain it. What we can say with some degree of assurance is that the old curricular structures are being reformed (Bernstein, 1996). The so-called ‘purity’ of knowledge categories is now less the case than when the Munn Report was submitted in 1977. Inter-disciplinarity is a sign of an age when some classifications and boundaries are being breached. Of course, the postmodernist epistemological critique will not easily be resolved, and already we can see rearguard re-affirmations of old ‘basics’ and curricular certainties.

#### CONTEMPORARY ECONOMICS: GLOBALIZATION, COMPETITION AND THE QUEST FOR EFFICIENCY

I have just dealt with two of the reasons for the fracturing of the social: first, a consuming individualism, with its celebration of difference; and second, the sequestration of the poor from the cultural and economic life of the society. I turn now to another reason for a weakening of the social: competitive individualism.

Western governments seem much concerned with global competition. Mrs Thatcher’s great admirer, President Reagan, even declared America to be a *Nation at Risk*. Part of the reason for this was thought to be because education was ‘failing to deliver’. And so began the effective schools movement. What also began has come to be termed the ‘quasi-market’ in the welfare state. Schools were to be given a dose of Darwinism. More was to be done with less. Professionals were not to be trusted; consumers were to be privileged. The message for the public sector was in the private sector: compete for resources; pander to the consumer, who is always right.

To summarise: first, consumerism is the new fundamentalism. It is associated with deep social divisions between the consumers and the poor; it celebrates individualizing rituals rather than collective rituals. There is less trust among us. There is deep ambivalence about the status of morals and knowledge in society (Bauman, 1994; 1995). The classifications of social roles and organisations are weakening, and new networks—both virtual and real—are in the making. Second, global competition is intensifying. Action is said to be needed urgently. Targets must be set. Quality must be controlled. Costs must be curbed. All of these trends—social exclusion, diminishing levels of trust, uncertainty about morals and knowledge, the re-ordering of old orders, the intensification of competition, heavy-duty managerialism—can be seen in the recent re-structuring of education (Hartley, 1997a). *Achieving Success in S1/S2* and *Setting Targets: raising standards in schools* form part of it.

#### ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY: ARTICULATION AND URGENT ACTION

I argue that what drives contemporary policy are mainly economic considerations: the quest to curb expenditure on the welfare state, and to lessen taxation on both the individual and the corporation, thereby releasing funds for investment and consumption. Let us consider HMSCI Osler’s foreword to *Achieving Success in S1/S2*. His concluding sentence reads: ‘It is essential that the recommended changes in practice are addressed with vigour and urgency at all levels in the education system.’ Here, it seems, is a case of ‘policy hysteria’ (Stronach and MacLure, 1997: 87). The impetus

appears to derive from Scotland's performance in the 'big league' table. The Third International Mathematics and Science Survey comprises a rank-order of some forty-one countries, and how they have performed at different levels in mathematics and science. *Achieving Success* does not spell out the details of Scotland's position; rather it refers to the league-table in more general terms (*paras.* 1.3, 1.4). Some of the details, however, are provided in Table 1.

*Table 1: International Comparisons in Mathematics and Science at the Eighth Grade*

Country	Mathematics		Science	
	Eight Grade		Eight Grade	
	Score	Position	Score	Position
SINGAPORE	643	01	607	01
NETHERLANDS	541	09	560	06
SCOTLAND	498	29	517	26
ENGLAND	506	25	552	10
USA	500	28	534	17

*Source: adapted from United States Department of Education et al., 1996; Keys, W. et al., 1997.*

There is cause for concern. But the interpretation of these data is difficult, and in any case it is not possible to generate a correlation—let alone a causal relationship—between TIMMS scores and economic prosperity. The case of the United States (the world's strongest economy, but rather low in TIMMS rankings) illustrates the point. Equally, the recent economic slippage of high-scoring countries such as Korea and Japan (both within the top five for mathematics and science) does not lend weight to the conclusion that there is a simple relationship between TIMMS scores and an economy's well-being. Nonetheless, the government's response has industrial and at times almost military overtones. Crucial to the plan of the Ministerial Action Group on Standards in Scottish Schools is the 'benchmark' (an industrial term). The benchmark is derived by grouping schools on the basis of shared characteristics (the entitlement to free school meals and the average attainment level between 1995–97) (*paras.* 26 and 27). This is meant to provide a valid index—the *Schools Characteristics Index* (SCI)—so that schools which share a common indicator can compare themselves to the benchmark; and, by implication, they can be compared to each other. Since the publication of the SCI, there has been not a little contention on the matter, so much so that the government has now set aside—for the moment—national targets for primary schools and early secondary schools (Munro, 1998a). It is not that schools appear to be unwilling to set targets, and it is surely proper that they do so, but the ensuing data may be used to compare schools which are not strictly comparable. (On this, it is interesting to note how many 'failing schools' have yet been identified in the leafy suburbs.)

*Setting Targets: raising standards in schools* also reveals the fairly predictable pattern in which Scottish education is managed from the centre. It begins with

reflection and self-audit. Once this introspection is embedded, it is then appropriated and refined by the government for ‘comparative’ (for which read ‘competitive’) purposes. Take teacher appraisal: it began with self-appraisal; and, with the publication of *Raising the Standard* in January, 1997, it developed almost into a merit-pay scheme. Take the process of academic audit in universities: what began as collegial self-evaluation became an external mode of inspection. This does not mean that total control over the process is ceded to the government, for the government assigns local ‘ownership’ (surely appropriate in a consumer society) to teachers and schools. But this is misleading, for the criteria are very much the government’s; only the tactics are for the school’s ownership and discretion. Now the pattern repeats itself in *Setting Targets*. First there is whole-school self-evaluation:

Scottish schools have welcomed the framework of national performance indicators in ‘How Good is Our School?’, published by HMI Audit Unit in 1996, and their use is becoming embedded in the development planning process.

Now comes the refinement:

The time is therefore right to introduce greater rigour in school self-evaluation in the form of quantitative targets. This need is underlined in HMI’s national report ‘Standards and Quality in Scottish Schools’ (SOEID, 1996). Targets set under the framework set out in this document will provide that rigorous underpinning to the process of self-evaluation (*para. 8*).

The word ‘therefore’ in the quotation does not logically follow from what precedes it. Moreover, it goes on to ‘sell’ the reform by the insertion of the now-familiar concept of ‘ownership’:

The school has the key role in the decision-making process. This ensures that there is local ownership and commitment and that all relevant factors are taken into account when the school is setting its targets.

But what does ownership refer to? Not all decisions fall to the school: the schools did not choose the target-setting in this way; they did not decide to use the criterion of free meals as a ‘characteristic’ of the school, and nor did they decide to have the SCI in the first place. A further aspect of the managerial model is that a systems approach is implied. That is to say, there is a compatibility which is either implied or insisted upon within all ‘levels’ (pupil, teacher, school, parents, EA and government) of the ‘system’. This cascading ‘consensus’ is not an agreed consensus: it is imposed by the national guidelines and targets. Indeed, the parallels between the SCI and the beginnings of the IQ-testing movement in the early part of the century are difficult to ignore. Both purport to define objectively a potential for achievement: the IQ test for the pupil, the ‘target’ for the school. Both have as their effect the rank-ordering of difference, and the naming of weakness. Both have spurious validity. Both attribute the cause of the failure or success to the individual or to the individual school. Both were the construction of a politically dominant group for the application to a perceived lower order.

Research evidence does not justify between-school competition. The most recent British evidence shows that it does not raise examination standards. In a large-scale study of 319 secondary schools in 89 areas, Rosalind Levacic *et al.* (1998) concluded that there was no evidence to confirm the claim that competition improves schools. This is not to say that schools do not make a difference, but it is to suggest that the ‘product’ of the school (say, the examination results) is a *co-production* between the school and the pupil. The schools cannot be blamed for the pupils’ environments. What research evidence *does* say—and has reported consistently for decades—is

that, on average, socio-economic background is by far the most important predictor of academic success. That said, the policy initiative should logically be on attempting to compensate for and/or to alleviate social exclusion (Robinson, 1997), as well as on the internal reform of the school. The government are indeed correct in citing research which points up the *correlation* between the entitlement to free meals and attainment, but we have known this since the educational priority areas were established in the wake of the Plowden Report in 1967. The point being made here is that entitlements to free meals should not be used simply as yet another 'school indicator', but to prompt the question why, in Scotland, is the incidence of free meals so high? In Glasgow, it is forty per cent. And nationally, the inequalities of wealth are widening, as indicated earlier.

The government's preference for targets and competition between schools might be set against its lack of publicity about other 'league tables'. Take, for example, international comparisons which show the percentage of GDP spent on education and defence. As a percentage of GDP, defence expenditure in the UK is 3.5 per cent, giving the UK second place within the OECD. In expenditure on public order and safety, the UK is placed first, at 2.1 per cent of GDP. But in the amount of GDP spent on education, the UK is placed ninth (OECD, 1997).

To summarise: we have said that, on the grounds of *economic* efficiency, government seeks to standardize and to articulate the structures and functions of education. Momentum, progression, coherence and continuity are the principles which are to govern practice. But the government's concern to 'frame' education may also turn on its interpretation of contemporary culture, to which we referred earlier. In the face of confusion and uncertainty within the culture, old certainties and remedies within education are being sought by government, be they 'direct teaching' or a heart-warming 'national' curriculum. And now there seems to be an attempt to re-structure all of the levels of education into a national framework, from pre-school to higher education and beyond. For example, consider the SCCC's proposed articulated curricular structure (SCCC, 1998: Appendix 2); or take Raffe's perceptive analysis of this trend at the post-16 level in Scotland, which reminds us very clearly of what is in the offing:

In 1999 Higher Still will introduce a 'unified curriculum and assessment system' for post-compulsory education below higher education in Scotland [...]. It will incorporate all academic and vocational courses in a single framework of 40-hour units, usually grouped into 160-hour courses, available at five levels. Common principles of curriculum design, assessment and certification will apply throughout the system. The unified system introduced by Higher Still may be further extended by the Scottish post-16 qualifications framework which is currently under discussion and which was endorsed by the Garrick Report [...] (Raffe, 1997:121).

A central issue within the reform of post-16 education is the unification of the academic and the vocational; and the structural, curricular, pedagogical and assessment changes which will enable it. What is being suggested in this paper, however, is that not only is the structure being re-shaped at the post-16 level, it is also being re-shaped *systemically*, as a system in its entirety, from pre-five to post-16. All seems set to be neatly packaged, with a common educational code. There may be a new ECU in the making: an 'educational currency unit' which would facilitate transfer between levels. But this itself would require 'convergence' of modes of assessment and curricular forms throughout the whole 'system'. On this, consider, for example, the National Standard Transfer form advocated in *Improving Achievements in Scottish Schools* (SOEID, 1996); or take the SCCC's (1998: *para.* 6.4) call for a 'straightforward, easily-created and maintained national record of achievement';

or the National Record of Achievement (NRA), which has been used in Scotland for seven years, and is to be superseded by the Progress File, with ‘an emphasis on increased individual ownership and personal responsibility for development through life’ (Scottish Office 1998b: *para.*13.9 ). The most recent and comprehensive view of this theme is contained in the consultation paper *Opportunity Scotland: A Paper on Lifelong Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998b):

***Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework***

14.9 We have welcomed plans by the higher education sector and the SQA to introduce a comprehensive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework which will help all learners, employers and providers to understand the qualifications system. It will show where each qualification is placed in the Framework and how different qualifications relate to each other. It will assist learners to plan progression toward their learning goals. We will join a group to develop the Framework and expect it to be in place by August 1999.

Like nested Russian dolls, there may emerge a complementarity in the forms and functions of the ‘framework’ at all levels. In short, the hitherto disparate educational codes of the nursery school, the primary school, the secondary school, the colleges and the universities all seem set to be shared. Just as Raffé has considered the systemic architecture for post-16, here I offer up for consideration another border-crossing which government needs to bridge: that between the primary school and the secondary school.

Why, now, is there so much concern with S1 and S2—indeed with 10–14 more generally? The most-often declared answer is that there are *pedagogical* concerns raised by the Inspectorate and others (Stark *et al.*, 1997:117; Simpson and Goulder, 1998; SCCC, 1998). (Curiously, however, although *Achieving Success in S1/S2* makes passing mention to research, it is not specified, and there is no list of references). Whilst not denying the importance of these pedagogical concerns, and whilst not denying either that they require to be addressed, I suggest that they should be set within much broader and important cultural and economic changes which are in train. As stated, S1 and S2 are in a ‘border zone’ which separates what hitherto have been discrete types of education, with different educational philosophies and professional cultures. To repeat, I am suggesting that there are two fundamental shifts taking place in contemporary society: first, an unstable and uncertain culture, marked by individual concerns about the self, and by collective concerns about nationhood (and not just in Scotland); and second, an increasingly unstable and competitive global—*not* national—economy. The speed with which these changes have come upon us has been alarming, and their effects on education will be profound. All countries must cope with them, and how they do so will be to some extent be determined by their different cultural milieux and histories. Of concern here is that the government’s reaction to these cultural and economic changes has been somewhat bureaucratic. The government’s solution purports to deal with these cultural and economic shifts through a policy of cultural containment (the emerging, articulated curricular ‘framework’ which calls for continuity, progression, coherence and momentum) and economic efficiency (centrally-defined frameworks are orderly and cheaper).

If it is accepted that a national framework is being constructed, then the government must focus on the borders in order to cross them. Already, much progress has been made: for example, the removal of the binary divide in higher education, and the convergence of the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council into the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Indeed the chief executive of the SQA, Mr Tuck, reportedly suggested in June 1998 that a common qualification for teachers and lecturers would help to ‘break down the cultural divide

between schools and colleges' (Munro, 1998b). But in the secondary schools there are formidable gatekeepers whose pedagogical and curricular preferences will not easily be given up (Simpson and Goulter, 1998).

The foreword to Mr Osler's S1/S2 Report, however, lends weight to the point that we are seeing the emergence of a planned articulation of the various levels of education, from pre-school to post-school. There is, he says, nothing particularly distinctive about the S1/S2 phase:

The report stresses that S1/S2 *should not be regarded as a distinct phase in education* but as an important and integral part of a progressive and continuous experience covering the full 11 years of compulsory school and beyond [italics added; see also *para. 5.2*].

Contrast Mr Osler's foreword to that of *Education 10–14* (CCC, 1986):

Increasing attention has been focused in recent years on the education of the 10–14 age group *because of the recognition that this is a critical stage* in the development of young people [italics added].

At issue here is that the government now regards the whole of schooling and beyond as a kind of seamless process, amenable to common curricular, pedagogical and assessment modes. It is a rationalisation, an articulation, of what it regards as a rather unwieldy arrangement, one which has arisen by incremental policies developed over time. The concept of 'stage' now no longer appears to be admissible in the policy-making forum. Notwithstanding much-vaunted calls for 'choice', the government seems set to curb plurality, not only on the grounds of efficiency, but also to select from the culture what shall count as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the 'framework'. Choice and flexibility seem set to only occur within the framework. Those who are deemed to be outside of the 'frame' have historically been given short shrift. On this, Sir James Robertson's commentary upon officialdom's reaction to R. F. Mackenzie is apposite:

[...] and when an R.F. Mackenzie applies to desperate ills remedies not found in our well-thumbed pharmacopaeia, we number him with the wilder prophets and healers, and treat him accordingly—to our deep discredit (Robertson, 1969:225).

Sir James, of course, was chairman of the Advisory Council on Education in Scotland which produced the far-seeing report *Secondary Education in 1947*. (That report, like *10–14*, which *Achieving Success in S1/S2* curiously omits even to mention, proved to be unacceptable, and thereafter advisory councils were quietly dropped.)

Thus far, I have argued that, in addition to educational concerns about S1 and S2, the very timing of *Achieving Success in S1/S2* can also be explained by the government's quest to structure a streamlined and cheaper national educational structure. I turn now to consider some of the pedagogical, curricular and managerial issues which the Report raises.

#### PEDAGOGY IN S1 AND S2

Scottish teachers have received over the last fifteen years mixed messages about how to teach. *Teaching and Learning in P4 and P7*, published in 1983, lamented the lack of progress towards child-centred education. Shortly after, *Learning and Teaching in the First and Second Year of the Scottish Secondary School* (SED, 1986) reported—somewhat to its dismay—that whole-class teaching was still the most common style (3.28). It added, '[...] it is essential that the learning and teaching process in S1 and S2 should be based on the principle of fostering the ability of pupils

to engage in independent learning' (5.13). Not so now: indeed, the S1/S2 Report's call for more 'direct teaching' (5.4) or for 'much greater emphasis to direct teaching' (5.8) is at one with the notion of 'best practice' pedagogy. All this not only implies a certain elasticity in the pedagogical advice of the Inspectorate to teachers over the years, but it also prompts questions about the reasons for the inconsistency. It may be speculated that the shift is explained on the grounds of efficiency. Similarly, with reference to advice on assessment, the Report argues that the 'fresh start' approach in S1 is no longer tenable, and S1 teachers should rely on the 'robust' information now being generated by 5–14 assessment procedures and national testing. This is a rather different position from that taken in the 1986 report: 'While detailed information from the primary school is often useful in arriving at decisions about suitable starting points, there is a danger of categorizing pupils prematurely' (SED, 1986: *para.5.3*). Within the space of just over ten years, the government's position on pedagogy has shifted considerably.

But there is a certain irony in this. The growth of flexible, service-sector occupations, where workers must expend a good deal of emotional labour, is better prepared for by a pedagogical style which admits collaboration, independence, creativity and less direction. To be sure, the manufacturing base in Scotland is in decline, whilst that based on service industries is rising rapidly. This does not mean that the overall economy is in decline. It is simply an artefact of an economy which is now interlocked globally: Japan and Germany have opted for more manufacturing; the UK and the USA for more services; France is in the middle (Castells, 1996:109). These trends will probably continue. The way forward towards a more productive economy is to recognise these shifts—both cultural and economic—and to incorporate them into education. Erecting an over-arching, bureaucratic, national structure is the educational equivalent of starting up a massive, hierarchically-integrated corporation in the 1950s. The latter have now been long abandoned by successful corporations. Equally, reverting to tried-and-tested (and cheaper) teaching styles may produce a classroom management regime which will be at odds with that of the post-Fordist workplace. *S1/S2* portends a similar mismatch insofar as its recommendations on curriculum are concerned, to which we now turn.

#### CURRICULUM IN S1 AND S2

I have referred to the weakening of knowledge codes. The 'purity' of the subject discipline is no longer what it was, especially in further education and in the 'new' universities where modularised inter-disciplinarity has occurred more readily than in the old universities. The integration of subjects rather than their separation seems to be the trend. This may be a reflection of the fact that cultural categories are weakening, becoming more ambiguous and blurred. But *S1/S2* nails its colours very firmly to the mast of Munn, agreeing (p.12) that '[. . .] the basic unit of study should remain the individual subject' (SOEID, 1997: *para. 5.8*). And, in a puzzling statement, it goes on to say that little since has occurred which would require a revision of this position. Indeed, it goes further and states,

A number of schools have developed integrated or co-ordinated courses at S1 and S2 but evidence [not specified] about the effectiveness of such courses would not justify their widespread introduction across the curriculum (p.12).

The disciplines, it states, 'have stood the test of time' (p.12). To an extent this is true. The schools have hitherto been 'driven' by the curricular structures of the universities, and these have tended to be subject-centred. But this is changing rapidly, for a number of reasons. First, the postmodernist critique of knowledge is occurring within the academy itself, and the purity of the subject is weakening,

especially within the new universities. Secondly, post-16 staying-on is now the preferred option, and the influence of the less subject-centred curricular structure of further education is now to be felt in the school. Indeed, there are some grounds for saying—space does not permit here a full consideration—that the educational code of further education (modularisation, learner-centred pedagogy, diffuse modes of assessment) has begun to insinuate itself below into the educational code of the school, and above into the new universities. Thirdly, and more generally, cultural categories within society are beginning to blur. To suggest that because integrated approaches have not so far worked we should therefore continue to emphasise the separate subjects is to ignore that the world has changed somewhat since 1977 when the Munn Report was published.

#### CONCLUSION

I have suggested that there are contradictory forces in play: a centralising tendency brought about by the need to curb expenditure on education; and, beyond the school, a culture which is in flux, and wherein ever-greater differences are generated, and re-generated. In academe, the traditional curricular structures and research methodologies are deeply disputed. Education policy, however, pays the greater heed to the economic imperative. In the search for efficiency, education is being standardised, formalised, monitored and managed as never before. A vast modernist bureaucratic edifice is in the making, one which seeks to articulate what hitherto have been different educational codes. Rather than recognise plurality and ambivalence in the broader culture, government seems set to frame it. To this end, old bureaucratic forms and Taylorist management styles are being re-worked and given a contemporary gloss. For those who are charged with effecting this lean and streamlined structure, it is at the borders wherein their management difficulties lie. In relation to this, we referred, for example, to Raffe's (1997) comparative analysis of the re-structuring of education at the post-16 level in Scotland.

In this paper the concern has been with another border zone: that between the primary school and the secondary school. *Achievement in S1/S2* is purportedly about standards, and there are undoubtedly educational causes for concern which require to be addressed. But the document can be read in another way. This question can be put: 'When viewed not from within S1 and S2, how and why does this document provide insights into the overall re-structuring of Scottish education?' That is to say, *Achievement in S1/S2* can be viewed *in relation to* other reforms in the system. So the argument here has been concerned with but one border zone and how this relates to others. As the government turns its attention to these other borders—between, say, pre-school and primary school, or between school and further education (as Raffe has analysed), or between further and higher education (as the Garrick Report has referred to), or between community education and post-16 education—then more local difficulties will emerge. But this new system architecture is emerging incrementally, with little public debate about the very totality or wisdom of its endeavour. Public discussion is—and has been—about the parts, not the whole. The architecture of this system is being engineered with much sophistication, with little arrows leading here and there, linking up this and that, revealing coherence.

But whilst it is one thing to plan it all, neatly and rationally, it is quite another for it to take root culturally in the schools and colleges; and beyond. The logic which all of this reveals—planned progression, coherence, linearity, conformity, flow-chart thinking—is one which runs counter to emerging cultural trends which reveal complexity and difference. The government makes much of flexibility and choice, but the very notion of a centrally-structured framework implies an eventual convergence (not a diversity) of the curricular form, of modes of assessment, and, by implication, of pedagogy. Here the parallels with another economically-driven structure—the

European Union—are apposite. Within the real economy, it is the currency which matters, whereas within education it is the credential. The emergence of the euro as a unit of exchange, whose rate is set by a central bank, can be compared to the emergence of the credential framework now being defined centrally within Scotland. But whilst rates of exchange—be they of currency or of credential—are converging, it is by no means clear that either national cultures (within the EU) or sub-cultures (within Scottish education) will converge according to plan. It is this cultural—and, by implication, political—dimension which is largely missing in the re-structuring of Scottish education. Cultural and professional practices cannot simply be ‘read off’ from elaborate organizational structures which are committed to paper. The government’s omission is curious, for the educational landscape is already littered with failed policies which have ignored the cultural conditions in which they are to be implemented (Sarason, 1990). The German social theorist Max Weber warned us about the ‘iron cage of bureaucratic rationality’ which might emerge if we allow the criterion of efficiency to be given free rein within industrial society. The emerging ‘framework’ in Scottish education may well prove him to have been correct.

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, Boyd and Hayward (1998).
2. The interpretation here may be regarded as contentious, depending upon one’s point of view. But in these matters there can be no immaculate perception, no neutrality, and the position taken here is no exception: ‘If the aim of academic writing is to achieve neutrality, then most of the work of the greatest thinkers and educators of the last two thousand years should be dismissed and forgotten.’ (Atkinson, 1998)

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