

Chapter 1. Three models of policy learning and policy-making in 14-19 education

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Introduction

This book asks the question: to what extent can the apparent failures of policy-making in 14-19 education in England, and elsewhere in Great Britain, be attributed to failures of policy learning? By policy learning we mean the ability of governments, or systems of governance, to inform policy development by drawing lessons from available evidence and experience. Policy learning includes 'experiential learning' from history (Olsen and Peters 1996), learning from other countries (Alexander *et al.* 2000) and learning from local innovations and experiments (Strategy Unit 2003). Effective policy learning increases the effectiveness of the policies that result. In this introductory chapter we first review the evidence that there have been failures of policy learning; we then explore the concept of policy learning in more detail and discuss three ideal-typical models of the policy process and of the kinds of policy learning which take place within them; finally we apply these models to 14-19 policymaking in the three home countries of Great Britain.

The apparent failure of policy learning

In 2001-02 the Nuffield Foundation hosted a series of seminars on 14-19 education and training (Nuffield Foundation 2002). The seminars were designed to inform the Foundation's future activities in the area of 14-19 education, and they led to the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education, launched in 2003. They reviewed different aspects of 14-19 year olds' lives and the education and training opportunities available to them. The seminars concluded with a sense of *déjà vu*: despite the rapid policy turnover and recurrent institutional restructuring of the previous two decades many of the old problems persisted (Raffe 2002a). They identified a need to learn from this experience and to consider why it had been so difficult to achieve lasting and genuine changes. They also identified a need for the UK systems to learn more from each other.

Over the past quarter of a century, 14-19 education and training in England have been the subject of continuous innovation, but this policy 'business' has not always resulted in substantive change (Lumby and Foskett 2005). Each policy innovation, it seems, has failed to learn from the experience of previous innovations; there has been a failure of policy learning. An analysis of 14-19 curriculum initiatives since the 1980s found 'limited evidence for policy learning at the national level' (Higham and Yeomans 2002: 6). Each initiative chose a different model of curriculum change but there was no evidence that its choice

was based on systematic evaluation of previous models. In numerous other policy areas, from youth training to vocational qualifications to institutional governance, there has been a continuing cycle of policy innovation with little evidence of cumulative learning. And this inability or unwillingness to learn from the past has been accompanied by superficial learning from the experience of other countries. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s governments borrowed policy ideas from abroad, with little regard to differences of culture or context and with a tendency to borrow from the countries which suited the political mood rather than those which had relevant experience to share (Keep 1991, Finegold *et al.* 1992, 1993). Policymakers in the four home countries of the UK have acknowledged the potential for policy learning from 'home international' comparisons; but they also accept that such comparisons have had little influence on their policymaking in practice (Raffe 1998, Byrne and Raffe 2005). Despite the rhetoric that devolution would provide a natural laboratory for policy experimentation, the devolved administrations are 'mentally marginalised' in Whitehall; mutual learning is rare and depends on 'accidents of meetings and personal acquaintances' (Parry and MacDougall 2006: 8).

The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies, established in 1999, promised to introduce a more inclusive and deliberative style of governance that would facilitate better policy learning (Paterson 2000a). However, the devolved administrations have had their own apparent failures of policy learning, such as the Scottish 'exams crisis' of 2000. An arrogant and heavy-handed leadership, it is alleged, failed to learn the problems of implementation 'on the ground' and persisted with an over complex,

inappropriately targeted reform, introduced into too much haste with too few resources (Paterson 2000b, Raffae *et al.* 2002). Recent policy forums have revealed dissatisfaction with the limited capacity for innovation in Scottish education and with the failure of policy learning in the face of rapid change and uncertainty (GGIS 2006, Leicester 2006). In Wales, some commentators have criticised the Assembly Government's centralising approach and regretted the absence of a culture of scrutiny (Morgan and Upton 2005). And the devolved administrations' potential for policy learning has been constrained by their limited policy making capacity by institutional restructuring and by changes in personnel with the consequent loss of policy memory.

However, the question of policy learning has been raised most acutely in England, where the government has rejected the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Education's (2004) proposals for a unified curriculum and qualifications framework (DfES 2005), dashing the hopes and expectations of large sections of the 14-19 education community. Where the Working Group had tried to learn from the mistakes of the past, the Government's own proposals seem merely to repeat them. Its plans for specialist diplomas fail to learn the lessons of earlier attempts to develop a vocational track through NVQs and GNVQs (Raggatt and Williams 1997, Stanton 2005). The proposed general diploma at 16 ignores the lessons of the GCSE, which began by stimulating progression beyond 16 but turned into a barrier for those who did not jump the five A*-C grade hurdle (Hodgson and Spours 2003); the 14-19 White Paper proposes to raise this hurdle. And unlike the Working Group, the Government's own proposals make no attempt to learn from the contrasting approaches to 14-19 learning in Wales

and Scotland, or to explain why its own divergent strategy is the only appropriate one for England.

There is, therefore, a *prima facie* case to answer: that there has been a failure of policy learning in England, and that the issue at least deserves further investigation in Scotland and Wales. In the rest of this introductory chapter we outline a conceptual framework which links policy learning to styles of governance, and we apply this framework to the three home countries of Great Britain.

Policy learning and policy-making: three models

We understand policy learning as an activity of governments or systems of governance. It is more than the sum of learning by individual policymakers. The fruits of policy learning may be located in the heads of policymakers, but they may also be found in official records and documents or (more nebulously) in the norms, routines, organizational rules and policy styles of governments (Richardson 1982, March and Olsen 1989). The process of policy learning can be elusive and difficult to study. Many analysts find it easier to study policy learning through its outcomes, and infer that successful learning has taken place if the policies that result are successful (Olsen and Peters 1996). Other analysts associate policy learning with a propensity to innovate (Fullan 1993, Leicester 2006). But the success of policies depends on many other factors than policy learning and a propensity to innovate may, in fact, reflect policy

business and the failure of policy learning.

The process of policy learning is therefore social and organisational, it is also political. It would be wrong to see it as a simple rational process based on learning and evidence that is subverted when 'political' considerations are introduced. Policy making in a democracy is necessarily and legitimately a political process. Olsen and Peters (1996: 33) even suggest that it is a 'mistake ... to impose norms, procedures, and criteria of relevance from one institutional sphere - science - on another institutional sphere with quite different characteristics - democratic politics'. Political learning is intrinsic to our concept of policy learning, although unlike Olsen and Peters we believe that it should have a social scientific dimension as well. Political processes may sometimes be in tension with the quality of learning, but they may also be a way to encourage or mediate it. However, we distinguish between the role of politics in policy making and a 'politicised' policy process in which policy making becomes centralised, personalised and dominated by ideological or short-term political concerns. We suggest below that a politicised approach to policy making may produce the worst failures in policy learning.

In this section we identify some theoretical and conceptual tools for analyzing policy learning. We draw from a range of relevant literatures, including theories of systems, organisations and institutions; political science, policy analysis and policy science; educational literatures of policy sociology and change management; and analyses of knowledge transfer and research utilisation. These literatures encompass a range of disciplines, methods and research

problems. In some of them the concept of policy learning is explicit elsewhere, as in much of the literature on governance, it is largely implicit. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that analysts and researchers from such diverse starting points tend to converge on a common set of themes and issues relevant to policy learning. We draw some of these themes together into three models of policy-making and policy learning, which we term *rationalist*, *collaborative* and *politicised*.

FIGURE 1.1 AROUND HERE

In the *rationalist* model policy learning informs a procedurally rational process of centralised decision-making within a hierarchical system of governance. Power resides with the state, and there is a clear boundary between the public and private spheres. Of the five patterns of governance described by Pierre and Peters (2005), ranging from '*étatisme*' to '*governance without government*', the *rationalist* model is nearer the *étatiste* end of the spectrum. The policy process follows a sequence of distinct and separate stages such as agenda-setting, the determination of policy objectives and priorities, the identification of policy options, the evaluation and selection of options, policy development, policy implementation and evaluation (e.g. Hogwood and Gunn 1984).

Policy learning informs the intermediate stages of this sequence. It is a technical process, separate from the political processes of agenda-setting and the determination of policy objectives and priorities; it is concerned with the choice of means to achieve politically determined goals. It is primarily

concerned with knowledge of 'what works', that is, of the most effective policy options in terms of stated criteria of performance. This knowledge is assumed to be transferable: what works within one context is expected to work in other contexts, subject to conditions which must themselves be understood as part of the policy learning process (Rose 1993). These different contexts include different historical periods and different countries: other countries' experiences are trawled for evidence of best practice (Ochs and Philips 2003). Policy learning may also transfer across policy fields: what works in health policy, for example, may also work in education.

Policy learning in this model is separate from implementation; it takes place at the centre, and results in policies to be implemented elsewhere, but it is informed by the evaluation of policy after implementation. This evaluation feeds back into the modification of the policy. The information flows in this model tend to be vertical between the central government and the various sites of implementation; they are typically structured by procedures for performance management and accountability. The most important policy learning relationships are within the policy community at the centre of the process. Relationships with researchers tend to be formal, contractual and driven by strategic policy agendas; relationships with practitioners tend to exclude or marginalise policy learning.

In the collaborative model governance is less hierarchical and based more on networks and partnership; the boundaries between public and private spheres are weaker. This model is close to the 'governance without government' end of

Pierre and Peters's spectrum. The stages of the policy process are much less distinct (Bowe *et al.* 1992). The distinction between the political process of goal-setting and the technical processes of evaluating options and developing policy is therefore blurred. So is the distinction between policy development and implementation. Policy learning is, therefore, less exclusively concerned with policy development and it is closer both to processes of political contestation and to policy implementation. In contrast to the rationalist model, which separates politics and policy learning, in the collaborative model political contestation is an instrument and a catalyst for policy learning. Policy knowledge is much broader than 'what works' and includes all five types of policy-related knowledge described by Nutley *et al.* (2003): know-about problems, know-what works, know-how to put it into practice, know-who to involve and know-why. Much policy knowledge is tacit, social and embedded in practices and in networks. It is dynamic, uncertain, context specific and expressed through 'the capacity for practical judgement' rather than formal, propositional knowledge (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 24). It resembles the concept of Mode 2 knowledge described by Gibbons *et al.* (1994): trans-disciplinary, contextualised, often tacit generated in the context of application and socially distributed. Information flows are horizontal as well as vertical: between stakeholders and between different sites of implementation, as well as between the centre and the periphery. They are also more diverse, originating from a wide range of partners, and less structured by accountability and management arrangements. Policy learning relationships with researchers and practitioners are more extensive, more continuous and more diverse than in the rationalist model.

The rationalist and collaborative models are ideal types. Each brings together a number of dimensions that may be more or less closely linked in practice. They are drawn from a diverse range of literature that, nevertheless, tend to agree that the collaborative model provides the better context for policy learning. This is for two main reasons.

First, the collaborative model more accurately describes actual policymaking processes and the types of knowledge that inform this process. The rationalist model is widely agreed to be a poor representation of how policy decisions are made in practice (Richardson 1982, Olsen and Peters 1996, Smith and May 1997). Similarly, policymaking in practice requires a broader range of knowledge than 'what works', and a model of acquiring that knowledge that is less linear than simple models of knowledge transfer (Nutley 2003).

Second, effective policy learning is more likely to occur in systems of governance characterised by networks, collaboration, weak hierarchy and multiple links between government and civil society, because in such systems there are fewer vertical, lateral and temporal barriers to flows of information (Schon 1971, Bovens *et al.* 2001, Nutley 2003, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, Pierre and Peters 2005). The weaker boundary between policy decision making and policy implementation allows the learning acquired during policy implementation to modify and reinterpret policy in the light of local circumstances, and to feedback into central policymaking. Flows of information to policymakers are more diverse and less distorted by hierarchical

relations of management and accountability. Collaborative models facilitate learning and transfer of knowledge that is tacit, context specific and embedded in networks or in practice. They also allow policy learning to benefit from political contestation, rather than assuming that politics and learning are intension. Nutley argues that one of the most effective ways in which research knowledge can encourage policy learning is through the process of advocacy, and by being used as ammunition in an adversarial policymaking system. She concludes:

there may be some benefits from initiatives which seek to introduce more instrumental rationality into the policymaking process but there is even more to be gained from opening up policymaking processes: enabling participation by a wide range of stakeholders and citizens (2003: 15).

Nevertheless, the collaborative model does not have all the arguments on its side. The rationalist model captures positive features of policy learning which may be absent or less prominent in the collaborative model.

In the first place, the rationalist model draws attention to the methodological issues involved in learning from past experience or from other countries. These issues include the complexity, diversity and dynamism of the policy field, the limited range of policy experiences from which to learn, problems of generalisation and the difficulties of transfer across national, local and historical contexts. They can be obscured by the collaborative model because it focuses

on policy learning as the product of relationships rather than as a kind of social science.

Second, the collaborative model may encourage consensual modes of policy-making which favour single loop rather than double loop learning. Single loop learning... addresses ways of improving the present state of affairs while double loop learning brings about a fundamental re-examination of the condition and the current strategies to address it' (Rist 1994: 190). Policy discourses, organisational theories of action and the routines, practices and 'logics of appropriateness' in which they are embedded may filter, interpret and reconstruct information. The effect is to inhibit learning which challenges the assumptions of the discourse itself (Schon 1971, March and Olsen 1989, Ball 1990, Argyris 1999). The rationalist model holds out the promise of more double loop learning, even if this promise is not always fulfilled in practice.

Third, the rationalist model's notion of stages of the policy process draws attention to the contexts in which different types of policy learning may, or may not, take place. Bowe *et al.* (1992) replace the notion of stages with that of overlapping 'contexts' of education policy making, which they describe as the context of influence, of policy text production and of practice. The willingness of governments to learn, and the types of learning in which they engage, vary across these contexts (Bell and Raffe 1988, Rist 1993). Governments are most likely to resist double loop learning in the context of practice, when policies are being implemented: such learning directly challenges their legitimacy by questioning the assumptions on which current policy is based. Governments,

on the other hand, may be more open to learning in the contexts of influence or of text production and under particular conditions, such as examinations crises, which create conditions for the generation of 'political space' (Hodgson and Spours 2005).

Thus, while the diverse literatures we have drawn on all agree that the collaborative model, on balance, provides the better context for policy learning, some features of the rationalist model may also be desirable. (Critics may argue that these are features of the normative model of rational policy making rather than of policy making in practice. However, actual policy processes may also possess some of the characteristics of a third model, which we term 'politicised'. The politicised model, shown by the right hand column in Figure 1, is an ideal type like the two other models although it draws heavily on current observations of New Labour educational policy making. It could be seen as a distortion of the rational model while, at the same time, including some aspects of the collaborative model, notably through the rhetoric of community and stakeholder involvement.

Whereas politics and policy learning are separate in the rationalist model, and complementary in the collaborative model, in the politicised model they are in conflict because of the propensity of a politicised process to restrict the flow of information and ideas in order to block those which may challenge a preconceived political ideology or project. Policy learning is, therefore, constrained or distorted by its political context. Governance is centralised and hierarchical as in the rationalist model, but it is dominated by the ideological or political project which may become associated with presidential politics and a

dominant personality leading to the marginalisation of sections of the policy-community itself. The project dominates all stages of the policy process, partly because its champions are allowed free rein to intervene in varying contexts; the different stages of the policy process are, therefore, less distinct than in the rationalist model. Policymaking, as a result, is neither procedurally rational as in the rationalist model nor deliberative as in the collaborative model. Policy learning becomes political learning: its main purpose is not to identify policy options and choose among them but to legitimate, gain support for and implement options already chosen by the political project. This can involve utilising diverse types of policy knowledge but the usefulness of knowledge is judged by its compatibility with the project and by its source rather than by the veracity of its evidence. Policy learning relationships reflect a sharp distinction between insiders and outsiders, most researchers and practitioners, and possibly many members of the formal policy community itself are considered outsiders.

As a model of policy learning, the politicised model can reap the worst of both worlds. On the one hand, it lacks the methodological rigour and the capacity for double-loop learning of the rational model; on the other hand, it lacks the rich, continuous multiple information flows of the collaborative model and its ability to use political contestation as a support for learning. There may be a tendency for policymaking processes in either the rationalist or the collaborative model to move towards the politicised model if the government either becomes a prisoner of its own ideology or becomes impatient with the capacity of more consultative processes to achieve substantive change.

Policy-making and policy learning in England

The home education and training systems combine features of all three models but in differing proportions. We suggest that the English education and training system currently experiences a dominance of the politicised model. This can be traced back to the Thatcher years, a period marked by enhanced power for the executive, the growth of alternative sources of policy innovation to challenge the monopoly of the civil service together with new networks of business and right-wing academics formed around neo-liberal think tanks.

In its first Parliament, New Labour's modernisation programme signalled a movement from the ideological politics of Thatcherism towards a rationalist approach that focused on public service concepts of 'best value', 'what works' and how to develop effective policymaking (e.g. Bullock *et al.* 2001, Nutley 2003). This could be seen as part of a broader effort to modernize governance, to promote partnership and public participation in services, to devolve power to regions and nations and to promote joined up government (Newman 2001). By 2005, however, New Labour's early reformism had given way to the promotion of competition, diversity and choice in public services. This was the result not only of election manifesto commitments but also of a political agenda concerned principally with retaining the allegiance of sections of the middle classes to state education provision and, more ambitiously as part of a political project to 'remake' members of the middle classes as 'consumer citizens' in a

globalised world (Steinberg and Johnson 2004). This politicisation has also been fuelled by political conflict arising from New Labour's 'legacy politics'. Commenting on the role of Andrew Adonis in the DfES, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman Ed Davey commented 'The prime minister has had his finger in the pie from the outset [of the Schools White Paper]. Adonis was instructed to deliver something for his legacy' (The Guardian Newspaper 2006). Behind the influence of wider politics, the structures of politicisation have also grown. There has been a significantly enhanced role for the Number 10 Policy Unit and other units within government (e.g. the Delivery Unit) an increase in the number of political advisers and political power being openly invested in the hands of a few powerful non-elected individuals, and an increased use of private consultants to carry out the traditional work of civil servants, all of which challenge not only civil servants but also ministers and their departments.

The politicisation of policy has been felt particularly within education because of its totemic significance for the direction of public service reform. However, not all areas of policy may be so vulnerable to this trend. Other less politically sensitive areas may exhibit greater pluralism within New Labour discourse and symptoms of what we have termed a 'collaborative' approach. Certain ministers have argued for strengthening the 'public realm' by promoting more civic involvement and not simply consumer choice (Jowell 2005) as part of the debate about modernising public services through popular involvement in their design and delivery (Leadbeater 2004). Nevertheless, politicised rather than rational or collaborative policy making appears to be the most influential and its presence can be illustrated through a brief analysis of key tendencies – policy

evasion; policy busyness; policy tension; the audit culture and policy amnesia – in 14-19 education.

Politicised policy-making and implications for policy learning. 14-19 education is particularly politically sensitive within the overall education agenda because of the role it plays in selection and social segregation (Stanton 2004). These sensitivities focus principally on the role of A Level and GCSE qualifications and the role of employers, leading to what can be termed 'policy evasion' and 'nogo areas'. Risk aversion is not a new phenomenon in policy making (Nutley 2003) but the Government's rejection of the Tomlinson Working Group's proposals for 14-19 reform could be viewed as an extreme case because of ways in which ministers, following the A Level grading crisis of 2002, raised expectations in the education profession and beyond by encouraging 18 months of public debate. Qualifications, however, are not the only sensitive area of 14-19 policy. The role of employers and their contribution to training is another well known 'nogo' area. Specialist researchers in work based learning have repeatedly complained of government refusal to consider greater regulation of the youth labour market and more extensive 'licence to practise' – a social partnership model for 'employment' rather than simply policy emphasizing the leading role of employers (e.g. Keep 2004). Policy evasion restricts policy learning by not only ruling out certain options but also by not allowing them to be seriously discussed in the first place.

At the same time, politicisation can lead to an irrational policy process which is exemplified by the sheer amount of policy and the rapidity of reform. At the time of writing, English upper secondary education has had a 14-19 White Paper

and its Implementation Plan, the Skills White Paper, the Schools White Paper, the Foster Review of Further Education, the Leitch Review of Skills QCA's *Framework for Achievement* and the LSC's *Agenda for Change* to name but a few. This 'policy busyness' (Hayward *et al.* 2005) arises from the broader political context - new ministers trying to make their mark and to make the headlines, remediating the impact of previous policy failure and trying to keep to politically determined timetables (e.g. the proposal that all the new specialized diplomas should be rolled out by 2010, a possible election year). This leads to a 'ready, fire, aim' approach in which policy initiatives are rolled out without sufficient evaluation or consideration of implementation issues, amply illustrated by the problematical case of the *Curriculum 2000* reform of A Levels, broad vocational qualifications and key skills (Hodgson and Spours 2003).

At the centre of the Government's politicized model is a process of political calculation and triangulation (Toynbee and Walker 2005) as it seeks to maintain middle class allegiance to state education with the promise of greater school choice or the development of new schools sixth forms. This, in turn, produces 'policy tension'. The 14-19 and Education White Papers promote both institutional competition and collaboration (Hodgson *et al.* 2005) with configurations of policy based not on coherent educational concepts or evidence but on a politically inspired mix of public service reform paradigms.

Despite the rhetoric of devolved responsibility to learners and the frontline, the mode of governance and the policy process reflect a determined attempt to

retain central control (Coffield *et al.* 2005). A key feature of the politicized model of governance is the influence of the 'audit culture' as a particular form of regulation. Originally a part of the Conservative's New Public Management, the audit culture has been amplified by the Government's attempts to justify increased levels of public expenditure (Newman 2001, Steinberg and Johnson 2004) illustrated by the extensive use of policy levers and drivers by the Treasury and various government departments (e.g. targets, inspection and funding regimes). In the field of education, these are exercised primarily through the DfES and its arms length agency, the Learning and Skills Council. One of many problems associated with 'arms length' policy levers and drivers is that little is known by policymakers of their actual effect on professional and institutional practice because the top-down systems created to operationalise them are not designed to encourage feedback.

Within the politicized model, political knowledge is at a premium. For the Labour Government, this involves applying a general template of public service reform from the health service to other areas of the public sector including education (Strategy Unit 2006). This leads to what could be termed 'lateral insulation' in which 'political' learning focuses on the relationship between different aspects of public service reform. Such a line of analysis suggests that ministers may develop a politicized and general lateral knowledge rather than sharing a deeper and more specific vertical knowledge with researcher and practitioner communities within a given field where 'policy memory' may reside. This form of policy learning begs the question as to whether policymakers can learn from the past, exercising what has been termed 'policy memory' and the

capacity to reflect upon how policies have fared in different contexts (Higham and Yeomans 2002, 2005).

Constrained learning relationships - practitioners, researchers and policy-makers. Policy learning is based on a variety of policy learning relationships between policymakers, practitioners and researchers. Learning relationships within politicised systems, for the reasons already explored, tend to be constrained and hierarchical rather than expansive and open.

Despite its reputation for centralisation England has, in fact, a tradition of bottom-up practitioner innovation in 14-19 education going back to the days of CSE Mode 3, TVEI and process based reform. However, over the last decade this has been increasingly confined to an ameliorating role in making centrally designed qualifications, such as GNVQs or *Curriculum 2000* more workable (Higham and Yeomans 2002, Hodgson and Spours 2003). Practitioners continue to be consulted through Green Papers and important policy initiatives but parameters are restrictive and the timelines for response, short. Practitioner involvement in consultation is also hierarchical. The Government invests a great deal in its relationships with head-teacher and manager groups, selected professional associations and 'elite' selective consultation groups which integrate chosen practitioners, academics and policymakers into key policy forums withingovernment.

Despite the drives for centralism and control the politicised approach, however, does not produce a monolithic system. On the ground, there is a flourish of 14-

19 innovation by practitioners, assisted by local authorities and local learning and skills councils around institutional collaboration, developing progression pathways and developing coherent programmes of study (Hayward *et al.* 2005). Local practice takes advantage of the different messages in government policy (e.g. the emphasis on both institutional competition and collaboration) but the question remains as to how far local innovation can be sustained when working against powerful policy steering mechanisms (Hodgson *et al.* 2005).

The relationship between government and the academic education research community in England, suffers from an undercurrent of mutual suspicion. The Government has tried to exercise a greater level of control over education research, criticising what it sees as the lack of cumulative research evidence and a lack of engagement with policy needs (e.g. the establishment National Education Research Forum (NERF), the funding of a number of 'centres of excellence' and the increasing use of political think tanks and private consultants). Education researchers, on the other hand, have attempted to address government concerns (e.g. Pollard 2005) about the relevance of education research although others have challenged government's 'naïve' belief in 'big science' to provide answers for 'what works' type questions (Furlong 2004). Nutley (2003) argues that the gap between education researchers and policymakers can only be bridged if each party recognizes that it has distinct concerns and problems and both make efforts to develop more mutual understanding.

Within the policy community itself the Government has attempted to promote elements of a 'rational' approach to policy making because of the political priority of encouraging 'joined up' government (Cabinet Office 1999, CEM 2001). At its most advanced, this approach envisages professionals and policy-makers from different sectors coming together in 'co configuration' to challenge their own professional traditions and practices in order to find new solutions (Warmington *et al.* 2004). In reality however, this integrated approach with its demands for more collaborative policy learning has been a relatively minor part of policy making. The dominant approach, we suggest, has been the broad political application of a public service reform project across different services. Furthermore, the effects of a distinctive English political environment with its top-down governance and policy busyness may undermine attempts at policy learning across different areas of public policy. The sheer number of policy initiatives and short time-scales for delivery make it difficult for policy makers to find time for cross departmental liaison and evaluation, a situation compounded by reductions in the number of public sector functionaries as a result of the Gershon Review (HMT 2004) together with constant reorganisations both within the DfES and LSC (Coffield *et al.* 2004).

The various symptoms of politicization, and the ways in which these support constrained learning relationships, combine together to create a difficult climate for reflective policy learning. Policy evasion, as a resistance to the slow development of necessary long-term measures, goes hand-in-hand with policy busyness and a frenetic pace of piecemeal reform. This results in less time for reflection and works against the idea of feedback from practitioners or

researchers. Policy tension and the ensuing political dissension results in political trade-offs and compromises rather than settlements based on policy learning. Policy performativity and the audit culture produce unintended outcomes due to the way they encourage compliance and 'gaming' by different parties within the system (see Lumby and Foskett, this volume). Within the politicized policy process, policy learning is not entirely absent but it is dominated by political learning derived from political experience and the need to ensure personal political survival within the higher echelons of government. Learning through rational or collaborative modes is subordinated to these objectives.

Policy learning and policy-making in Scotland and Wales

In Scotland and Wales supporters of political devolution in 1999 hoped to develop a more open and participative style of governance, more consistent with the collaborative model described above (Paterson 2000a, Loughlin and Sykes 2004). Even in Northern Ireland the policy contexts since the 1998 Good Friday agreement has been defined by aspirations for 'pluralism, democratisation and social inclusion' (Donnelly and Osborne 2005: 149), but with the Northern Ireland Assembly still suspended at the time of writing we focus here on Scotland and Wales.

Many of the institutional forms associated with the politicised model in England, such as central policy units and non-elected advisers detached from policy

departments, are absent or weaker in Scotland or Wales. Peter Peacock and Jane Davidson, the respective education ministers at the time of writing, enjoy greater longevity in office and more control over their own departments than any New Labour education minister in England. The scope for presidential or ideological policymaking is restricted by the dynamics of coalition government in Scotland and minority government (since 2003) in Wales. The committees of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have potentially more influence than their Westminster counterparts. There is less of the policy busyness found in England: policymaking has been busy but the agendas are less fragmented and less subject to policy tensions. Local government is stronger, and the audit culture is weaker.

In both countries learners, practitioners and other stakeholders have been encouraged to contribute to debates about education policy. In Scotland, the Executive launched a National Debate on school education in 2002, and encouraged wide participation among all stakeholders (Munn *et al.* 2004). This process gave rise, among other things, to the current reform of the 3-18 curriculum, *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Curriculum Review Group 2004). A parallel inquiry into the aims of education was conducted by a Committee of the Scottish Parliament, while another Committee conducted a wide-ranging review of lifelong learning. In Wales, a similarly wide consultative process led to the *14-19 Learning Pathways* (WAG 2004). More than 170 people from different sectors and stakeholder interests took part in 'Task and Finish Groups', and many others participated in focus groups and other consultation exercises.

In both countries a similar spirit of partnership has informed policy development and implementation (Daugherty, 2004). A network model is being used to develop and implement the **14-19 Learning Pathways** in Wales – to the point where a recent report identified a need to rationalise the burgeoning system of partnerships (Chapman, 2005). The **Assessment is for Learning** programme in Scotland has been seen as an example of a collaborative model of change that has avoided top-down prescription and engaged with the profession (Hayward *et al.* 2004). A similar model is being used for the implementation of **Curriculum for Excellence**, described by the TES Scotland as ‘a major departure for Scottish education, which in the past has relied on edicts from above rather than organic growth’ (TES Scotland Plus 2006: 2). At the time of writing more than 700 schools have joined a Register of Interest of participants in curricular innovation.

The devolved administrations’ commitment to policy learning is also reflected in their engagement with academic research. Historically, links between educational researchers and government have been closer in Scotland and Wales than in England. This partly reflects the smaller scale and denser networks of these countries. Before 1999, it sometimes also reflected an implicit pact between researchers and a territorial leadership asserting its sphere of autonomy within the arrangements for administrative devolution. Since 1999 the devolved administrations have made a conscious attempt to engage researchers. They have also provided active support for capacity-building in educational research. The Scottish Executive and Scottish Funding Council have co-funded an Applied Educational Research Scheme with a

strong capacity building remit. In Wales Jane Davidson, the Education Minister, established an Education Research Liaison Group in 2001 in response to reports of weaknesses in research capacity.

The devolved administrations have, therefore, moved some way towards the collaborative model outlined above, and they seem to be much closer to this model than the government in England. Have they, however, solved the problem of policy learning? We suggest three reasons for caution, or at least for suspending judgement on this issue.

The first is that even if Scotland and Wales exemplify the collaborative model they also exemplify some of the potential limitations of that model as a context for policy learning. As we noted earlier, the collaborative model may, under some circumstances, detract from the methodological rigour associated with the rationalist model. It may confuse consultation with research and mistake the strength of consensus for the strength of evidence. It may encourage single-loop learning which does not challenge this consensus rather than the double-loop learning which explores more radical options. Critics in both Scotland and Wales have questioned whether these countries may be developing a consensual but conservative style of policy making which resists innovation (Reynolds 2002, Martin 2005). It is questionable whether the National Debate in Scotland would have been allowed to engage in the kind of double-loop learning which challenged the assumptions and roles of established policy communities.

Second, the revolution in governance may be incomplete. Welsh critics have noted that old styles of policy making have persisted and old policy communities have retained their influence, reflected for example in the decisions about the Welsh National Council for Education and Training and the Welsh Baccalaureate (Rees 2002). The decision to reabsorb key educational agencies into the Welsh Assembly Government has been criticised by Morgan and Upton (2005) who argue that the system lacks a culture of scrutiny. Humes (2003) draws attention to aspects of continuity in Scottish policy making since 1999. And although the Scottish Executive gave verbal support to the Parliamentary Committee investigation on the purpose of education and on lifelong learning, in an apparent spirit of collaboration, it largely ignored their findings in practice. Relations between the research and policy communities have varied, even under devolution; in Scotland there was a period of mutual mistrust under the Executive's first minister of education, Sam Galbraith, a former surgeon whose medical background may have encouraged a narrow understanding of the nature and purposes of educational research. Moreover, to the extent that Scotland and Wales have moved towards a collaborative model this may be temporary, part of a cyclical process linked to the different policy making contexts outlined by Bowe *et al.* (1992). The commitment to openness has been strong in the context of influence where the administrations have been less committed to particular policy directions and have less to lose by sharing influence. As policies move into the context of policy text production and the context of practice the administrations may become less open to ideas which challenge the wisdom of the chosen policies (Raffe 2002b). A less collaborative and more top-down style may re-emerge. In addition, as we have

noted above, either the rationalist model or the collaborative model may evolve into a politicised model if the administration becomes a prisoner of its own ideology or becomes impatient with the pace of change under more consultative arrangements. This could happen in Scotland or Wales as well as in England.

Our third reason for suspending judgement with respect to Scotland and Wales relates to the discontinuities associated with the devolution process itself. In the short term this process may have reduced the countries' capacity for policy learning by changing the nature of the learning, diverting scarce resources away from policy learning and reducing the stock of policy memory. The new context of political devolution raises questions about the extent to which policy lessons learnt before 1999 can still be applied thereafter. To some extent policy learning may have to begin anew, with a blank sheet. However, the small civil services and small resources for policy making, already stretched before 1999, now have to accommodate the increased demands of political devolution and accountability. Their capacity for policy learning is tightly stretched. One short-term casualty of devolution, at least in Scotland, was research, which had a low priority in the institutional restructuring after 1999. This was reflected, for example, in a four-year gap between cohorts of the Scottish School Leavers Survey, an important data source for 14-19 education which had previously contacted new cohorts biennially. Research capacity in Wales is still small in relation to the policy learning needs of a national government (Daugherty 2004). And the organisational changes that accompanied devolution have sometimes resulted in a loss of policy memory. Scottish education policy has

become less 'joined up' since the single department of the Scottish Office was replaced by two separate departments of the Executive, one for schools and one for post school learning. Nearly all the staff of the new Department of Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, responsible for post school education and training, had to be recruited from other policy areas. As an indirect consequence of devolution the Scottish Inspectorate lost its leading policy-making role, a move which was justified on democratic grounds but which deprived educational policymaking of its main source of policy memory and professional expertise.

Conclusion

We have suggested that policy learning is most likely to take place in systems which have many features of the collaborative model, some features of the rational model and relatively few or weaker features of the politicised model. This optimal balance may be expressed in terms of three types of learning relationships:

- ***Learning relationships between government and practitioners*** might be marked by the blurring of boundaries between policymaking and implementation; the involvement of practitioners in policy networks; weak hierarchical relationships; established horizontal communications; a supportive accountability framework with information on performance and policy outcomes

not distorted by accountability and control mechanisms; and a high degree of sensitivity of policymakers to issues of deliverability.

▪ ***Learning relationships between government and researchers*** are characterised by recognition of the variety of types of 'knowledge' relevant to policy; the involvement of researchers in policy networks and decision making; mutual understanding and recognition of the different norms of policy and research; government's acceptance of researchers' rights to engage with political debates and a joint commitment to enhancing research capacity to engage in strategic research.

▪ ***Learning relationships within the government/policy community*** are marked by a recognition that political contestation can promote learning; a focus on the research and development capacity of government; encouragement and supporting structures for mutual learning across policy fields and sufficient stability of institutions and staffing within government to support policy memory.

In none of the home countries do we find all these conditions. To reach this ideal in England may mean moving away from the politicised model towards a more collaborative style of governance. Scotland and Wales appear to be developing a collaborative model but it remains to be seen whether this will be sustained and, if so, whether it will need to be supplemented by features of the rationalist model.

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