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Intended and enacted curricula: tracing the trajectory of an enduring problem

This article reviews the literature on educational change and investigates the complex nature of putting educational ideas into practice. It also sheds light on the similarity between the intended and the implemented curriculum by arguing that a preoccupation with two conventional models of curriculum implementation has foiled meaningful classroom practice. An alternative model that could significantly enhance our understanding of implementation is suggested. Focusing on why and how teachers' understanding of curriculum policy is critical to the translation of policy into practice, alternative ways in which policy might be conceived, developed and put into practice are considered.

Beoogde en geïmplementeerde kurrikulums: op die spoor van 'n blywende probleem

Hierdie artikel oorskou die literatuur oor opvoedkundige verandering en spoor die haakplekke op in die implementering van opvoedkundige idees in die praktyk. Dit werp dus lig op die verwantskap tussen die beoogde en die geïmplementeerde kurrikulum. 'n Besorgdheid met twee konvensionele modelle van kurrikulum-implementering het betekenisvolle klaskamerpraktyk die onderspit laat delf. 'n Alternatiewe model wat ons begrip van implementering beduidend sal bevorder, word voorgestel. Dit blyk dat 'n fokus op die hoekom en die hoe van die onderwysers wie se sinbelewing van die kurrikulumbeleid van die uiterste belang is met oog op die omskakeling van beleid na praktyk. Dit verg 'n meer gepaste formulering van die kurrikulum en dui ook op die alternatiewe wyses waarvolgens kurrikulumbeleid ondersoek, gekonseptualiseer, ontwikkel en in die praktyk toegepas word.

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This article reviews the literature on a topical issue in education, generally, and curriculum implementation, in particular, namely why is it so difficult to translate policy into practice? How does one understand policy and its link(s) to what actually happens inside classrooms? The inquiry is located within the broader literature on educational change and summarises salient aspects of literature related to schools and educational change. In sketching the trajectory of the policy-practice disjuncture, an important part of the explanation for the teachers' failure of translating educational policies into classroom practices can be found in conventional views of educational policy.

Two curriculum implementation models dominated curriculum thought for the better part of the twentieth century, and the struggle to implement curriculum policy successfully at classroom level depends to a great extent on a preoccupation with the two models. A third implementation model is proposed as an alternative that eliminates many of the shortcomings of the first two models and could significantly enhance our understanding of implementation, while being more in step with modern theories of educational change.

1.   Educational policy and its translation into practice

Why is successful school change so hard to achieve? More specifically, why do policies seldom permeate the classroom practices of teachers? According to Elmore (1999: 270), part of this answer can be traced to the mistaken belief held by curriculum reformers that sound curriculum models would create their own demand. A cursory glance at large-scale educational change by the early 1970s in the USA attests to the absence of change at classroom level. Elmore (1999: 263) accurately reflects this dilemma:

> We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers engaging in these practices in large scale institutions designed to deliver education to most children.

It is thus far more difficult to put ideas into practice. In addition, a myriad of factors could derail any attempt towards change, making

it essentially a highly risky endeavour. Most changes assume teachers to be highly skilled practitioners with excellent subject content knowledge, working harmoniously with fellow colleagues. This view disregards the cellular nature of schools and the professional isolation of teachers, not to mention the "classroom press" teachers experience on a daily basis. In addition to these factors, most reform strategies focus on structures and formal requirements and do not engage directly with existing cultures, and which new values and practices may be required. As Fullan (2001: 34) so eloquently points out: "restructuring occurs time and time again, whereas reculturing is what is needed".

If the contextual realities in which teachers are working are added to the existing problems, it becomes clear why it is so difficult to bring about change.

1.1 Contextual realities

Educational change often falters because no provision has been made for the unique particularities within which it will be realised. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is unwise and fraught with danger, as McLaughlin (2000: 79) warns:

> Schoolteaching does not take place in generic classrooms stripped of subject matter concerns, mindless of the backgrounds, needs, and interests of the students who come to school, or impervious to department, school, district, and other context influences. To ignore context is to ignore the very elements that make policy implementation a problem.

When Curriculum 2005 was introduced in South Africa the fact that schools differ was completely ignored, and this was pointed out by scholars such as Jansen (2002) and Rogan & Grayson (2003). These differences are particularly evident in South Africa for a variety of reasons that persist to this day. Rogan & Grayson (2003: 1173-4) point out that there is an immense diversity of schools in South Africa: some boast magnificent buildings and educational programmes that would rank among the best in the world, while others occupy broken-down buildings, lacking doors and windows, electricity and sanitation, and with few books and no resources. They argue that

policy-makers in South Africa should have adopted a theory of implementation that took the diversity of schools into account. There is a huge range not only in the quality of schools, but also in the knowledge and skills of the teachers. Implementing a curriculum in such an uneven landscape could only exacerbate inequalities, which were the hallmark of education under the apartheid system.

1.2 The multidimensional nature of educational change

According to Hargreaves (2000: 283), reformers lose sight of the lack of predictability due not only to the fact that the environment in which educational change takes place is increasingly complex and turbulent, but also because of the multidimensional nature of educational change itself. Fullan (2001: 30) concurs when he indicates that there are at least three components or dimensions at stake in implementing any new programme or policy: the possible use of new or revised materials; the possible use of new teaching approaches, and the possible alteration of beliefs.

The multidimensionality of change underscores the complexity, difficulty, uncertainty and ambivalence that accompanies all attempts at change and explains why policy has for over half a century struggled to be mirrored in the classroom practices of teachers. In addition, each individual views change as a highly personal experience.

1.3 The personal nature of educational change

Educational change is further complicated by the fact that change is often a personal and emotional experience. Hargreaves (2000) is of the view that overly rationalist approaches to improvement and change have presented a view of learning, teaching, leadership, and change that is excessively cognitive, calculative, managerial and stereotypically masculine in nature. Teachers adopt different approaches to their work and to changes than do many of their colleagues. The emotional dimension of educational change stresses the need to avoid reform strategies, leadership styles and work conditions which create conditions of hopelessness, and feelings of guilt and shame. Such emotional conditions in schooling reduce teachers' sense of ef-

ficiency and their ability to provide quality education for students (Hargreaves 2000: 292).

Nearly all the innovation literature addresses the importance of the personal engagement of those involved in any reform process (Robinson 2003: 25). Fullan (2001: 32) argues the importance of recognising the subjective meaning of education change, and when complex change is involved, people do not and cannot change by being told to do so (Fullan 1993: 24). Robinson (2003: 24) asserts that those responsible for driving the reform process are not able to track what actually happens to policy documents in practice. She continues by arguing that if teachers do not feel a sense of identification with the policy at a political level, its goals may be undermined by practitioners who understand and accept neither its conceptual foundation nor its curricular imperatives. Robinson (2003: 24) concludes by focusing attention on how such circumstances create a façade of reform, where teachers play out a role that has been legislated for them by the state. Ball (2005: 215) calls this "performativity". In an insightful article entitled: "The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity" he argues that reform does not simply change what educators do; it changes who they are. The performances serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of quality, or moments of promotion or inspection. He argues that the policy technologies of education reform are also mechanisms for reforming teachers and for changing what it means to be a teacher. The new vocabulary of performance renders old ways of thinking and relating dated or redundant or even obstructive (Ball 2003: 217-8). It is easy to comprehend why South African teachers initially struggled when the new curriculum was introduced with a complete new vocabulary.

Fullan (2001) also refers to the personal engagement with change but uses a slightly different term, namely "meaning". He agrees that it (meaning) is central to making sense of educational change. Fullan's (2001: 8) assertion is instructive in this regard:

> Neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms.

In my study on teachers' understanding of curriculum policy in three South African schools I clearly explicate how their own views about what constitutes good teaching contradict curriculum policy and how its implementation deviates from the official policy (Blignaut 2005). Teachers, for instance, were of the opinion that group work which is fore-grounded by curriculum policy was time-consuming, and one of them remarked that she only did group work twice a term. Research findings by Spillane *et al* (2002) indicate that individuals assimilate new experiences and information by means of their existing knowledge structures. Viewed from this perspective, what a policy means for teachers depends to a great extent on their repertoire of existing knowledge and experience.

It is my contention that the majority of South African teachers' epistemologies were shaped by a markedly different education system and that those influences act as powerful mediators (filters) of how and why teachers make sense of the new curriculum. One of the greatest obstacles is that most of the teachers and even student teachers who had their schooling in South Africa had most, if not all, of their learning experiences under apartheid and fundamental pedagogics whose epistemological assumptions were different from those that inform the current curriculum. Although they may strongly reject that form of schooling and the assumptions, which informed the way that the education system was organised, their own personal experiences as learners function as an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie 1975). For many experienced teachers this is the only way that they know how to teach because that is all they have observed or experienced. In three case studies it was found that teacher epistemologies played a crucial role in how teachers made sense of curriculum policy and how this influenced their classroom practices, which was mostly traditional and transmission-orientated (Blignaut 2005).

The challenge of meaning is how those involved in change can come to understand what it is that should change, and how it can be best accomplished, while realising that the what and how constantly interact and reshape each other.

Earlier attempts at reform floundered because the insights that are gradually emerging from the literature in the past three decades of

educational change were not available to policy-makers in the 1970s and were to a large extent not taken into account. This explains why policies have historically struggled to penetrate the classroom practices of teachers.

Capacity-building is generally regarded as crucial for educational change to become institutionalised (cf Darling-Hammond 2000).

1.4 Capacity-building as leverage for change

Support or rather the lack thereof is one of the most commonly cited reasons why educational innovations fail. Huberman & Miles (1984: 23) put it succinctly: "… large scale change bearing innovations lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that their users received once the change process was underway". Moffet (2000) as cited by Robinson (2003: 27) argues that successful implementation of innovation depends to a large extent on the existence of a reform-support infrastructure, with open and functioning communication channels between different levels of the system, good use of human resources and strong district support.

It can be said that successful change occurred if a critical mass of teachers are implementing the reform meaningfully and have embraced the change.

1.5 The challenge of scaling up

The challenge for educational reformers is first, to have the reform accepted and, secondly, to have a critical mass of teachers who believe in, and embrace the educational innovation. Policy-makers worldwide have to contend with this challenge. Commenting on why educational change has had so little impact on educational practice in the USA, Elmore (1999: 253) argues that innovations that require considerable changes in the core of educational practice seldom penetrate more than a small fraction of USA schools and classrooms and seldom last for very long when they do. With the "core" he means how teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the student's role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork.

Elmore's (1999) argument in defence of his thesis is based on his view that most teachers tend to think of knowledge as discrete bits of information on a specific subject and of student learning as the acquisition of this information through processes of repetition, memorisation, and regular testing of recall. The teacher is generally the centre of attention in the classroom, initiates most of the talk and orchestrates most of the interaction in the classroom.[1] Students' work is typically assessed by asking them to repeat information that has been conveyed by the teacher in the classroom, usually in the form of worksheets or tests that involve discrete, factual, right-or-wrong answers (Elmore 1999: 253-4).

Elmore (1999: 254-5) states that at any given time, some schools and classrooms might violate these core patterns. Students may initiate a large share of classroom talk; they might also work in groups. Teachers may ask broad, open-ended questions designed to elicit what students are thinking and how they are thinking, rather than to assess whether they have acquired discrete bits of information. As a proportion of the total number of teachers, they are always a small fraction. Research conducted in South African schools by Jansen (1999), Harley & Wedekind (2004), Stoffels (2004) and Blignaut (2005) confirm this observation. Attempts to fundamentally change the stable patterns of the core of schooling are usually unsuccessful on anything more than a small scale. To substantiate this point Elmore cites "progressivism" in the USA as an example of a movement that failed to reform education because it tried to change the core of schooling. It could be argued that the NCS also threaten the core of schooling.

2.   Conventional explanations for lack of change

Some conventional explanations focus on the autonomy of implementing agents and their unwillingness and limited capacity to change their behaviour (Berman 1978). Implementing agents fail to notice, intentionally ignore, or selectively attend to policies that are inconsistent with their own interests and agendas (Firestone

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1   Cf Blignaut 2005 for a South African version of the latter.

1989). Policies that fit their agendas are more likely to be implemented, while those that do not are more likely to be either opposed or modified so that they do fit (Spillane *et al* 2003). Fullan (1991) also reminds one that implementing agents or agencies often lack the capacity – the knowledge, skills, personnel, and other resources – necessary to work in ways that are consistent with policy. Given the legacy of education under the apartheid system and the dichotomy between urban and rural schooling as well as the many underqualified teachers in South Africa, it is not surprising that teachers are battling to implement the NCS successfully.

2.1 Limitations of conventional explanations

While the accounts that catalogue the difficulty of curriculum policy to change the classroom practices of teachers are compelling, they are not sufficient to explain non-change. It can be argued why an emphasis on sense-making as advanced by Spillane *et al* (2002) could broaden one's horizons and push back the boundaries of one's understanding of the complex nature of educational change.

Recent studies of the implementation of education standards show that teachers and school administrators frequently not only heed higher-level policies but also work hard to implement them (Firestone *et al* 1999; Hill 2001). Yet the same studies offer evidence of limited implementation of state and national policies. Portrayals of implementing agents as resisters and saboteurs working to circumvent policy proposals that do not advance their self-interest do not suffice to account for these outcomes. By assuming that implementing agents understand what policy-makers are asking them to do, most conventional theories fail to consider the complexity of human sense-making. In these accounts, implementing agents are portrayed, either implicitly or explicitly, as intentionally interpreting policy to fit their own agendas, interests, and resources. These accounts assume that teachers are responding to the ideas intended by policy-makers, which they either ignore or modify (Spillane *et al* 2002).

Research in cognitive and social psychology, however, suggests that caution is necessary in this instance. Spillane *et al* (2002) argue that viewing failure in implementation as demonstrating lack of capacity

or a deliberate attempt to ignore policy overlooks the complexity of the sense-making process. Sense-making is not a simple decoding of the policy message; in general, the process of comprehension is an active process of interpretation that draws on the individual's rich knowledge base of understandings, beliefs, and attitudes (Carey 1985, Markus & Zajonck 1985). Differences in interpretation or in acting on understandings are an essential aspect of the process of human understanding. Thus implementing agents' sense-making provides numerous opportunities, aside from any wilful or intentional efforts to revise policy to fit with local agendas, for the transformation of policy-makers' ideas about changing practice. In order to explain the influences on implementation, the mechanisms whereby teachers understand policy and attempt to connect understanding with practice must be explored. The process whereby teachers come to understand policy, the understandings that result, and the consequences of those understandings for policy implementation are rarely analysed explicitly in conventional implementation models.

The main theme of this article and, in particular, the question as to why classroom practices are so hard to transform will now be examined. In order to do so, it is imperative to review two curriculum implementation paradigms that have dominated curriculum thought over many decades in the past century. It is my contention that allegiance to these curriculum implementation paradigms has also contributed considerably to the lack of transformation of teachers' classroom practices. A third curriculum implementation paradigm has emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century that holds much promise for attempts to bridge the gap between curriculum policy and the classroom practices of teachers.

Since the mid-1970s, the design of traditional implementation strategies has been divided between two polarised perspectives: fidelity versus adaptive implementation. Recently, however, Snyder *et al* (1992) offered a third alternative, called enactment, to help teachers and students derive meaning in the classroom. A brief overview of the three implementation paradigms will now be given, followed by a comparison and a sketch of their possibilities for constraining or enhancing educational change.

3.   The fidelity perspective

The fidelity perspective views the process of change in a technological top-down and linear manner.[2] This perspective focuses on using the curriculum as its developers originally intended. Approaches to policy development based on the fidelity perspective generally begin with research conducted or mandated by state bureaucrats (outside of situated practices). This is followed by policy development processes that often culminate in written products such as policy documents. This approach to policy development is commonly referred to as the Research, Development, Dissemination, Adoption (RDDA) model. Hence, it is firmly expected that a highly specified programme developed by experts will be actualised in practice as exactly as possible, without any modifications. Policies conceived within this prevalent model of policy development have failed to bring about changes in educational practices. Hopkins *et al* (1994: 17) underscore this point:

> ... centrally imposed change implicitly assumes that implementation is an event rather than a process; that a change proceeds on autopilot once the policy has been enunciated or passed.

This view does not distinguish between the object of change and the process of how change evolves, in other words how schools and local agencies put the reforms into practice. I agree with Hargreaves (2000: 289) who echoes the same sentiment when he asserts that meaningful educational change can no longer be achieved in a step-by-step, linear process. Change does not proceed through clear and discrete stages. Educational change that is premised on a linear process negates the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the process of change and is incongruent with the view of educational change advanced in this instance. There are salutary warnings in the literature that caution against the wisdom of such an approach. Studies have shown that change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit and that macro-level strategies are limited in changing micro-level realities (cf Darling-Hammond 2000, McLaughlin 2000).

2   This section draws on the work of Cho (1998) as a basis to advance my argument.

From a fidelity perspective, research traditionally measured the degree of implementation by means of a prescribed instrument. With a direct correspondence to practice in mind, educational research paid attention to snapshots of the behaviour of the teacher, moment by moment, in the classroom (cf Fullan & Pomfret 1977). As an early historical fad in research on teaching, such a rigid implementation paradigm was based upon behaviourism, which is easily connected to positivism, firmly distinguishing facts from values, and researcher from researched (Cho 1998: 5).

From this perspective, teaching is viewed as a considerably limited process whose main purpose is that of achieving a product (curriculum), since implementation is predicted as an extremely well-prescribed phenomenon.

3.1 The adaptive perspective

An alternative perspective emerged in the mid-1970s when the Rand Change Agent conducted some unprecedented large-scale research on the implementation of federally supported programmes. By closely examining nearly 300 projects used for survey research, and approximately 30 settings used for field research, Rand researchers pointed out that "the very nature of these projects requires that implementation be a mutually adaptive process between the user and the institutional setting" (Cho 1998: 7).

With an implementation paradigm shift in mind, Berman (1981: 260) asserted that "research has changed […] from a quest for superior technologies to an exploration of organizational and contextual explanations of change". He maintained that the challenge against the taken-for-granted technological-experimental perspective gave rise to a new consideration of three meta-propositions referring to ways of thinking about educational change:

- Educational change typically involves an implementation-dominant process.
- The educational change process consists of three complex organisational sub-processes – mobilisation, implementation and institutionalisation – that are loosely, not linearly, coupled.
- Outcomes of educational change efforts tend to be context- and

time-dependent (Berman 1981: 261-78).

The assumption underlying this perspective is based on an understanding of change efforts as involving many unpredictable factors that can best be undertaken by negotiating the intention of the developers and thus by adapting it to each institutional setting in which an innovation takes place. This perspective can be compared to postpositivism that emphasises the complexity of the context in which a change takes place. This adaptive paradigm accepts the notion that adopting an innovation is merely the first step in a complex process of change. Unlike the fidelity perspective that views reality as static and transmissional, the adaptive perspective brings a constant flow of mutual modification to the heart of an organisational process of change. In the long run, a process of change resembles a time-consuming and context-dependent process (Hall & Loucks 1981, Berman 1981). Briefly, the success of a new curriculum results from the consequences of trade-offs within a local context in which multiple values are embedded. Meaning emerges as the result of a constant, transactional process between an ideal goal and existing reality. Yet the authority of written programmes selected is still, to a large extent, respected by change facilitators and implementers (Cho 1998: 3).

Although the adaptive perspective catapulted one's understanding powerfully forward with regard to the implementation process, it still did not take all the complexities of teachers' work into account. Notably, it neglected teachers and students as "meaning" makers. As such, it paved the way for the emergence of a third alternative implementation paradigm.

3.2 The enactment perspective

As argued by Snyder *et al* (1992: 404) the enactment perspective refers to meaningful educational experiences "shaped by the evolving constructs of teacher and students". The conceptualisation of curriculum in this perspective is completely different. In this instance, "curriculum" is not necessarily the taken-for-granted notion of a "document". Nor is it captured by the *a priori* instrument that enables researchers to measure the enactment of the curriculum in

the light of predetermined goals and objectives. The enactment perspective points to the misnomer of the term implementation due to an unnecessary application of top-down bureaucracy. When one views "knowledge as temporary, developmental, socially and culturally mediated, and thus, non-objective" within the classroom, it does not matter what the policy imposed is outside the classroom (Cho 1998: 12).

The use of the term curriculum enactment invites an active involvement of students and teachers who bring their own background knowledge to the classroom. It also strongly encourages teachers to be "aggressive interpreters" who are supposed to create educative room for their professional development. Analytically, the priority in implementing something is located in the very context in which evolving meanings are shaped. Ultimately, the social construction of reality involves both teacher and students in their search for personal meaning, regardless of the curriculum guideline (Cho 1998:12-3).

4. Appraisal of implementation models

This section pays particular attention to the conceptual problems of the two dominant implementation models – the fidelity and adaptive perspectives – by comparing and contrasting them. By locating the discussion within the literature that was reviewed in the first part of this article, I argue that these traditional implementation models are incongruent with the emerging theories of educational change. It is argued that the field of implementation becomes an educational vehicle whereby practitioners can increase and understand ways of professional development. Policy-makers need to provide space to teachers in interpreting new curricula rather than providing "teacher-proof curricula". Those schools that need more guidance and help should be supported until they can move to more autonomy.

Finally, I contend that the enactment perspective of curriculum implementation provides us with a deeper and richer understanding of how teachers make sense of a curriculum at classroom level, and holds out much more promise for an alternative conceptualisation of the teacher as a meaning maker. This perspective (enactment) is also

more in line with the emerging literature on educational change, and the view of implementation promoted in this article.

The fidelity perspective should be dropped from the field of curriculum implementation, and a new one should be created, where the role of the teacher can be realistically constructed in the light of whose authority is crucial within the classroom. The view of the teacher as "faithful implementer" is dated and might have been more appropriate in earlier, more stable times. As has been indicated in the literature review, such a view of the teacher is incongruent with the unpredictability, uncertainty and complexity of the process of educational change and is out of order in a postmodern world. The epistemological and ontological foundations/assumptions that underlie the fidelity perspective run counter to emerging insights in the literature.

The adaptive perspective goes further than the fidelity perspective in the sense that the role of teacher and the context in which the curriculum is introduced are recognised. However, these traditional implementation models do not take the notion of the teacher as "meaning maker" seriously and are not in line with the emerging literature that characterises the process of change as highly unpredictable and complex. A cautionary note though: In the first section of the paper it was argued that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is fraught with danger and that contextual realities in South Africa suggest a more differentiated approach to implementation. Some schools in South Africa could be rated among the best in the world compared to others where very little constructive teaching and learning take place. Schools that are known for producing excellent education and those that improve themselves should be allowed the freedom to move in the direction of an enactment perspective.

The enactment perspective acknowledges the role that teachers and students play in the implementation of a curriculum, and teachers and students are invited to function as partners. Within this view of curriculum, teachers are not perceived as passive implementers but as "members of a classroom learning community". Curriculum is viewed as a social process created and experienced within multiple, interacting contexts (Snyder *et al* 1992). Teachers' personal and practical knowledge, intuition and image are expected

to be used for linking development and implementation. The central thrust of the enactment perspective is getting the teacher to feel the ownership of an innovation, and demands of the teachers a constant pursuit towards the certainty of "transformation of subjective realities" (Fullan 1991: 36).

The enactment perspective acknowledges teachers as meaning makers; takes cognisance of educational change as a highly uncertain and multidimensional endeavour, and is congruent with the view of implementation advocated in this article. Such a view of implementation resonates well with why and how teachers make sense of a new curriculum. I concur with Cho (1998) that the idea of the teacher-as-deskilled-worker should be firmly discarded under the critical tradition of thought, which is exemplified by Freire's (1970) transformative emancipatory enactment confronting the "banking" system of education.

It is not surprising then that curriculum policy has failed to permeate the classroom practices of teachers, given the fact that these traditional models of implementation have dominated curriculum implementation for so long.

4.1 Critical reflection

Change is without doubt intangible and, probing ever deeper into the riddle why educational change is so difficult to accomplish in schools, one is reminded by the incisive words of Hargreaves (2000: 285) that schools are characterised by incredible degrees of order, continuity and tradition, and remain impervious to much in the way of attempted change. He continues by declaring that schools may be assailed by change but that they are also places of great historical continuity. Hargreaves' depiction merges favourably with Darling-Hammond's (2000: 642) portrayal of schools as requiring to cope simultaneously with "provocations to change and conservative forces to preserve tradition".

What obscures matters further in the translation of policy into practice is vividly captured by McLaughlin's (2000: 74) assertion that teachers' perspectives on teaching and learning are rooted in fundamentally different premises of actions, if not different goals than those

of policy-makers. Students are the workplace context of greatest consequence for teachers when they talk about their classrooms and their commitment to teaching (Mclaughlin 2000: 75). Ball (2003: 222), following Smith, outlines how the "primacy of caring relations in work with pupils and colleagues" has no place in the hard world of performativity. The "reformed teacher" is conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets. It is assumed that teachers and context will adjust to policy but not of policy to context. Ball (2005: 47) calls this the "privileging of the policymaker's reality".

Teachers are not always convinced that any policy can be sufficiently worked out to be "applied" as is in practice. Policies that are conceptualised far away from the hard world of practice run the risk of being ineffective or entirely ignored because such policies will nearly always overlook the factors that affect teaching and learning. I agree with McLaughlin's (2000: 82) assessment:

> The extent to which teachers can succeed in meeting these goals depends on their success in wrestling with the deep, hard changes in beliefs, attitudes, and practices they assume.

Guskey (1986: 7) claims that any change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes and hence practice will most likely emerge once they have explored and judged the innovation in their classroom. As he puts it:

> … change in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent on their gaining evidence of change in the learning outcomes of their students. Practices that are found to work, that is, those that a teacher finds useful in helping students attain desired learning outcomes, are retained; those that do not work are abandoned.

Teachers have thousands of hours of experience in applying what has worked for them in the past, trying out their own ideas and revising their practice with ideas or impetus from self-selected external sources. Too often the home-grown expertise of experienced professionals has gone untapped. In interrogating the main theme of this article further – why is it so difficult for policy to change practice – I am provoked to ask: are we missing something here? It might be far more useful to examine alternative ways in which policy might be conceived, developed and put into practice:

> […] Policy ideas in the abstract […] are subject to an infinite variety
> of contingencies, and they contain worlds of possible practical ap-
> plication. What is in them depends on what is in us, and vice-versa
> (Spillane *et al* 2002: 387).

When teachers are presented with changes in curriculum policy, they interpret and enact them through the unique filters of their own experiences, beliefs, personal resources, theories, context and so forth, resulting in significant variances among the classroom practices of teachers. This state of affairs underscores why teachers adapt rather than adopt an innovation.

5.   Conclusion

The literature review made it clear that educational change is a complex phenomenon that is uncertain, unpredictable and above all multidimensional. Aspects such as resources, capacity, will (motivation), context, support and a host of other factors resurfaced as critical themes in the literature on change and have invariably been the focus of policy researchers over an extended period to clarify the intricate relationship between policy and practice. Despite all these efforts one's understanding of why it is so difficult to translate policy into practice is still partial and incomplete. It is my view that a focus on why and how teachers' "sense-making" of curriculum policy is critical to the translation of policy into practice is a much more apt phrasing of the curriculum implementation problem.

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