

## School-Based Curriculum Development in Scotland: Curriculum Policy and Enactment

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### **Abstract**

*Recent worldwide trends in curriculum policy have re-emphasised the role of teachers in school-based curriculum development. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is typical of these trends, stressing that teachers are agents of change. This paper draws upon empirical data to explore school-based curriculum development in two secondary schools within a Scottish local education authority. In the paper we argue that the success or otherwise of curriculum development in schools is dependent upon teachers being able to make sense of often complex and confusing curriculum policy, including the articulation of a clear vision about what such policy means for education within each school.*

### **Key words**

*Curriculum; teachers; schools; curriculum development*

### **Introduction**

Curriculum policy in Scotland has undergone a period of intense change in recent years. Since the publication of *A Curriculum for Excellence* in 2004 (SEED, 2004) by the Curriculum Review Group on behalf of the Scottish Executive, the new Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) has been implemented through a phased process of reform throughout Scotland, culminating with the mandated implementation of changes in 2010-11. CfE is distinctive in relation to other recent Scottish curricular reform in that it emphasises the role of teachers as 'agents of change' (SEED, 2006), thus reaffirming the importance of school-based curriculum development (SBCD) in Scottish schools.

A Scottish local authority, the Highland Council, has been at the forefront of enacting AifL and CfE, developing innovative new models of pedagogy and formative assessment. A major feature of the Highland approach has been the co-construction of new methodologies by groups of teachers, working in collaboration with external agencies including universities (Hayward *et al.*, 2009). For example, the Council has developed and sustained teacher learning communities, which have forged links between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, through the use of CPD and action research (Hayward & Boyd, 2009; Priestley *et al.*, 2011; Wallace & Priestley, in press; Priestley, in press). The recent publication of an integrated Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy encapsulates these developments, the principles of which are widely welcomed by many managers and teachers in the authority.

Despite these positive developments, at both a national and regional level, the implementation of the new curriculum has not been as smooth as hoped for by its architects. This comes as no surprise. The difficulties inherent in the translation of central curriculum policy into practice have been well-documented. For example, research has pointed to the inevitability of teacher mediation of policy (Osborn *et al.*, 1997) – the iterative refraction (Supovitz, 2008) that occurs as policy is translated as it migrates from setting to setting – and the fact that teachers often face difficult contradictions in their work as a result of conflicting policy imperatives (Reeves, 2008). This often produces what Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008) refer to as the ‘implementation gap’ between policy intentions and classroom practice. CfE and the Highland Framework are subject to such issues, and thus offer an interesting new context for re-examining school-based curriculum development, especially given the increasing worldwide popularity of this new curriculum model (Young, 2008).

The research reported in this paper is concerned with teachers’ enactment of CfE in Highland Council schools. In other words, how are schools responding to these changes in curriculum policy? In the paper we explore two contrasting case studies – secondary schools that have approached the enactment of the new curriculum in quite different ways, and with varied results. The paper thus explores the different internal conditions – the institutional logics (Young, 1998) of SBCD – as they impact upon the enactment of CfE in each school. The paper first provides a short overview of the national and regional context within which both schools undertake SBCD, before outlining the empirical research that underpins our conclusions. We then construct a case study of each school, and provide an analysis of the factors that are significant in shaping institutional responses to the new curriculum.

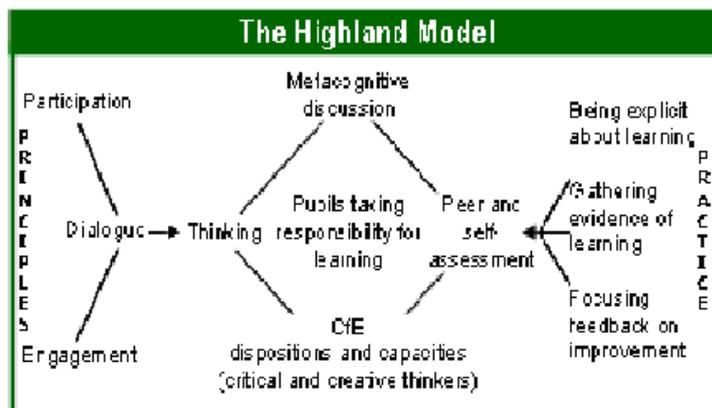
### **Curriculum innovation in Scotland and within The Highland Council**

Since 2002, schools in Scotland have been faced with a series of curricular and pedagogical innovations that arguably present new and radical visions of schooling. CfE has been heralded by its architects as ‘one of the most ambitious programmes of educational change ever undertaken in Scotland’ (Scottish Government, 2008, p.8). It is said to build upon earlier programmes of reform, notably *Assessment is for Learning* (AifL: see, for example, Hayward *et al.*, 2004; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005), which have sought to shift the emphasis in classrooms away from inputs by teachers towards the development of autonomous, self-directed learners. CfE is often claimed to be distinctive, but in fact is typical of much contemporary worldwide curriculum policy, manifesting a set of common trends or features. Some of these have been identified by Michael Young (2009, p.1): ‘the introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks; the shift to learning outcomes; and the move from subject specific to generic curriculum criteria’. In common with developments elsewhere, curricular policy in Scotland explicitly moves away from central prescription of curriculum, towards a model that relies upon the professional capacity of teachers to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of local school communities.

CfE has attracted some criticism for its lack of theoretical rigour (Priestley & Humes, 2010). According to Priestley and Humes, the curriculum combines features from competing curricular models (see also Kelly, 1999). The curriculum was initially framed around a set of purposes, the Four Capacities<sup>1</sup>, which provide a particular starting point for SBCD, based around the development of processes and the specification of content to achieve curricular aims. However, subsequently the curriculum has also been constructed in terms of outcomes<sup>2</sup>, which Priestley and Humes suggest offer an alternative starting point for SBCD, involving an audit approach to curriculum development and arguably encouraging a culture of strategic compliance (Priestley, 2010). Interestingly, our case study schools provide examples of both of the above approaches to SBCD.

Within this national policy landscape, the Highland Council has, since 2002, developed a relatively distinctive model for the enactment of these national policies. A key part of the Highland approach has been an ongoing programme of teacher professional learning (TPL) to foster the development of formative assessment and dialogical pedagogies. Over the course of several years, the council has run or facilitated pedagogy-specific courses, with an emphasis on improving teacher understanding of methodological approaches fit for achieving the purposes framed within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy. During the 2010-11 session, two ongoing initiatives of this type were *Co-operative Learning Academies* and *Tapestry* (a teacher network approach to developing formative assessment). A number of teachers from our case study schools had participated in one or both of these initiatives. Such activity is relatively common within Scottish education authorities. However, Highland is fairly distinctive in that the authority has gradually moved away from the ‘tips for teachers’ approach inherent in their earlier teacher development programmes, which tended to focus on the development of pedagogic techniques (for example, traffic lighting, questioning techniques and feedback through marking), rather than being concerned with broader purposes of education. The subsequent development of a coordinated model and a set of underpinning principles – *participation, dialogue, engagement* and *learning* (see figure 1 below) – has formed the basis of the Highland approach to TPL, and has grounded the subsequent development of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy.

Figure 1: the Highland Model



The Highland model is explicitly underpinned by an assumption that learning episodes should epitomise these principles, leading ultimately to the development of the capacity for critical and creative thinking, and for metacognition. Instead of teachers being told to adopt certain techniques such as those listed above (with the attendant risks that these will be adopted uncritically), such techniques were to be seen as tools that were expressly fit for purpose to achieve specific educational goals.

It would be misleading to suggest that the above-described initiatives have driven change unproblematically in Highland schools. Previous research (e.g. Priestley & Miller, in press) suggests that the penetration of the model into Highland schools has been patchy. Highland schools face a range of common implementation problems that have their roots in the external environment; these include the current situation of financial cuts, confusions emanating from tensions within and between Highland Council policies and a strong attainment agenda which has been argued to exert a strong distorting effect on the translation of curricular aims into practice. Schools have to grapple with the complexities, and at times incoherence, of national curricular policy described above.

### **Research design**

In 2010, a partnership was established between the Highland Council and the University of Stirling. This project has the clear focus of supporting the development of CfE in Highland Council schools, and explicitly builds upon previous work (e.g. Priestley *et al.*, 2011). The project has provided explicit support for curriculum development to a number of different networks of practitioners, including senior managers, and three clusters of associated schools (made up of secondary schools and their feeder primary schools). The project has advocated a particular approach to curriculum development, based upon the following:

- The articulation by practitioners of the big ideas associated with the new curriculum – i.e. a clear expression of curricular purposes.
- The identification of knowledge/content and methods which are fit for purpose.
- The undertaking of a situational analysis – a contextual audit – to identify action required to facilitate the introduction of new approaches (see Priestley, 2010 for further detail).

In parallel to this development work, we undertook research into teachers' enactment of CfE. The research adopted a case study approach, drawing from three types of teacher network within the Highland Council: three clusters of associated Highland schools; secondary teacher subject networks; and Council-wide curriculum development networks.

The research addressed the following research questions:

1. What are stakeholders' understandings of CfE? How does this differ from teachers' existing practices?

2. What changes have emerged as a result of CfE, in relation to whole school practices, school culture and teachers' personal abilities?
3. What factors have enhanced or hindered teachers' implementation of the changes?
4. How do teachers respond to perceived increased levels of professional autonomy and creative freedoms inherent in CfE?

A range of different practitioners participated in the research, including headteachers, teachers, members of secondary subject and curriculum development networks, and education authority staff. All data were collected in 2011. This paper is based on two case studies of secondary schools, offering a comparison of their efforts to enact the new curriculum.

- The first secondary was selected from a cluster of associated schools. Data comprised semi-structured interviews with the headteacher and three volunteer teachers, and notes from meetings attended by the researcher.
- A separate secondary was identified within the authority as a successful 'early adopter' of CfE. Data comprised interview data (headteacher, seven teachers and two pupil focus groups) and documentation from a secondary school. This case was added to the research because the school claimed an approach to SBCD similar to that advocated within the project, and in contrast to the more commonplace audit of outcomes approach.

The ensuing case descriptions focus on teachers' perceptions of the issues impacting upon the enactment of CfE. We acknowledge at the outset that teachers' prior experience, backgrounds and biographies (both personal and professional) impact greatly on their ability to engage with SBCD. However, a detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper; therefore we do not present in-depth biographical information about the individual respondents, nor do we seek to frame our analysis explicitly in terms of specific iterational dimensions of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) experienced by particular respondents (for a discussion of this see Minty & Robinson, forthcoming). Instead we focus more narrowly on the contextual issues within each school – the cultural and structural features of each context that help shape agency. We particularly pinpoint agency in its projective (aspirational) dimension, exploring the views of teachers towards the new curriculum, but also unpack its practical/evaluative (contextual) dimension in each setting (ibid; see also Priestley *et al.*, in press for a further discussion of teacher agency). We thus present a short vignette about each school, followed by a discussion of the perceptions of teachers in relation to SBCD within this context.

While the partnership with the Highland Council is a public matter, we were concerned to protect the schools and individual respondents in research where data might expose them to some risk. Thus the schools are referred to through the use of pseudonyms (Townview High School and Braebank Academy), and the anonymity of the teachers is preserved as far as possible. All data were treated as confidential, being only accessible to the project researchers, and not available to the

Council or other third parties. Respondents maintained the right to withdraw throughout the project. The research complied with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational research Association.

### **Townview High School:**

#### ***School context***

Townview High is the sole secondary school for a medium-sized town and surrounding villages. It has over 800 pupils, and around 60 members of staff. The school has experienced a period of flux in recent years, with several headteachers in quick succession, and inspections that have been critical of poor results, indifferent leadership, and the poor physical state of the buildings. This had contributed to the school's reduced standing in the local community and very low staff morale. The most recent inspection report highlighted improvements under the tenure of a new headteacher, commenting favourably upon on the 'improved school ethos', 'stronger' staff morale and staff teamwork, including in the senior management team, 'growing attention to school self-evaluation and improvement', and 'the strong start made by the new headteacher in leading the school forward'.<sup>3</sup>

At the start of our research morale was clearly improving, as the inspection reports improved in tone as the new management regime started to take effect. Both the current headteacher and her predecessor (an acting head) have worked to rebuild the school's reputation and improve the physical layout of the school, within the resources available. In an interview the head stated the need to bring 'attainment back to the forefront' alongside improving morale, improving timekeeping and appearance, supporting staff and 'getting children to enjoy their education'. She has been heavily involved in promoting the school positively in the community, for example meeting with local press, and working at building a positive relationship with the parent council. The noted improvement in morale may also be partly attributed to a turnover of staff as new teachers replaced longstanding teachers taking retirement. In our research we saw considerable evidence of recent innovation in response to curriculum policy change. This stood in contrast to the moribund nature of the school in recent years, and included initiatives such as the development of teacher learning communities, peer observation of teaching, a focus on pupil feedback and self-assessment, and work around primary/secondary transition alongside local primary schools. However, it is fair to say that resultant changes in practices were either in their early stages or not yet forthcoming at the time of the research.

Nevertheless, morale remained fragile, and we noted a marked decline between the first and second stages of the research (February and June 2011). The school has been deemed to be overstaffed in relation to the school roll and staffing reductions have been made, and are ongoing. New staff members have tended to be appointed on temporary contracts. According to the headteacher, this is making staff 'very nervous', and the threat of transfers, compulsory transfers and redundancies

makes it difficult to 'keep people's momentum [up]'. The head attributed low morale directly to staffing instability and to the poor physical state of the buildings. In the second round of interviews, respondents raised concerns around wider issues relating to pay, conditions and teacher pensions. Moreover, this uncertain climate has developed just as teachers are being expected to implement a complex new national curriculum, placing additional pressures on already over-stretched staff.

### ***Teacher perspectives on developing Curriculum for Excellence***

In addition to the headteacher, we interviewed three teachers in Townview High School. The teachers were selected from a pool of volunteers by the headteacher. Each teacher was interviewed twice over a period of four months. A number of themes emerged.

Teacher attitudes towards CfE in our sample varied considerably. The ideas and philosophy behind CfE were warmly received by interviewees, and were said to tie in with their own personal ideas about education. The headteacher described the Four Capacities as 'a strong hook'; one teacher described them as 'exceptionally important', while another saw them as 'a brilliant idea'. A teacher focused on the constant need for refreshment within teaching, and within her department. She said she was very open to new ideas and new ways of working. She welcomed CfE, in that it encourages teachers to think about and change their practice. She felt teaching would become stagnant without this.

*I think that's good, I think there needs to be a refresh; there are a lot of teachers who have been [here] 30 plus years. [...] You can get stagnant, if you don't change it up, freshen it up. [...] So bringing in and allowing staff to focus on new... maybe just refreshing the way they provide their learning and teaching, is good. (Teacher, Townview)*

The most positive of the three teachers was initially very excited about CfE, feeling that it 'fitted perfectly' with her view that education should look at the child holistically:

*if you think about it beyond the politics, [the] capacities are brilliant. Seeing the kid as a whole and not just as you teaching knowledge in your own subject, it's a brilliant idea'. (Teacher, Townview)*

The teacher who held the most negative views towards the new curriculum saw CfE as 'change for change's sake'. A term used throughout both her interviews was 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it', and it was clear that she saw the former curriculum as being fit for purpose and without need of change. She saw both CfE and the new qualifications framework as 'reinventing the wheel'. She described teachers as 'floundering', trying to get their heads round the changes. She felt that teachers were 'blind-folded', especially in terms of assessment, as they don't know what the ultimate destination is. This was a theme raised by teachers in the majority of schools (both secondary and primary), in which we conducted this research, including those in Braebank.

Although two of our respondents broadly welcomed CfE in principle, there was considerably less

enthusiasm for it in practice. Policymakers were criticised for failing to recognise the complexities involved in its implementation. Teachers held extremely negative views towards national guidance for implementation and the structure of the curriculum. CfE was seen by two of the teachers to represent an existential threat to their school subjects, and there were substantial misconceptions about the curriculum. All the teachers were confused in terms of what was expected of them in relation to the new curriculum, although they did report having a greater sense of clarity by the time of the second interview. At least one teacher admitted to a cynical, strategic compliance with the new policy.

A particular issue involved what was seen as an existential threat to the specialist subjects taught by these teachers. One teacher's understanding of the new curriculum was centred around the idea that it meant the 'grouping together' of subjects, and building relations between them. Whilst she enjoyed the breadth of subject matter that she was able to bring to the inter-disciplinary courses she developed for S1, her focus throughout both interviews was upon preparing students to pass exams for which, she repeatedly said, you 'still need to have your experts'. Such anxieties were mirrored in her views on new, flatter management structures in the school, with faculties replacing discrete subject departments; 'faculties don't work. You have got to have an expert in the department'. She was also of the opinion that pupils like having distinct departments rather than having teachers cross over.

Another teacher raised similar concerns about the threat to her subject posed by CfE, and similarly emphasised the importance of the role of the expert. She referred to the misunderstanding she felt many people had in relation to information technology as a cross curricular theme, and her subject, computing. She felt that computing had suffered as a result of the perception that ICT is a theme running throughout CfE, and as such she suggested there was less recognition of the work done by computing teachers, and an assumption that all teachers would be able to teach ICT. Working in a single teacher department, she was concerned for the stability of her post, should ICT be taught by all teachers.

*Okay fine, put a car out there, put a pupil into that car. Guaranteed they'd probably be able to zoom around in the car park doing something. They may be confident getting behind the wheel, 'well I'll do it, yeah no problem'. Are they competent? Are they effective? No. Very few people will go into a field without sufficient training from educated professionals and do things correctly. (Teacher, Townview)*

The pace and complexity of change was seen by our case study teachers as an issue contributing to staff negativity towards CfE. One teacher described the atmosphere at staff room meetings as 'pissed off'.

*It's in the staff. It's written all over their faces. People standing up and blatantly refusing to take part. .... 'this won't work, I won't do this'. And that's another problem. It's creating a divide in the staff. (Teacher, Townview)*

Such perceptions partly lie in what was seen as the complexity of the new curriculum itself, and in a lack of clarity in its specification. A teacher who was broadly supportive of CfE in principle, described implementing it as a 'struggle'.

*The practice of it is another story. I just think it is a huge amount of work to ask of teachers ... It's like someone asking you to do something but they are not quite sure what they want you to do. Therefore you have to define what they want you to do. (Teacher, Townview)*

She referred to the new reporting system as an example. She and her departmental colleagues had developed a joint understanding as to how to use the terms 'securing', 'developing' and 'consolidating' in their reports. Such discussions were not held in other departments, and as such the whole school reverted to the old system of reporting. She perceived this to be a 'backward' step, given that pupils had been trained in using a three colour system in their self-assessments. She said it 'needs to be made easier to deliver in practice', and blamed the difficulties on bureaucracy, and the vagueness of what teachers were being asked to do; 'it's too abstract, it's not clear cut enough' and is 'wishy washy'. She said teachers should be given more time to bring in the changes, and that they should be given more structure in the curriculum, and that the government should consult with teachers more. Despite this, she believed it has been beneficial in that it has encouraged teachers to reflect on their own practice, which she thinks would not have happened without CfE. Whilst there were some aspects of CfE which she felt were already being done by teachers, it had justified some of her beliefs and 'probably clarified certain things [I] had in my head'.

The CfE materials were considered to contribute to the lack of clarity around the new curriculum. Both the Head and teachers spoke of being overwhelmed by the amount of information contained within the curriculum folders, as explained by this teacher:

*I feel more comfortable [since the first interview] but it's like when something gets handed to you at first - this big folder - you are like [draws in breath], learning outcomes. And then when actually you go into it, nobody has a clue! (Teacher, Townview)*

These teachers tended to locate the blame for this confusion with external agencies, ranging from parents to school inspectors and the government. The Highland Council was seen in particularly negative terms. Part of this emanated from the current situation in respect of budget cuts and possible redundancies. However, the council was also criticised as having created barriers in terms of their lack of structure at a strategic level. The head spoke of her initial confusion at the start of 2010-2011 in terms of trying to implement so many initiatives at once (Stirling/Highland partnership project, CLA, Tapestry, and various school and council working groups).

A teacher echoed these thoughts:

*Since I have arrived there has [sic]been huge changes, we had a temporary Headteacher ... basically pulling the school out the doldrums. We had, obviously, implementation of Curriculum for Excellence; we had the Highland Council policies coming out left, right and centre; HMIE. It's*

*been a lot of change, a lot of admin and it is hard to put the brakes on and say 'I just want to get back to doing my job now'. (Teacher, Townview)*

Whilst council working groups (including subject teacher networks) were seen as a strong driver in many respects, there was a perception that there were too many groups, and that there was often duplication or overlap between them; an issue which was also raised in Braebank. A Townview teacher saw the 'piecemeal' approach as something which further added to disengage staff from the process of implementation.

*There is no umbrella. [...] no central point to refer that to. So all these groups are doing great work, but not matching things up. [...] You can have three groups working on all these areas to develop a strategy for all three, and come out with three completely different documents. [There is] no council wide structure which concerns me quite greatly [...] Staff become discontented. (Teacher, Townview)*

### **Approaches to innovation**

A common theme in this school is related to the point made earlier in the paper that CfE has created multiple, competing starting points for SBCD. In Townview High School, an audit approach to SBCD was clearly evident. SBCD was seen largely by our respondents in terms of the tweaking of content to meet the demands of the curriculum outcomes – the Experiences and Outcomes of CfE. A teacher said that she conducted an audit, matching up 'every single learning outcome to what I did. [...] So I ticked all that'. Her colleague said she did the same, checking off the outcomes that were already covered, and seeing 'what's left over basically, like a jigsaw puzzle, what's left over, what are we not covering, can we cover it, if we can't cover it now can we cover it in the future?' This approach to SBCD can be readily viewed as strategic compliance, rather than a thorough and rigorous engagement with the new curriculum.

*I can cover all of these assessment parts in one, with one project here, one short project. It's not exactly the way they are saying it but you are not saying we can't do it this way. And it meets all the criteria. I can tick all the boxes quite confidently. And with the S1 stuff that I'm doing as well, that is one thing that you can see with Curriculum for Excellence that the rules aren't quite as strict [so] you can tweak them without feeling too guilty. (Teacher, Townview)*

It was evident that this approach to SBCD was also associated with a perception that the enactment of CfE was an incremental matter, and that it was adding to workload and complexity in teachers' work. In the eyes of our respondents, CfE was seen as something additional to implement on top of the already established core business of the school, rather than as a holistic framework within which coherent educational practice might be developed. Many aspects of CfE were thus seen to be in tension with existing practices. In particular, the emphasis on inter-disciplinary approaches jarred with pre-existing notions of essentialist bodies of knowledge encapsulated in subjects, foundationalist views of knowledge and transmission pedagogies. Associated with this were issues of risk. In a context where teachers' work is largely judged by success in rates of examination passes, such change represented a considerable threat. The audit approach overtly sought to maintain the

status quo within CfE where possible.

## **Braebank Academy:**

### ***School context***

Braebank Academy offers in many respects a contrasting picture, however there were many similarities. The school's approach to CfE was more in tune with the holistic SBCD process advocated within the Highland/Stirling project. At the time of the research, staff morale was generally high, and the types of emergent practice are different to those found at Townview High School. One major difference between Braebank and Townview was that Braebank had developed a clear vision of what CfE meant for its programmes, and had made considerable progress in developing these programmes. This was despite considerable baseline similarities between the schools, including indifferent leadership and poor inspection results, followed by the appointment of new Headteachers (although we note that this latter event occurred two years earlier in Braebank, potentially placing it two years ahead of Townview in a cycle of innovation).

Our research in Braebank Academy was conducted in parallel to the main project, and differs in some respects. At Townview, the research was undertaken over an extended period, and involved small numbers of staff. In contrast, at Braebank, the research was a snapshot undertaken in a single visit, and involved pupil focus groups and a larger number of teacher respondents than at Townview.

Braebank Academy serves a small, rural, Highland town and its surrounding villages. It has a roll of over 400 pupils and around 40 teachers. An inspection report from 2004, before the appointment of the current Headteacher, highlighted criticisms of teaching and identified weaknesses in the head's leadership. Despite this, teacher morale was judged to be good, although pupil morale was more mixed. A follow through inspection in 2006 suggested that progress had not been made in all areas identified for improvement and school leadership still needed strengthening. Following the appointment of the current head, a further follow through inspection was conducted in 2007. The report notes that 'the school had made significant changes to its curriculum and timetable structure, which were improving the range of pupils' choices and their experiences'. It also identifies a new Inter-disciplinary Programme for S1 and S2 which was 'effectively improving pupils' skills in working together and using information and communications technology'.<sup>4</sup>

This new course was established as a pilot CfE programme. It is notable for the clarity and coherence of its aims and organising themes (e.g. sustainable development; numeracy) and its clearly articulated links between methods (e.g. cooperative learning) and purposes. Nevertheless, it is evident that the programme remains limited in both its scope and impact, serving only junior pupils in the first two years of school, and being detached from the rest of the subject-based curriculum. It has undergone a number of changes since it was first introduced. Other initiatives ongoing in the school include the John Muir Award introduced in 2008, which introduced an outdoor learning

component. All teachers were trained in cooperative learning in 2008, and the school has made extensive use of Highland Council resources for formative assessment.

A major focus under the current head has been the development of staff collegiality. There is now a fully developed programme of peer observation, and teachers are encouraged to share ideas at in-service training. There has been an emphasis on challenging existing practices through drawing on ideas from outside the school. One key member of staff has been heavily involved leading a subject network, and several teachers have undertaken Chartered Teacher programmes, involving university study at post-graduate level and action research in their own classrooms. A formerly critical member of staff visited schools in Denmark, and has subsequently been a major player in developing Interdisciplinary Programme. The Headteacher has encouraged distributed leadership through the school, for example giving two teachers collaborative responsibility for developing the pilot CfE programme. Moreover, the Headteacher has been active in developing a clear vision for CfE and the methods by which it might be enacted. At times this has been interpreted by staff as being over-directive, but it is clear that this vision has provided the impetus for many of the developments that have occurred in the school. The 2007 inspection report stated that the new headteacher 'had set out a clear strategic vision and had improved systems for communication with staff'. These features were less evident, or (in the case of peer observation) more recently developed at Townview High School.

### ***Teacher perspectives on developing Curriculum for Excellence***

It is interesting to note how the attitudes towards CfE expressed by teachers at Braebank are very similar to those expressed at Townview, although there are some clear differences too. In principle, many welcomed the advent of a curriculum that advocates re-professionalising teachers, and encourages students to become more autonomous in their learning. One teacher explicitly stated that he likes the soft skills and the emphasis on cooperative learning. Another commented on the desirability of making links between subjects, and saw CfE as an opportunity to make such links.

However, as in Townview, concerns were expressed about the new curriculum. In common with their colleagues in Townview, there were comments about what one teacher referred to as the 'astonishing lack of clarity' in the curriculum guidance. For example, a teacher complained that 'we have lots of shiny documents and I'm afraid they don't mean a great deal'. Another teacher stated similar views, calling for the 'provision of resources that are effective and useful'. He blamed external agencies, and lack of communication between them, for the situation. An additional problem, he said, was that 'you can't speak out against it because it's almost like it's the golden calf'.

Teachers also expressed concerns about the lack of strategic direction from the Council.

*It's astonishing that the lack of uniformity in this [unclear words] that you've got umpteen different schools using umpteen different projects .... And I've said this to [the Headteacher], 'why are we producing sixteen different ways of doing this? One will do it'. And then we realise*

*that's inefficient and go back to doing one. That is just bad planning or poor planning. The Scottish Government or the local Highland Council need to take responsibility and say 'look you feed it out'; the structure needs to be centralised. (Teacher, Braebank)*

As at Townview, there were concerns about the threats to the subject, and the prioritising of skills over knowledge. And likewise, teachers expressed concerns about a proliferation in workload, and the complexity of working with multiple change initiatives. One teacher, while welcoming the autonomy inherent in CfE, felt that this would be undermined by increased paperwork.

*Yeah, but there's a paradox there. It depends what you mean more autonomy. Because what's going to happen? It's going to die under the weight of bureaucracy and paperwork. And that hasn't been looked at. So yeah we have to be careful when we say 'what do we mean by autonomy?' [...] If, however, the teacher is thus spending hours doing paperwork then it's not autonomy. (Teacher, Braebank)*

### **Approaches to innovation**

While teacher attitudes towards CfE seemed to be fairly similar in the two schools, there were significant differences in terms of the approaches to SBCD. Unlike in Townview, where the audit of outcomes, followed by incremental change was the predominant approach, at Braebank SBCD was driven far more by big ideas. Audit of outcomes were still utilised, but at a far later stage in the process. It is clear that the programme has been primarily driven by a vision, clearly articulated by the headteacher and other staff, of what education should be about. Moreover, time has been allocated to enable staff to make sense of and co-construct this vision (changes were made to the school timetable, and Friday afternoons are available for staff CPD and pupil revision sessions or sports). The vision corresponds in many ways to the big ideas of CfE and the Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy. These include notions of inter-disciplinary learning (the making of cross-curricular links), the development of meta-cognitive capacity and other skills, and the use of cooperative learning methodologies to enable dialogic learning. However, it is far from clear whether the above-mentioned policies were the stimulus for change. Indeed several teachers admitted to being ignorant of the Four Capacities of CfE and key Highland policy documents. What seems more likely from the transcripts is that there has been a fortuitous conjunction of circumstances – the appointment of a new head with a clear strategic view, the stimulus provided by a negative inspection report, the permissions for innovation provided by national and council policy, the cognitive resources provided by training in methodologies such as cooperative learning, and teachers who were interested in new ways of working. This conjunction created a context that was clearly fertile for innovation.

*But to the school's credit, it's very big in co-op learning and AiFL. So that's the norm throughout this school in that sense. So if that is what the Curriculum for Excellence is. And that's what co-operative learning, and that's what [Inter-disciplinary Programme] is doing. And we're well on our way for that. And what I've seen, certainly since I've joined the school, it's a sea change from a transmitted teaching, one teacher talking. (Teacher, Braebank)*

The programme, once established, has subsequently influenced other parts of the curriculum. A teacher identified changes to teacher attitude and examples of previously unengaged teachers moving towards new methods of working. He suggested that while not everyone had embraced innovation, there has been a move away from 'chalk and talk', and people are now actively focusing on teaching social skills. He said that when talking to pupils, he could see that the 'metacognitive things that they are doing is [sic] finally coming through', and that they are now much better at working in groups and listening. While mistakes have been made along the way, and while the programme has not always been popular with teachers, there has been an auto-catalytic process that has fed innovation, led to changes in practices within the school, and arguably raised the capacity of teachers to engage with SBCD.

*But so what we've done is we've now taken those kind of ideas, we've put them into [Interdisciplinary Programme]. So if it's been developed it can actually be done in this sort of stand-alone space. It's almost like a sort of a sandbox, a sandpit where we can experiment with different ideas. And they can go back out into the curriculum. So a lot of the co-operative learning work has started here and then moved out. (Teacher, Braebank)*

## **Conclusions**

While the small scale of the research and differences in research design between the two cases preclude generalisation, there are a number of conclusions that may be drawn from these findings. The similarities between the schools are striking. Both schools were subject to poor inspections, and changes in leadership. In both schools, there is considerable hostility from many teachers towards both national and local authority policy. And yet there are differences in terms of the schools' approaches to SBCD. Braebank Academy has innovated as a response to the problems faced, and had developed distinctive programmes to meet the challenges posed by changes in curriculum policy. There is some evidence that Townview High School is also innovating, but with less apparent clarity of purpose at present. Whilst we recognise that Braebank is two years ahead of Townview in terms of the cycle of innovation, our research suggests that Braebank has responded proactively to CfE, whereas Townview has until recently tended to react, often belatedly, in the face of policy. At Braebank there is a clear sense of purpose underpinning innovation, whereas at Townview innovation seems to be more piecemeal and fragmented, with some confusion about the big picture, and how the various parts fit together. A key difference lies in staff morale; the difference between the schools was tangible at the time the research took place. At Braebank, morale is high; at Townview it is very low, despite both schools facing similar internal conditions and the same external environment. Two questions arise prominently for us from this research.

The first is: *why does one school innovate in the face of adversity, when a second school facing similar adversity fails to do so?* The research suggests that in the case of these two schools, at least part of the answer lies in the existence or otherwise of a number of factors. We suggest that innovation has occurred in Braebank Academy because there is a clear, holistic vision of the big ideas

of the new curriculum, and a clear appreciation of the methods needed to put them into practice. Thus, for example, teachers were able to see how cooperative learning and inter-disciplinary approaches were tools for achieving curricular purposes. Conversely in Townview High School, this holistic vision was manifestly absent, with a lack of clarity about the new curriculum, and staff struggling to articulate how initiatives such as the Cooperative Learning Academy and Tapestry linked to the big ideas of the curriculum. Contributory factors to the situation at Braebank included the role of the Headteacher and distributed leadership. As we indicated, these factors are starting to develop at Townview, and it will be interesting see how the school progresses over the next couple of years.

A second question relates to national and council policy; *how might curriculum policy raise capacity for SBCD?* In common with other countries, Scotland has framed its curriculum in terms of outcomes to be achieved. Moreover, recent policy focusing on teachers as agents of change (see Priestley *et al.*, in press) follows two decades of prescriptive curriculum policy that has arguably reduced capacity for SBCD in schools. Our research suggests, indeed, that part of the problem with the enactment of CfE lies in a lack of capacity to develop the curriculum at a school level. Guidance on process, particularly processes for SBCD, is far from evident in the morass of material emanating from the Scottish Government, its agencies and the local authorities. We suggest that such processes are essential if teachers are to make sense of complex, new curriculum policy, and translate this into meaningful practice. Future curriculum policy thus needs to explicitly develop and articulate clear processes for engagement, as part of a strategy to renew capacity for SBCD. It is intriguing that in Braebank, where the school was able to develop such a process, there has been some success in innovating in response to CfE. We suggest that further research and development work is required to both empirically test this notion, and to further develop such processes, thus informing future policy.

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<sup>1</sup> These are statements of what young people should become as the result of undergoing an education in Scottish schools. According to CfE students should become Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. Each of these capacities is broken down into a set of attributes (see <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/index.asp> for further details). The notion of capacities has been further criticised (see Biesta 2008; Watson 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Further details are found at <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/howisthecurriculumstructured/experiencesandoutcomes/index.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Inspection report, 2010 – not fully referenced to preserve the anonymity of the school.

<sup>4</sup> Inspection report, 2007 – not fully referenced to preserve the anonymity of the school. The name of the pilot programme has been removed, and it is referred here as 'Interdisciplinary Programme' so as to preserve the school's anonymity.