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The Making of a Curriculum: how history, politics and personal perspectives shape emerging policy and practice

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ABSTRACT *A new Norwegian curriculum is an integral part of the wider educational reforms of Laerplan 97 (L97). This study investigated curriculum genesis through the formulation of the subject syllabuses within broader related principles. Subject group leaders and some group members formulating documentation were interviewed. Representatives from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and the Minister for Education, in post when reforms were initiated, were also interviewed. Using the data, the study examines three interrelated influences on curriculum policy making: political intervention, historical legacy and personal ideologies. The research sought personal perceptions of truth and knowledge about education, in particular curriculum formulation and content, so as to consider how the state and others together exercise and impose power on that search for truth and knowledge. (Donald, 1979). When documentation is complete, human involvement seems to be erased. Text seldom conveys the emotional, intellectual and ideological endeavours, the arguments, debates, experiences and decisions of participants involved in its creation. Beneath collective endeavours lie personal narratives. It is on these narratives that this paper focusses as it explores the interrelationships of political, historical and ideological influences on individual perspectives, collective decision making and emergent policy. The paper identifies and explores tensions, conflicts and achievements as curriculum policy is formulated and considers some related implications for Norwegian teachers as they seek to turn policy into practice within the parameters of their socio-historical legacies.*

Keywords: *primary; curriculum; policy/practice*

INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to make explicit the impact of personal perceptions and beliefs within a broader context of political and historical–cultural influences. Ozga (1990, p. 359) emphasizes bringing together 'structural, macro-level analysis of educational systems and educational policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which

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takes account of people's perceptions and experiences'. Emergent messages are as much the product of history as they are of the relative moments in time when 'new' policies emerge. Ball (1994) draws on Foucault (1971, 1977) to establish a broad conception of discourse as going beyond language. Policy as discourse and policy as text are distinct but interrelated processes (Ball, 1990, 1994). Discourses and text production are linked to desire, beliefs and power. Drawing on Offe's (1984) work Ball (1998, p. 127) points out how disputes take place at a number of levels 'national, local and institutional', urging a focus on changing relationships and inter-penetration between the generic and the local, the macro and the micro. The research aims to reveal how Norwegian curriculum policy was shaped to carry explicit and implicit messages about content and the mode and means of delivery; messages reiterated historically and through personal ideologies. Curriculum formulation is explored as a discourse (or not, as the case may be) between politicians and educational professionals, each of whom is powerful in shaping the future through actions and decisions. Self-perceptions of relative power differ and the paper endeavours to draw out these differences in understanding the relationship between power, discourse and text in contributing to the call for 'a theory of how people involved in the ongoing production and reproduction of curriculum act, react and interact' (Goodson, 1994, p. 39). The struggle within discourses, recognized by Pecheux, (1982) and Macdonell, (1986), will be examined in detail through the eyes and words of key participants at the political, professional and personal levels.

SHAPING THE NORWEGIAN CURRICULUM

This is a necessarily brief overview of a complex process. Other authors have more substantially detailed curriculum developments (Rust, 1990; Trond, 1991; Gundem, 1993; Hagan and Tibbets, 1993; Telhaug and Volkmar, 1999; Koritzinsky, 2000, 2001). Monsterplanen 1987 (M87) was a move towards decentralizing a previously centralized curriculum, building on M74 and mainly in line with a progressive pedagogical tradition (Koritzinsky, 2001). Equality through uniformity in educational provision has a well-established pedigree, going back to the 1930s; M87 was more concerned with equity through diversity. The construct of the 'community active school' emerged, reiterating previous attempts to emphasize pupils as active, participative learners and co-constructors of their own learning experiences. M87 required curriculum planning to take account of pupils' geographical, social and cultural settings. Local curriculum work became relatively uncontested (Gundem, 1993), with pupils expected to design and undertake local projects. Decentralization began to be perceived as a valuable social, political and educational ideal, with local adaptation of the curriculum, decentralized decision making and responsibility taking prevailing (Solstad, 1997). M87 aimed to renew each school's awareness of the relationship between goals and methods (Granheim & Lungren, 1991), although there are criticisms of teachers' limited insights into the principles of curriculum development (Trond, 1991). Locally based teaching,

local curricula and teacher work plans became imperatives that would carry through to Laerplan 97 (L97) to be embedded in relatively detailed curriculum targets and focal points for specified age ranges. The pivotal role of the headteacher in sustaining momentum was acknowledged. Teacher collaboration was seen to be having positive effects (Solstad, 1997). However, not all schools embraced the more corporate and collaborative culture, preferring to retain individual teacher autonomy, previously a powerful diktat. In this earlier climate of decentralization and locally based decision making, the individual teacher's voice and autonomy had remained strong within the discourses of local policy making and school-based activity.

By the 1990s the focus had moved to 'the content and quality of education' with the objective of educational policy defined as 'quality of equality' (KUF, 1994, p. 20). Government objectives followed for the Long-term Programme 1994–1997, presented as new directions in educational policy. Equality remained central, subject knowledge became crucial and Norway's economic and international positions attained prominence. A view prevailed that education should, to a larger extent than before, develop the competences needed for a changing environment (Koritzinsky, 2001). Substantial reforms were presaged. L97 emerged, but not without its critics in relation to a perceived loss of autonomy and deprofessionalization for teachers (Gundem and Karseth, 1998; Telhaug and Volckmar, 1999) and the rise of a chauvinistic world view (Gundem and Sivesind, 1998).

Two documentary sources provided the overarching structure for detailing subject content. The *Core Curriculum* was available as groups worked. It covers primary, secondary and adult education. It provided the rationale for educational objectives and directions. It emphasizes principles of equity, individual responsibility, entitlement and societal needs. It describes in detail the human qualities the curriculum should foster. The *Principles and Guidelines* document was available in draft form during syllabus development but was not subsequently approved by Parliament until very near the end of the initial six month writing process. This document emphasized individual and local adaptation and equality (each with historical precedents). It obliged schools to promote home–school links. It required education based on Christian and humanist values. It emphasized practical approaches for learners along with the need to promote pupil cooperation and independence. Nature and the environment were prominent. Adaptive teaching was an overriding principle; taking account of individual need and development; the caring role of the school and cultural relevance. The curriculum was designed as subjects with a common format, although, as we shall see, combinations of subject areas also prevailed, leading on from M74 and M87. The *Principles and Guidelines* detailed the annual number of lessons for each subject area, across age groups.

The new curriculum would be centrally determined, have syllabii that would describe general aims, subject-related objectives and broad content 'while at the same time leaving scope for local and individual adaptation' (Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, 1991, Preface). To what extent were the conditions for a balanced discourse by diverse policy makers created in the prevailing climate?

THE STUDY

Research was conducted during 1998–1999. By this time, final versions of subject syllabuses had been distributed to schools, along with the *Core Curriculum* and *Principles and Guidelines*. Schools were coming to grips with documentation, but the formulation process was sufficiently recent for participants to have clear recollections. During this period, further changes to the reforms were also underway (Koritzinsky, 2001).

The Norwegian subjects and subject combinations are listed. Where a subject group leader was interviewed, the gender is indicated in parentheses, along with their work base. Additional parentheses indicate the gender and work base of any additional group members located and interviewed:

- arts and crafts (male, school-based);
- domestic science (female, college-based);
- English (female) (female, school-based);
- science and the environment (female, school-based) (female, school-based);
- Norwegian (female, college-based);
- mathematics (male, college-based);
- social studies (history, geography and society) (male, university-based) (female, school-based);
- music (no interview);
- physical education (no interview);
- Christianity and other religions and philosophies (no interview).

Also interviewed was the Basic Group leader (male, municipality-based). This group's remit was to ensure coordination across subject groups in relation to thematic aspects and ensure appropriate provision for six-year-olds, entering formal education for the first time.

Semi-structured interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The dilemmas and difficulties are similar to those described by Crawford (2000), undertaking a similar enterprise in England. Tracking subject group leaders was a priority requiring considerable travel as there had been a decision, at Ministry level, to draw leaders from as widely as possible, geographically. Group members were a bonus, with contacts made when possible. Two staff members from the Ministry of Education were interviewed. This could not be taped (their direction). Notes were made during and immediately afterwards. They would proffer fact, not opinion (*their* distinction). Gudmund Hernes, the Education Minister initiating Reform 97 was interviewed. His term of office had ended in late 1995 when appointed to the Ministry of Health. Initial subject drafts had been completed by this point and a consultation process followed. At the point of his leaving, subject re-writes were underway.

Interviews were in English which was well spoken by all the respondents. Respondents received an outline of the questions prior to interview. Interviews were taped, with permission. On occasion, respondents asked for the tape to be stopped. Perspectives were shared about aspects of the development process that, were they to be attributed, might subsequently affect individuals. Participants were assured of

anonymity, so it has been necessary to omit any subject reference (indicated in text as ‘subject’). Respondents received transcriptions with invitations to add, amend or delete. Two returned amended copies; there were no deletions. Respondents offered documents, some in English and others subsequently translated.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This research is built around personal narratives, potentially cumbersome, yet illuminating. Findings must illustrate progress from policy-in-the-making as discourse to policy-as-text, documenting the myriad influences on emerging messages. Sections, from across transcripts, were collated under headings that described the subject development process from beginning to end. These headings offer an organizational tool for presenting findings:

- identifying subject leaders and establishing teams;
- links with the Ministry of Education;
- the working process for the team, including consultation;
- designing the subject and ensuring progression;
- linking subjects and integrated delivery;
- textbooks and teacher development.

Identifying Subject Group Leaders and Establishing Teams

Leaders perceived themselves as being approached because of related subject expertise. Initiatives were described that may have singled them out: ‘they must have heard in Oslo about the new ways of working with children’. Personal contacts seemed influential: ‘I had links with a coordinator who was a high level civil servant’. The ex-Minister concurred: ‘they (staff in the Ministry) gave me a list of people and they partly wanted members who had practical experience of teaching in schools ... also members with academic grounding in various fields’. Not everyone was willing, as they were required to leave current responsibilities: ‘I was asked to lead the group and said “No” and after another a week I was asked again. Then there was a third phone call and I was told the Minister was insistent’. Power seems centrally located at this point of selection.

Leaders did not pick teams, contributors were approached by the Ministry: ‘I was told they had picked a crew’. There were opportunities to identify gaps in expertise and request additional members: ‘I asked for a professor in applied languages’. A balance between educationists and subject experts seemed important. One leader remarked: ‘we sought people outside the community of teachers ... like art and music, we also brought in artists’. No one spoke of negative responses to requests. Selected team members represented all phases of education: ‘two from high schools, one for younger children’; ‘I work in the University’. They came with writing expertise: ‘he had written a book on cross-curricular work’; ‘a text book writer for intermediate children and for teacher training’.

The Basic Group liaised with subject groups. This was linked to the principle of subject integration and encouraging thematic approaches to subject delivery: 'all the people in this group were supposed to follow the work of one of the subject groups'. The Basic Group had an overview to ensure subject integration could happen, once documentation arrived in school. The ex-Minister had a view that this may not happen without monitoring:

> academics are ... orientated towards the fallacy of the latest word ... their various sort of lore and they are eager to push that ... because fields are like pillars, they are vertical and you don't have that much interaction across.

Subject groups were largely determined at government level with positive responses to requests from groups for additional members. Criteria for inclusion were perceived as subject knowledge or related expertise status, delivery expertise, writing experience, reputation and a recognized need for diversity within the group. Practising teachers and headteachers were included.

Links with the Ministry of Education

Subject leaders met Ministry representatives and reported remits to their groups. All leaders spoke of clear directives from the outset: 'we had to be much more specific than in the previous curriculum' (M87); 'we were told to be specific'. There was documentation with explicit messages: 'we got papers from the Government and then there was a big meeting with them'; 'the Minister wrote the core document'. However, there remained some sense of negotiation for some groups: 'I felt they were open-minded, they told us, if you have ideas, well come up with them and we will see if you can convince us'; 'they asked for advice, we wrote letters'.

All leaders spoke of the first meeting with the Ministry as giving explicit messages about how to proceed. One consistently strong recollection concerned examples given as areas of focus for individual subjects: 'The Minister gave a big talk to the leaders, he had certain ideas'; 'we had some examples, for instance he mentioned *Humpty Dumpty*'; 'he had read Robin Hood and all these classical books when he was a boy ... he said if you don't put in all these titles, I will do it'. Full group meetings with the Minister made positive and lasting impressions: 'that the teacher should not focus on standing at the blackboard and keep telling the children what to do'; 'he used some pictures from (subject) and the connections between (subject) and aesthetics and I liked that'; 'he strongly believes that children have a lot of inner strength and are curious about everything'; 'he said the role of play in the children's lives was very important and then he said we had to encourage the children to play more, to play even higher up, the older children had to play more to encourage the creative side of their personalities'. The Minister provided other information: 'he said we have to realize that our children are some of the worst in the world ... reading and writing'. There were also less positive impressions: 'he did not have a realistic view of what primary children might do but the intentions were interesting'; 'he had some views on what the school should be ... I don't dare to say, a romantic view'. There was an acknowledgement that 'some of the things ... wanted in those documents went against the grain and the traditional

mode of thinking in the various fields'. Not every discipline could accept dictated activity to the same extent.

Leaders received written feedback on draft documents, a new form of discourse: 'the work would come back with red writing on it … paragraphs were scribbled out and re-written'. 'I took out the names' (examples cited were *Humpty Dumpty* and *Robin Hood*) 'and the politicians put them back in'. Power shifts became evident: 'group leaders were generally outnumbered at meetings by Department personnel'; 'some of us were seriously concerned and wondered if we should withdraw'. The ex-Minister wanted explicit messages about content but subsequently settled for references to 'for instances'. He commented:

> … and that was as far as I was able to pull it you know, for instances … meetings with the publishing houses who were going to write the textbooks and extol the same philosophy here. It's not just that you choose something and it's not just *Humpty Dumpty* … there are modern evergreens, some Beatles' songs that are going to be sung for a hundred years.

In some cases, no compromises were reached. As one group leader remarked:

> it took two meetings with the Minister because we didn't want to put in (subject) and (subject) because we thought this was a task for the teacher … the textbook writers will put all this in the textbooks … we lost by instruction, he said if you don't do as I say, you are off.

When re-writes were underway 'there was a female intermediary between the Department and the Secretary of State and the leaders'. This was the newly appointed Minister for Education. Several respondents remarked 'off the record' that in their opinion the intermediary retained links with the previous Minister as re-writing progressed. In their view, this became a key factor in the shift of the balance of power as leaders could not explicitly challenge ensuing directives.

The perceptions of Ministerial influence were strong from the outset. Clear examples were given of subject content and clear images were conveyed of how teachers should teach. Whilst some welcomed this specificity, others believed it conveyed an unrealistic view of learner's needs; that the experience and interests of one individual could not be sufficient justification for curriculum content. In general, respondents began to feel less positive about government responses as the process progressed. The potential for ideologically and professionally informed negotiation regarding subject content seemingly diminished as texts emerged, but some compromise was reached regarding specific examples of subject content. Towards the end, there seemed to be the greatest breakdown in communication, although only one respondent would go on record in commenting on this part of the process.

The Working Process, Including Consultation

Leadership and group dynamics came to the fore within group working processes, with different approaches evident. One leader remarked: 'In shaping the content, the

group began with the *Principles and Guidelines* document'. Another began socially: 'we went out to dinner and I think that was the best start, good food, good wine, talked a little bit about ourselves. We started talking about what kind of school we knew, what principles'.

Despite some flexibility in recruitment, concerns emerged that group members were not always sufficiently knowledgeable. This generated tensions: 'he wasn't up to what was going on in (subject) teaching, the atmosphere was sometimes very tense'; 'I know some people worked much harder than others'. Individual knowledge and responses were key aspects, affecting dynamics and progress within groups.

The work was intellectually challenging, demanding an entirety of subject knowledge be constructed and articulated for an extensive age range. The Minister anticipated the exposition of 'an internal logic to a body of knowledge'. This work centred on identification of targets and focal points (the required structure for each subject): 'we worked very hard with the targets and focal points, it was so difficult … little by little, we decided on the focal points'. However, some felt it was not clear from the outset that this was the model to be used: 'the common targets for the subjects were a late heading in the process … that wasn't clear from the beginning'; 'the subjects and the main headings were altering all the time'. There was much internal discourse: 'we had hard discussions until we converged on frames for the plan'. Group leaders took the lead in writing the texts, but as to how it should look only emerged over time: 'I did not have a clear understanding, it was developing all the time, you create the road as you are walking on it'.

New messages were received as it emerged that individual subject content was considerable: 'we got it back after a meeting by the leaders and they had got new signals … we had planned for too high a number of lessons'. Others felt more positively: 'The Ministry thought this was a good structure for our plan'. One leader remarked on consequences for their group: 'We had a period when the Department fetched another person who was going to work with us because they were not satisfied with the language we had used'. Clear communication of subject content was a key issue. The ex-Minister remarked ' … those that wrote the best Norwegian, straight, lucid prose were the (subject) … some of those who wrote the most obtuse language were the philologists unfortunately and the (subject)'.

'At the end of six months we had a big document, we had two or three days in hotels to pull it all together'. All subjects went out simultaneously for national consultation for 'about two or three months'. The original group did not always undertake subsequent re-writing. New participants were commissioned: 'Experts not involved in the first draft were invited to participate after public consultation'. 'I cooperated with some members, we worked for another three-quarters of a year … the current plan is totally different from the one we had on the first of May'; '… then all members were released and they got another person working with me'; 'The Department asked a new leader to work together with me and we read all the written results from the consultation and then we changed. She was the leader … we changed very, very much'.

The work was intellectually challenging in groundbreaking ways. Personal ideologies, expertise and commitment affected group dynamics and relationships,

becoming key factors to parallel the hierarchical relationship of group to government. Despite this, or perhaps in overcoming these intra-group tensions, groups developed ideological and intellectual ownership of their work, a passionate commitment to seeing it through. Some retained strong feelings when 'their' draft documentation was passed to other experts perceived as being more likely to fulfil government requirements in the time available. Ultimately, the political will was strongest and used most powerfully against groups that sought to differ.

Designing the Subject and Ensuring Progression

Each group wanted sufficient detail to embrace the entirety of 'their' subject whilst confronting the realities of time available for classroom delivery. All respondents recalled lengthy discussions about the phase of pupil development at which it would be appropriate to introduce particular content. Group leaders were relatively confident that all phases of learning were well represented by a knowledgeable individual and that this informed the lengthy debates: 'the members of the group had experiences from the classes we worked with, and we read, of course we read'.

Group members brought personal experiences. One spoke of friends with young children in school, dissatisfied with how their own subject was taught. Individual visions were for a curriculum that would be intrinsically interesting to pupils, whereby the teacher must create opportunities for practical, pupil involvement. They brought personal agendas; 'I very strongly wanted to have lessons in (subject) from the first year and luckily I got it'. One group wanted to design the subject from a school perspective: 'we used the experiences from teachers practising in schools who were in the group'. There were references to consultation documents from other countries: 'we studied national plans from other countries, I have many of those'; 'we looked at Danish plans, Scottish plans, Swedish plans'. The Norwegian and English groups co-consulted: 'we wanted the language plans to be similar'.

A parallel, prevailing principle was for pupils, as active learners, to design curricular experiences: 'we were told that this should be the idea ... the pupils had to be active ... we were pleased about that'. This created new challenges, requiring common experiences through learning and teaching, balancing specification with opportunities for pupil involvement: 'making choices about content also includes the pupil'; 'we try to force the teacher to be active'. Another leader articulated associated tensions: 'I feel there are difficulties when pupils wish to go their own way in their progression, create their concepts, and then we want to have equality in school, to secure a mastery of, a common understanding of "subject" '.

Despite Ministry directives to reduce content and subsequent re-writing, some respondents remained overwhelmed: 'I am working with it now and I can still see that it's too big'. Hindsight revealed omissions: 'I should have linked more on (subject). I would have liked to have shown more examples but I have a chance now because I am working on papers which are going to be sent out to teachers this autumn'. It revealed regrets: 'some of the things we didn't manage to get in'. This respondent felt that assessment opportunities had been reduced by the requirement to cover specific content at set times in the pupils' learning processes,

a frequently reiterated frustration. Another leader remarked: 'I would have changed it at the higher levels but we were tired when we made this part and there could be more challenge in it. Perhaps we could have made more play for the lower grades'. Human frailty is also a factor.

Ensuring progression within subjects and facilitating active pupil involvement in curriculum design were substantial simultaneous goals. The former speaks explicitly in documentation through targets and focal points and the latter implicitly through principle. Whilst the latter was warmly welcomed in principle, it was generally perceived as a constraint in expediting progression. Nevertheless, subject groups seemed pleased to impose this explicit message on practitioners. Group members drew on personal experiences and perceptions to inform decisions about content and appropriate teaching styles and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the personal from the professional. The groups had some power in determining content and pedagogy, but as has been seen from the comments above, ultimately, the state asserted its perceived right to frame content as deemed fit.

Linking Subjects and Integrated Delivery

This search for links across subjects and combined subject areas would constitute a major part of the groups' working processes. The ex-Minister illustrated its centrality within his own ideology: 'you have to have a concern about the logic of fields and another matter is that I wanted to achieve a thinking across fields because the way the curriculum had been realized before was that you considered English in isolation from religion, you considered painting in isolation from religion … this was one of the aims of bringing groups together so they could at least have a go at making an integrated approach to the whole curriculum'. The Basic Group raised the profile as writing proceeded, with increasing amounts of time given to thematic links as the initial six month writing period progressed.

The thematic approach was seen as promoting participative learning, as one leader expressed it:

> the theme is understood as taken from different experiences, our subject areas, and it is based on the active research of the children in these subjects … there is a research part and they should try to get new knowledge and present it for others.

It was felt by one leader that the time had come to be explicit and directive:

> at this point in our history when we have tried for fifty years to get active learning into the school and still haven't obtained that, okay you have to make some heavy legislation.

The high degree of teacher autonomy in curriculum selection and implementation was proffered as the reason. One leader remarked:

> If you are looking into the older curriculum, it has always written about themes, written about projects and so on, but it has never been implemented to a high degree. Usually timetabling in the Norwegian school will

> always be subject by subject and it is up to the teacher to do something more, but in many schools, you will find subjects separated from each other.

Group leaders had been clear from the outset that subject linkage was required: 'and in my subject that I was responsible for, we were discussing this almost all of the time ... in the group leader meetings (it) was a topic we discussed on several occasions. Maybe it was the most discussed topic'. When leaders met, they worked together across subject drafts to bring coherence: 'when we had the leaders' meetings, we tried to put the same thing in the same grade, let's say tobacco and alcohol ... and that was the leader's job. ... I think we should have given more time for that in leaders' meetings'. It was perceived as a substantial challenge during curriculum design: 'it was a difficult part of the work'; 'that part of the work was difficult and frustrating'; 'for each target, we wrote down what subject we could make connections with, the subjects met together in a group. We discussed our focal points and found themes'.

At one point, a separate plan for themes was proposed: '... in each year group, for the first four, the next four and the upper three years', however, it was felt this might jeopardise progression and, as Ministry officials commented, 'we wanted every curriculum group to make a good progression within their subject'. This separate plan was not implemented, but the Basic Group recommended that time allocated to theme and project work should be specified. This resulted in a legislated time allocation of 60%, (elementary stage 6–9 years) 30% (intermediate stage 10–12 years) and 20% (lower secondary 13–15 years). One respondent remarked: 'this percentage of time is easy to check, nothing else is easy to check. I think that is a way of making it more operative, making it possible to be operative and possible to start the discussions with the teachers'. Another: 'This is very, absolutely unusual to do this because it is a very strong constraint on the methods the teacher could choose and it is very unusual to do'. This legislation was subsequently changed, although percentages remain as a guide to teachers.

When asked why this work was not now included in the documentation, one member remarked:

> It disappeared ... I believe it would have made it too easy for teachers if the book had that under every focal point, perhaps they would be too relaxed and say 'oh they think every thought for us, we don't have to make any effort'.

A leader explained: 'we were all asked to come to Oslo, to a big hotel, trying to put things in our own plan from one group to another ... we marked it with stars, what can we work together with?' However, he continued: 'We put it away ... in the consultation the teachers said "this, we can do better ourselves", they told us "actually, we are teachers" '. In his view this was preferable because teachers then undertook this planning, 'they link it to the local area they are working in', an important dimension that could not have been accommodated centrally. Another respondent felt that to do the work thoroughly might have resulted thus: 'I suppose

the work would have been as thick as that (indicates with fingers) so it was removed'. In leaving decisions about how to make subject linkage to teachers, they would have to 'work together with the children', a potentially powerful but implicit message.

The ex-Minister remarked on the lack of explicit subject linkage:

> that as I see it is a defect of the plans ... a decision is never made only once, so now that it is apparent that this is a defect, and the thing that makes me optimistic is the fact that we have discovered that and we can correct it. Implementing a plan is a learning process also and on those occasions when I can sort of wish myself back in my old position it is to make those additions and modifications ... we didn't see all these things at the start. I never intended we should have perfect foresight.

At the time of data collection, teachers were endeavouring to rise to the challenge of promoting active learning through thematic planning and project work: 'Most teachers agree that this is the right way but how, this is the difficulty, the challenge ... I have been around giving talks about this and I have met many teachers in many different places and they have got the idea and they often ask: 'How do we do it then?'

Leading on from subject documentation, related materials began arriving in schools during 1998. One ex-group member, a headteacher, remarked:

> these support links between the subjects ... there should be one for each subject ... the people writing these are partly those group leaders, some are doing it, some have been taken off, actually (her group leader) wasn't allowed to do this because of conflict between the (subject) group and the Minister. I was asked to go in as a member but I boycotted it when I heard that she was taken off.

This respondent had a view about the potential, future use of new materials: 'this guide is for teaching and if someone is going to check or control what we are doing, they will check through this'.

Three parallel strands have emerged. The first is to specify subject content as a progression across age groups, the second is to facilitate pupil involvement in curriculum design in the classroom and the third is to ensure that the specified subject progression can engender opportunities for subject integration through teacher planning and delivery. The first of these appeared to be the priority at this stage of curriculum development, although attempts were made to retain a commitment to the latter two through legislation, subsequently removed. Thematic planning and project work were left to teachers to incorporate. This would seem to represent a return to a state of being from which several leaders and members, along with the Minister, had wanted to move teachers.

Textbooks and Teacher Development

Norwegian teachers make regular use of textbooks as pupil workbooks. Many group members wanted to change this: 'In Norwegian primary schools teachers maybe

depend too heavily on textbooks'. I asked: 'How does having a text book help a child to be active?' The reply:

> it doesn't happen very much in my opinion but the teachers seem to need one book for each pupil. In the (subject) group, when we discussed this we had a vision of a classroom with different textbooks. Different books, all sorts of materials and they could choose for the level from what they could manage. This is a very hard struggle for the teachers because they prefer to have one textbook for each child so they can bring it home and do their homework … there is a lot of work to do.

Another remarked: 'We are trying to get the teacher to use the plan more than the textbook'. This was not likely to change rapidly because 'The publishers were contacting us regularly to ask, can you give us some ideas so we can start textbook production'.

Language had been carefully selected to convey implicit messages about the need for changes to teaching–learning styles:

> The teachers were telling children how it was, that was the Norwegian way of teaching (subject). We tried to make a curriculum that showed they were going to work in other ways too … they were discovering, they were working outside, they were looking after, they were experimenting. We tried to use those words.

One respondent maintained that failure to follow through on subject linkage was now a hindrance to teachers working from the plan to design activities that extended teaching–learning repertoires: 'there is a heavy weight on the teachers in their planning and the documents don't help them as much as I think they could have done if they had taken up that line and followed it through'. A view was expressed that this would sustain dependence on textbooks that were undertaking the 'thinking' for them.

Courses were ongoing 'everyone can have three days of (subject)'; 'teachers get 21 hours of training'. One respondent spoke of anxieties in relation to a subject-specific course she was providing. The challenges she saw were to help teachers adapt the curriculum to their local environment and culture and make links with other subjects. When asked if she would be helping teachers to plan, she replied: 'If they ask, the students plan in the teacher training college and they go out on practice and try it out'. Her reply did not seem to indicate a belief that experienced teachers would need practical support in developing planning approaches, despite the substantive explicit and implicit messages of the new curriculum.

Curriculum implementation is ongoing. The ex-Minister had remarked; 'now it's out among the wolves … a reform isn't implemented a perfect idea, it is to start the process of learning'.

Policy as discourse and text moved on, beyond centralized activity and into classroom application. New discourses begin, discourses of interpretation and application against a backdrop of traditional understandings, teacher professional development and personal inclination.

FROM DISCOURSE TO TEXT AND BEYOND: POLITICAL INTERVENTIONS, HISTORICAL INFLUENCES AND PERSONAL IDEOLOGIES

Drawing on the Norwegian context and with some reference to the English context, this concluding section reflects on inter-related influences on curriculum design as it progresses from policy-as-discourse to policy-as-text and beyond.

The Norwegian experience can be considered in relation to global trends in curriculum construction, what Ross (2000, p. 15) calls 'the professional or tamed curriculum'. These are determined through overt and covert political interventions, increasingly taking the form of globalized common ground in curricular formats but failing to learn lessons from historical imperatives (Goodson, 1994). Levin (1997, p. 256) speaks of the frequent criticism of schools on the grounds of poor achievement as an international phenomenon and that 'evidence to the contrary may be politically ignored in the service of a political agenda', justifying an agenda to centralize a previously decentralized curriculum. Such criticism legitimizses political intervention on the grounds of economic regeneration (Goodson, 1994; Ross, 2000). The English National Curriculum has increasingly been subject to the preferences and beliefs of Secretaries of State with associated power transferences away from teachers and local authorities (Ball, 1990; Graham, 1993; Moon 1995). Discourse becomes seriously imbalanced if the state's power outweighs the knowledge and influence of knowledgeable others. In the initial establishing of subject groups in Norway, different communities of educational professionals were represented and collectively and willingly engaged (up to a point in some cases) in the parallel processes of specifying progression, maximizing opportunities for pupil involvement in curriculum design and local adaptation and supporting subject integration through thematic approaches and project work; each of these remits was required at ministerial level and all were embedded in historical, cultural and policy-related antecedents. L97 appears to have been underpinned by a considerable will, at the political level, to ensure that these values became imperatives and seems to have been supported in some of this, at least to some extent, by the subject groups, although we should not make the mistake of seeing groups as homogeneous (Crawford, 2000). Nudges of past reforms attained the status of new truths with the requirement to integrate subjects and active pupil involvement in the co-construction of the curriculum being legislated for within L97 and embedded in syllabus formulation. Teachers also seemed to have welcomed this in principle, but were coming to recognize associated difficulties in implementation (Broadhead, 2001). These legislative requirements were subsequently removed within two years, although the percentages remained as guidelines to teachers.

It is difficult to disentangle professional knowledge from personal values; they impact on the policy making process in a complex interface at every level of power, influence and activity. Policy making can be unscientific and irrational (Ball, 1990). The challenge seems to be in the participants being able to draw distinctions between facts, values and perceptions of truths. On the surface, practices may appear systematic. This research has sought to reveal the deeper level complexities of human interfacing; the power struggles between central and decentralized policy

makers located alongside fierce commitments at all levels to personal truths and values. Systematization was evident in how groups were convened, managed and directed. Human enterprise can be collectively managed, but this does not necessarily bring harmony either within groups or between decentralized and centralized policy makers. It is human nature to espouse strong personal beliefs. To be rational requires an informed detachment. The disharmony is powerfully illustrated by the focus on the 'for instances' in the curriculum documents (e.g. *Robin Hood* and *Humpty Dumpty*). Whilst their inclusion was supported by a clear conceptualization by the Minister, subject leaders and group members perceived them as prescriptive. In fact, this name dropping increased within the documentation from consultation to the final syllabus (Koritzinsky, 2001). As group members anticipated, these 'for instances', being so specific, have been picked up by textbook writers and are emerging in practice as directives that may repress adaptation. In talking of the negative effects of curriculum intensification in England, Hargreaves (1994, p. 119) notes that intensification 'fosters dependency on externally produced materials and expertise'. If such materials convey only a limited interpretation of the original thinking and associated discourses, teachers can make only limited applications in practice; restricting their potential to be creative and locally adaptive in thinking and practice. This will reduce professional effectiveness by limiting opportunities for collaborative discourse through joint planning and evaluation of implementation.

Many Norwegian schools are small, with few staff to tackle policy interpretations. Webb & Vulliamy (1999, p. 131) talk of small schools having a 'distinctive ethos … a family-like atmosphere with highly informal relationships'. In the Finnish and English schools they studied teachers spend time teaching; there is seldom time for policy working parties, resulting in the alienation of theory from reality (Goodson, 1994). Norwegian teachers have time allocated to team plan. This will not necessarily lead to productive policy interpretation and application and as we have seen, there has been some resistance to team planning as potentially diminishing individual autonomy. Nor should we confuse policy implementation with individual teacher professional development. Policy, both as discourse and text, has to be regenerated in teacher-friendly settings. New events need to take place that allow practitioners to engage in related discourses and perhaps urgently if inappropriate practices are not to become the new fallacies (Broadhead, 2001). Teachers need to perceive of themselves, culturally, as next phase policy makers but become constrained in this if the curriculum is perceived as 'complete on receipt'. Policy-as-discourse and policy-as-text for teachers can be embedded in their intellectual and collaborative engagement with learning goals as adapted to the needs of the school and the children through long- and short-term planning. These discourses will be as intellectually challenging for collaborative practitioners as they were for subject groups. Responses to perceived hierarchies will feature, just as they did at national level, resonance and dissonance. However, this paper would argue that the dialogue must continue into schools. It has not done so in England, certainly not in terms of determining curriculum content. Opportunities to design and implement from first principles are limited and teachers now deliver to clearly specified outcomes deter-

mined well away from their and the learners' classrooms. In England we are currently experiencing the worst teacher shortages since the 1960s.

Across nations, as in Norway, curriculum reform has started with the State. Political steering should be subject to professional comment (Granheim & Lungren, 1991). This was evident in the group constitutions and early processes, but became weaker as policy emerged as text. Consultation called on teacher comment in a generalized way, one that severely distanced content from implementation. The teacher's voice in policy making remains relatively mute whilst, simultaneously, teachers perceive themselves as having had their individual autonomy threatened, albeit somewhat reinstated from the later amendment to reforms, post-1998. Norwegian curricular practices have long striven to embrace a conceptualization of classrooms as places where learners have the right to be seen and heard in the co-construction of their own learning experiences in keeping with local culture and community. To achieve this goal through teacher development and enhanced opportunities for pupil learning, school-based activity associated with policy making and implementation through teacher thinking, creativity, decision making and pupil involvement should not be conceived of as merely a continuation of policy making at the national level. Rather, national policies should be seen to be serving the needs of teachers and pupils in being best placed to create and engage with learning opportunities that can combine progression with teacher–learner autonomy, planning with flexibility of experience and rigorous subject knowledge with subject integration. These challenges remain unresolved and the voices of teachers and learners as policy makers must be heeded if they are to be resolved.

The study has sought to illustrate how collective and individual actions, perceptions and experience become catalysts to bridge past and present, for better or for worse, as policy emerges; how a power base, human knowledge, human frailty, beliefs, pressures and dispute contribute to the discourses of policy making at the macro and micro levels. All of these elements will inevitably also frame the work of teachers and learners as policy makers and the lessons must be learned in terms of better understanding collective human enterprise. Widespread and well-funded research is ongoing into the effects of Reform 97. Work is ongoing to develop hypotheses of the relationships in Norway between politics, public administration and agents within the educational system. Alongside this, Halpin & Troyna (1995) urge resistance to policy borrowing, given the uniqueness of contexts for each country, and heeding Ball's (1998) call to register the importance of local politics, culture and tradition when translating potentially generic solutions into policy and practice. There is an inherent responsibility for policy makers to understand the uniqueness that emerges from historical and current influences on the genesis of new policies. There is a parallel responsibility to simultaneously anticipate likely influences on classroom practice and on the teacher's role in subsequently making policy work well for learners. Policy makers at all levels and researchers have responsibilities to engage with practitioners in meaningful ways at all stages of policy development, implementation, evaluation and evolution. Moreover, there are responsibilities to engage with learners in the policy making discourses, to bring them into the frame of reference along with politicians and professionals. Curriculum

development, curriculum implementation and the subsequent impact on teaching and learning have to be recognized and explored as a continuous process. The discourses of intellectual debate, policy making and text production as guidance should include all stakeholders.

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