

5 Curriculum Development, Change and Control

It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves. (L. Stenhouse, 1975: 143)

We have noted in the earlier chapters of this book that if the development of an *educational* curriculum is to be promoted and if appropriate forms of curriculum change are to be effected, a good deal of attention must be given to the choice of a suitable theoretical model for curriculum planning and, in particular, to some important questions about the kind of emphasis which can or should be placed on the selection of curriculum content and the use of curriculum objectives. In later chapters we will also note the account which must be taken of a vast range of constraints and influences which together provide the context within which curriculum change and development must occur. This chapter will address itself to questions concerning the possible strategies which might be employed for changing the curriculum, the techniques which have been shown to be effective in attempts to bring about curriculum change or to promote curriculum development.

Again we must begin by noting that the most significant change which has occurred since the publication of the first edition of this book in 1977 is the politicization of the curriculum. The effect of this in relation to curriculum change has been twofold. First, quite sweeping changes have been made by centralized diktat. And, second, all other forms of change and development have been arrested, since deviation from the prescribed form is not permitted, and this, as was predicted in earlier editions, has had the effect of bringing the natural evolution of curriculum to a halt. Some changes may be allowed to occur within subject-content or methodology, but nothing more sophisticated than that is now possible. The kinds of changes, indeed advances, which were

to be seen in the 1970s and 1980s are no longer possible. As a result, the understandings we were developing about the complexities of educational planning and provision have not been extended significantly, nor, as we shall yet again see, have they been incorporated in the curriculum which has now been imposed.

Those understandings, however, continue to be important and interesting to any serious student of curriculum. And, indeed, the strategies which have been employed by those who have taken responsibility for implementing these new policies are interesting in their own right, especially when compared and contrasted with those which had emerged from earlier experience of curriculum change in less overtly political contexts. Both, then, will form the substance of this chapter.

First we will look at what was learned from the work of major national agencies established to promote and support curriculum development in the United Kingdom. Secondly, we will explore some of the problems of disseminating curriculum innovations, by looking at some of the models of dissemination which have been either postulated or employed and by considering their relative effectiveness. Thirdly, since this kind of exploration must lead to a questioning of the role of any centralized agency in curriculum development, since in fact the main lesson to be learnt from a study of dissemination techniques is that local initiatives have always been more effective than national projects in bringing about genuine change, we will examine the theory and the practice of school-based curriculum development, and the associated concepts of 'action research' and 'the teacher as researcher'. And, fourth, against the backcloth of the understandings which we will see emerged from those developments, we will consider the devices which have been employed for effecting the massive changes in schools in England and Wales required by the 1988 Education Act and its associated policies and practices.

National agencies for curriculum development – the work of the Schools Council

The most illuminating, and indeed appropriate, way to set about an exploration of the effectiveness of national agencies in supporting curriculum change and development is to trace the work of the Schools Council in England and Wales. For this was the largest non-statutory and politically independent body established with the set task of promoting curriculum change. And it will be interesting not only to identify the important lessons which can be learnt from its work but also to compare and contrast that work with the

procedures which have been adopted for the implementation of centrally dictated change by the several political quangos which have been created to enforce that change on schools and teachers.

It was suggested in Chapter 1 that the 'unplanned drift' (Hoyle, 1969a), resulting from the product of external pressures, which characterized such change as the curriculum once sustained, at least at the level of secondary education, was replaced by attempts at deliberate planning and curriculum construction only in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was largely as a result of a concern felt throughout the western world that it might be falling behind in the race for technological advancement.

In the United Kingdom that period saw the beginning of a number of attempts to change the curriculum, supported in some cases by the injection of money for research and development from such bodies as the Nuffield Foundation, until all these threads were drawn together by the establishment in October 1964 of the Schools Council for the Curriculum and Examinations, whose brief was 'to undertake research and development work on the curriculum, and to advise the Secretary of State on matters of examination policy' (Lawton, 1980: 68). It was funded jointly by the Department of Education and Science and the local education authorities. It is worth noting also, that its constitution implicitly endorsed the idea of teacher control of the curriculum, in that teacher members formed a majority on virtually all of its committees.

There are perhaps two major kinds of general lesson to be learned from the work of the Schools Council – first, those relating to its role as a politically independent, professional body for curriculum development, and, second, those deriving from its failure to bring about change on any significant scale. Both throw light on the issue of the role such an independent body can play in promoting the continuing development of the curriculum.

A politically independent professional agency

It is worth remembering that at the time when the Schools Council was first established there was little in the United Kingdom which could be called professional curriculum theory (Blenkin *et al.*, 1992). The major intellectual influences on curriculum came from those contributory disciplines whose inadequacies we noted in Chapter 1 – philosophy, psychology and sociology. Curriculum theory, as we defined it there, was virtually non-existent. That, by the time the first edition of this book was published in 1977, there was a wealth of theoretical understandings which that book attempted to summa-

size was largely due to the Council's work.

For the many research and development projects it sponsored opened up all of the issues of curriculum theory which we are still exploring here – curriculum models and ideologies, curriculum evaluation, pupil assessment, the role of the teacher and, perhaps above all, strategies for the dissemination and promotion of innovation and change.

In the course of doing this, it also generated a great legacy of materials, handbooks and other artefacts which, as Lawrence Stenhouse (1983: 354) said, embody 'ideas of power ... and are the best outside source of ideas about pedagogy and knowledge for teachers who will approach them as critical professionals who perceive ideas not as threats to their own professional autonomy, but as supports for it'. He goes on to add a point which is particularly relevant to our discussion here, that, although these ideas were generated at a time of optimism, they still have importance at a time of gloom and recession.

These ideas, insights and understandings, it might be said, came largely from the mistakes which were made by many of the Council's earlier projects – the too ready adoption of the aims and objectives model, for example, especially because it seemed to be required for purposes of evaluation, and the simplistic strategies which were initially adopted for the dissemination of its planned innovations. However, without the freedom to make these mistakes, these lessons would not have been learnt (as they have still not been learnt by the authors of current policies). And so there is some force to the argument that the main significance of the Schools Council's work lay not in the changes it brought about in the school curriculum (its own Impact and Take-Up Project [Schools Council, 1978, 1980] revealed how slight these were), but in the fuel it provided for the developing curriculum debate and the insights and understandings it helped us to achieve.

The virtual cessation of that debate and the loss of those insights and understandings, which are key features of the era since the Council was dis-established and replaced by a number of politically driven quangos is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the value of its work in this respect. And it is perhaps the best evidence of the importance of a politically independent agency for curriculum development in a genuinely democratic society.

Lessons from the Schools Council's work

Curriculum and examinations

The first lesson to be learned relates to the duality of the role given to the

Council – its responsibility for both curriculum development and the public examination system – which was a major factor in determining its policies and its actions. For its task was to maintain a balance between two potentially conflicting elements of the education system (Becher and Maclure, 1978). There is no doubt that these two must be planned in phase, not least because, as we shall see when we consider in Chapter 7 some of the external constraints on curriculum planning and development, the public examination system is probably the most influential of these; and, indeed, as we shall see when we consider the implementation of current policies and practices in England, control of assessment procedures is the most effective element in control of the curriculum. Hence the Council's inability to bring about significant changes in the examining system severely limited its effectiveness in promoting curriculum change. Its advice on examinations was never taken seriously by the Department of Education and Science, as is demonstrated by its attempts to introduce a common system of examinations at sixteen-plus (Schools Council, 1971a, 1975b), a change which was given official sanction only after the demise of the Schools Council when it was implemented through the establishment of the General Certificate of Secondary Education in 1988.

If a national agency is to influence the development of the school curriculum to any significant degree, then, it must be able to effect changes on a broad front and, in particular, to address the issues raised by the many constraints on curriculum change and development, especially the public examination system.

Its initial subject base

This dual role also determined the major flavour of its work at least during the first ten years of its life. For, like the examinations system, its work was largely subject based, and this made it difficult for it to respond to changes of focus within the curriculum. It also led it to adopt a differentiated approach to curriculum planning. Because the constraints of the examination were less significant in relation to those pupils regarded as 'less able' or those whose examination targets were within the newly established Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), where examination requirements, and even subject content, were more readily malleable, it could be claimed that it was at its most influential in recommending changes in the curriculum for the 'less able' pupil in the secondary school. Indeed, a major part of its brief was to advise on a suitable curriculum for the early leaver, the school leaving age having been raised to 16+, with effect from 1972, on the advice of the

Newsom Committee (CACE, 1963). It must also be recognized, however, that its influence here often took the form of advising schools to offer such pupils a different curriculum, consisting largely of low-status knowledge and little else (Kelly, 1980). This is a point we will return to when we discuss the issue of curriculum entitlement in Chapter 10.

Planning by objectives

A third aspect of the work of the Schools Council from which many lessons have been learnt was the encouragement it offered to most of its early projects to adopt an objectives-based planning model. Again it must be conceded that this was understandable in the context of the general climate existing at the time when it was established. Whatever the reasons, however, it is clear that from the beginning the Council was not only concerned that, in order to demonstrate its proper use of public funds, the work of all its projects should be evaluated, but inclined also to the view that this could best be done, perhaps could only be done, if they began by making clear statements of their objectives. There were, of course, notable exceptions to this general trend, among which, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, was the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP) (Schools Council, 1970), but these exceptions merely prove the rule and there is no doubt that as a whole the Schools Council added its weight to that growing trend towards regarding this as the only proper basis for curriculum planning, a trend which we have noted, vigorously questioned and, indeed, rejected in earlier chapters. The link between the prespecification of objectives and curriculum evaluation we will explore more fully in Chapter 6; we must merely note here that the Schools Council can be criticized for lending its general support, at least in its early years, to the view that this link is non-problematic, although this must be offset by a recognition of what some of its later projects contributed to the opening up of this issue.

Dissemination

Lastly, we must note that further lessons were learnt from the methods of dissemination adopted by many of the Schools Council's projects. Again, we will look at the problems of the dissemination of curriculum innovation later in this chapter. We must comment here, however, that on the evidence of its own Impact and Take-Up Project (Schools Council, 1978, 1980) the work of the Council was less effective than one would have hoped and that this was to a large extent attributable to the forms of dissemination it adopted, particularly in its early years, or to its failure to pay adequate attention to the problem of dissemination.

The force of most of these difficulties and criticisms was recognized by those responsible for the work of the Council, so that its later years saw new trends arising from the emerging inadequacies of the old. We have already seen in Chapter 3 that there was a development away from the starkest forms of objectives-based planning, for example, as more sophisticated forms of evaluation were developed. The emergent problems of dissemination, too, led to a greater concentration on the idea of supporting local, school-based initiatives.

However, it is quite clear not only that the early patterns and structure adopted by the Schools Council influenced curriculum development generally but also that they acted as a continuing constraint on its own work and thus inhibited these later developments (Blenkin, 1980). It is equally clear that they provided ammunition for those who argued that a teacher-controlled Schools Council had failed to make a significant impact on the curriculum of the schools. It was claimed above that the success of the Schools Council is to be judged not by its direct influence on curriculum change but by the contribution its work made to promoting debate about the curriculum, to developing insights and understandings, to extending awareness of the complexities of curriculum planning and to creating an interest and concern for curriculum issues among teachers. But the influence of the Council's work on general development in both the theory and the practice of curriculum change, while it may be very extensive, is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, while its failure to achieve direct changes through its own projects was manifest from the evidence of its own Impact and Take-Up Project (Schools Council, 1978, 1980). Its attempts to learn from the inadequacies of its earlier practices, then, were thwarted not only by those practices themselves but also by the strength they added to the case of its opponents.

Reconstitution and disestablishment

These criticisms of the achievements of the Schools Council under a system of teacher control, then, led to its reconstitution. For the move to reduce the teachers' control of the curriculum, which we will explore in Chapter 7, gained strength from the criticisms by outsiders of its work (Lawton, 1980), as well as from the economic stringency which led to a reduced availability of money for curriculum development. Thus the main thrust of the reconstitution of the Council was towards reducing the influence of teachers in the formation of its policies and increasing that of many other bodies with an interest in education. In short, in unison with the general trends of the time, it was designed to open educational policy to public debate, and thus

to bring it under the control of the administrators.

It was but a short step from this to complete disestablishment. Problems of the kind we have listed and the criticisms they led to were the major stated reasons why the funding of the Council was withdrawn in 1984. There is no doubt, however, that there were also significant underlying political reasons for this action, as we shall see when we explore the political context of curriculum change and development more fully in Chapter 7. This was clearly a step towards the establishment of the new National Curriculum and, in that context, perhaps the greatest significance of this action is that it had the effect of removing the only major source of politically independent research in education and the only politically free professional agency for curriculum change and development.

Its role in curriculum development was in theory to be taken over by the School Curriculum Development Council (SCDC), but this was clearly a politically controlled body and merely paved the way for the establishment of those several political quangos which have subsequently been established to oversee the implementation and maintenance of those policies and practices which have been decreed by the 1988 Education Act and subsequent policy changes.

The strategies adopted for this implementation are interesting in themselves as devices for effecting curriculum change, and we must consider them presently. Before we do so, however, we need to explore in some detail the three most significant understandings relating to curriculum change and development which emerged from the Schools Council's work – the issue of the dissemination of innovation, that of school-based development and the concept of action research.

The dissemination of innovation and change

It was suggested earlier that a major reason for the failure of the Schools Council to influence curriculum change more directly and more widely was to be found in the dissemination strategies that were adopted. The dissemination of innovation is another problem that was created by that shift we have noted on several occasions from unplanned drift to deliberate planning, from random evolution to positive engineering. The essence of the change is that dissemination replaces diffusion (although the terms are not always used with meanings as clearly distinct as this). 'Once the curriculum reform movement got into "third gear" the term "diffusion", suggesting a natural social process of proliferation, gave way to the term "dissemination", indicating planned

pathways to the transmission of new educational ideas and practices from their point of production to all locations of potential implementation' (MacDonald and Walker, 1976: 26).

The intentions behind this process were several. It was hoped that it would lead to improvements in the channels of curriculum change; there was optimism that it would accelerate the speed of curriculum change; it was expected that the quality of the curriculum would be improved; and greater cost-effectiveness was also envisaged (MacDonald and Walker, 1976).

The problems which rapidly became apparent arose from two major and interrelated sources. First, the effectiveness of this process was seen to be affected to a high degree by those many constraints which limit all forms of curriculum development. At an early stage in its existence, the Schools Council identified several of these as being particularly significant in the constraining effects they were clearly having on innovation – 'finances, staff attitude, the mobility of pupils, parental pressures, and examinations' (Schools Council, 1971b: 15). In general, the social climate and organizational health of each institution proved to be a crucial factor – a point we must return to shortly.

Models of dissemination

The second set of problems for programmes of dissemination arose from the models of dissemination which were used, and some discussion of the models which have been identified must be undertaken as a prerequisite to examining the problems themselves.

Two major attempts have been made to identify different models of dissemination – those by Schon (1971) and Havelock (1971). These have been taken as offering the bases of an understanding of the problems of disseminating educational innovation, but it must be noted and emphasized straight away that their analyses are based on evidence culled from spheres other than education, a process whose dangers and inadequacies we have had cause to comment on in several other contexts.

Schon's models

Schon identified three models of dissemination, which he called the Centre–Periphery model, the Proliferation of Centres model and the Shifting Centres model. It is not unreasonable to see the second and third of these as elaborations of the first and thus all three of them as different versions or methods of what is fundamentally a centre–periphery approach.

The essence of the simple Centre–Periphery model is that it assumes that the process of dissemination must be centrally controlled and managed, that the innovation is planned and prepared in detail prior to its dissemination and that the process of that dissemination is one-way – from the centre out to the consumers on the periphery. The effectiveness of this approach depends on several factors, which include not only the strength of the central resources but also the number of points on the periphery that are to be reached and the length of the ‘spokes’, the distance of these points from the centre.

The Proliferation of Centres model attempts to overcome these factors, or at least to reduce their significance, by creating secondary centres to extend the reach and thus the efficiency of the primary centre. The intention is that the work of the central development team is supported and extended by local development groups. In turn, these local groups are supported by the central team through the provision not only of advice but also sometimes of courses of training.

It can be seen that the adoption of this kind of model represents an acknowledgement that attention has to be given to the process of dissemination itself and not merely to the details of the innovation to be disseminated.

Schon’s third model, the Shifting Centres model, was posited to explain the spread, witnessed in recent years, of ideas such as those of civil rights, black power, disarmament and student activism, in other words changes of values and attitudes of a more subtle and less deliberate kind. These developments are characterized by the absence of any clearly established centre and of any stable, centrally established message. Indeed, this is a model which appears to be more successful at explaining how unplanned diffusion occurs than at offering a strategy for planned dissemination. Schon believes it has potential value for curriculum change but this must be questionable, since it is a model which appears to offer no basis for the development of any specific message (Stenhouse, 1975).

Havelock’s models

Havelock’s analysis of dissemination strategies can be seen as an attempt to take us beyond the notion that these must always assume a one-way, centre-to-periphery process. His Research, Development and Diffusion (R, D & D) model has many affinities with Schon’s basic Centre–Periphery approach. For it assumes a developer who identifies the problem and a receiver who is essentially a passive recipient of the innovation developed to resolve that problem. It is a ‘target system’ and is regarded as the model to be adopted when large-scale curriculum change is the aim.

His Social Interaction (SI) model, however, places great stress on the social interaction between members of the adopting group. Again it is a form of the centre–periphery model; again it is a ‘target system’; and again the needs of the consumer are determined by the central planner. But it recognizes that the key to the adoption and implementation of the innovation is the social climate of the receiving body (a problem we have just seen the Schools Council also identified), and that success or failure will hinge on the channels of communication there. It thus represents, like Schon’s Proliferation of Centres model, the beginnings of a shift of focus from the centre to the periphery.

It is with Havelock’s third model, the Problem-Solving (PS) model, that this shift is completed. For the essence of this model is that the problem is identified by the consumer and the process of innovation is thus initiated also by him or her. The individual on the periphery is thus himself or herself active and involved from the beginning, and the process is essentially one in which he or she recruits outside help. The relationship between the consumer and the external support agent is one of mutual collaboration rather than that of the receiver and the sender of a message; and the whole process is personalized to the point where it has to be recognized that this is not a model of mass dissemination, since the solution that is devised for the problem need not be seen as solving the problems of other consumers. In short, it might be fairly claimed that this is not a model of dissemination at all but rather a model for school-based curriculum development.

The inadequacies of the centre–periphery approach

It will be appreciated that there is a good deal of overlap between these schemes and models. It is not an over-simplification, however, if we suggest that the major division is between those which adopt a centre–periphery approach of central development and planned dissemination and those which encourage initiatives from the consumer and have led to the development of the notion of school-based curriculum development. The latter is an approach which, as we saw, the Schools Council came to late in its life; the former was the strategy adopted by the early projects of the Council and, as we suggested earlier, this was a major factor in its failure to influence curriculum development as directly as it was once hoped it might.

The gap between theory and practice

For there are some problems which it might be argued are endemic to this approach and which make it quite inadequate as a device for bringing about

effective curriculum change. In particular, there is a wide gap between the idea of a project held by its central planners and the realities of its implementation, if that is even the word, in the classroom by the teachers. The existence of this gap between policy and practice was viewed by Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) as the central problem of curriculum development and, indeed, of the advancement of education itself. Even when a project team sets out deliberately to support teachers in their own developments rather than to provide a teacher-proof blueprint (Shipman, 1972), as was the case, for example, with the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP), the Keele Integrated Studies Project (KISP) and the Goldsmiths' College Interdisciplinary Enquiry Project, the same difficulties have been experienced. It has proved impossible to get across to teachers the concept of the project, the theoretical considerations underlying it, in such a way as to ensure that these were reflected in its practice. And so a gap emerges between the ideals and the realities, a gap that in some cases is so wide as to negate the innovation entirely, at least in terms of the conception of it by its planners.

The main danger then becomes a possible loss of credibility for the project, a rejection of the principles behind it, if an ill-informed or maladroit or even malignant implementation of it derived from lack of adequate understanding has led to disastrous practical consequences. That something has not worked leads too readily to the assumption that it cannot work, rather than to a consideration of the possibility that one has got it wrong.

Such a situation is clearly unsatisfactory since it means at one level that the sums of money spent on central curriculum development have not produced anything like adequate returns and at a further level that they can be positively counterproductive, in so far as failures of this kind can lead to an entrenching of traditional positions.

This kind of reaction, however, is easy to understand, once one acknowledges that schools are living organisms and must be helped to grow and develop from within rather than having 'foreign bodies' attached to them from without, like barnacles attaching themselves to a ship's bottom. This kind of attempt at transplantation must lead in almost every case to 'tissue rejection' (Hoyle, 1969b), and that has been the experience of all such attempts at the dissemination of innovation.

Organizational health and social interaction

Various hypotheses have been put forward to explain the inadequacies of the centre-periphery model of dissemination. One piece of research has indicated that even where a lot of positive effort has gone into promoting the dissemi-

nation of a project to the schools, barriers to its implementation exist not only in the failure of teachers to perceive with clarity their new role but also in the absence of conditions appropriate to their being able to acquire such a perception (Gross *et al.*, 1971). 'Our analysis of the case study data led us to conclude that this condition could be primarily attributed to five circumstances: (1) the teachers' lack of clarity about the innovation; (2) their lack of the kinds of skills and knowledge needed to conform to the new role model; (3) the unavailability of required instructional materials; (4) the incompatibility of organizational arrangements with the innovation; and (5) lack of staff motivation' (*op. cit.*: 122). The first four of these conditions, they claim, existed from the outset; the last emerged later. Nor would this seem surprising.

It has also been suggested that another major factor in the ineffectiveness of this approach to curriculum change is its failure to take proper account of social interaction theory (House, 1974). Broadly speaking, the argument is that centre-periphery approaches to dissemination in education are using the wrong model of social interaction or 'personal contact'. They are attempts at imposing a highly depersonalized model and thus they reduce the level of personal contact, leaving the teacher as a largely passive recipient of the innovation. This not only restricts the flow of the innovation but invites teachers to modify and adapt it to conform to the norms of their own group.

'Power-coercive' strategies

Another perspective on this difficulty sees these attempts to impose new ideas and approaches to curriculum on teachers as examples of the use of 'power-coercive' strategies (Bennis *et al.*, 1969), attempts to bring about change or innovation by enforcement. This kind of approach is contrasted with 'empirical-rational' strategies, which attempt to promote change or innovation through demonstrations of their validity and desirability, and 'normative-re-educative' strategies, which approach the task of innovation through devices for changing the attitudes, the values and the interrelationships of the teachers and for providing them with the new skills needed to implement the change. Again, therefore, we can see that a major concern is with the quality of the social interaction within the school and with the teachers' response. We can also recognize that the contrast is between imposition, whether from an outside agency or from within the school through, for example, a powerful and strong-willed headteacher, and the involvement of the teachers themselves both in identifying the need for change and in developing responses seen by them to be appropriate to that need. It will be interesting to return to this analysis when we review the methods by which

recent changes have been imposed on schools as a result of central government directives.

'Teacher-proofing' and professionalism

Finally, it is worth noting briefly the implications of this debate for notions of teacher professionalism or the professional concept of the teacher. It would not be appropriate here to engage in detailed analysis of the concept of professionalism. It is important, however, to note, not least because of the enhanced significance this has in the context of the National Curriculum, that to adopt power-coercive strategies, to attempt to develop 'teacher-proof' schemes, to endeavour to bring about change from outside the school, is to view the teacher as a technician rather than as a professional, as an operative rather than as a decision-maker, as someone whose role is merely to implement the judgements of others and not to act on his or her own. We must note, therefore, that the difficulties of this approach to curriculum planning and innovation derive not merely from the fact that it seems to have proved ineffective in practice but also because it has serious implications for the professional standing and responsibility of teachers. Again it represents a technicist rather than an ethical approach to curriculum development. And, again, as we saw when we discussed objectives-based planning models in Chapter 3 and as we shall see when we look at the uses of assessment in Chapter 6, it leads to a particular form of curriculum, one that promotes *learning* but not *education*.

These, then, have been some of the criticisms of those early attempts at curriculum innovation and change which did not plan their dissemination but rather hoped that their ideas, once propagated, would spread with the wind, and of those which, while deliberately planning the dissemination of their ideas and materials, did so in a somewhat authoritarian manner, offering what they hoped would be 'teacher-proof' schemes and packages, and expecting teachers either to accept the imposition of these upon them or to recognize unaided their supposedly self-evident attractions.

Some consequent modifications

In response to these criticisms, therefore, many devices have been used to improve the processes of dissemination both by deliberately planning it and by doing this in a manner designed to take greater account of the difficulties of ensuring proper acceptance. Most of these may be seen as indications of a move towards Schon's proliferation of centres. House (1974) recommends the

creation of more incentives for local entrepreneurs, the leaders of Schon's secondary centres; he also wishes to increase the number of those participating in the exercise; and his major aim is 'to reduce political, social and organizational barriers to contact with the outside world' (MacDonald and Walker, 1976: 20). In pursuit of much the same goals, the Schools Council attempted to establish local development groups, to involve teachers' centres, to gain the support of local education authorities, to promote the in-service education of teachers, to mount regional conferences and even, in some cases, to involve members of the project teams in the work of the schools, as change agents working in secondary centres (Schools Council, 1967, 1971b, 1974b). Many of these devices were also adopted by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) in the final stages of its work, when it sought to support teachers in effecting changes in their curricula (Kelly, 1987). And one can see the institution of in-service days in schools as a step in this direction.

In spite of all such developments and the use of all these detailed strategies for planned dissemination, major difficulties have continued to exist. Some of these were identified by those concerned with the dissemination of the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP). In particular, failure to achieve adequate dissemination was attributed to difficulties in communication between the project team and the schools (MacDonald and Rudduck, 1971). It would be a mistake, however, to interpret that statement at too simple a level, since a number of features of this failure of communication have also been identified. One is the tendency of teachers 'to invest the development team with the kind of authority which can atrophy independence of judgement in individual school settings' (*op. cit.*: 149). The converse of this was also observed, namely the anxiety of some teachers not to lose their own style by accepting too readily the specifications of method included in the project. Both these factors would seem to point to the need for a full and proper involvement of the teachers with the development of a project. Both of them too draw attention to the significance of House's insistence on a proper regard being paid to the different forms of social interaction.

The manner of introduction

This emphasizes the importance of the manner in which innovations are introduced. It will be clear that if an innovation is to have a chance of 'taking' in a school, it will be necessary for more to be done than the mere provision of resources and in-service support for teachers. Teachers will need to become committed to it, an ideological change will need to be promoted, if they are to be expected willingly to adapt their methods and approaches to

meet the demands of the new work. This offers a far more subtle problem. It is here that the manner in which the proposed change is made becomes important. For if it is imposed by the headteacher, for example, or by powerful pressure from outside, the dictation involved will be counterproductive and will promote opposition and hostility in teachers rather than support. Not only will teachers in such circumstances not work to promote the change planned; they will quite often deliberately and actively sabotage the efforts of others. It is plain that power-coercive strategies do not bring about real or effective change.

The micro-politics of the school

To bring about effective curriculum change, then, we must take full account of the micro-politics of the school (Ball, 1987). Indeed, as we have seen, the attitudes of staff were one of the major constraints on curriculum change that the early work of the Schools Council drew attention to. It asserted that 'innovation cannot succeed unless the majority of staff are, at worst, neutral; but it was clearly important to have a majority positively inclined to curricular change' (Schools Council, 1971b: 15). That report went on to say that 'one solution suggested was that innovation should begin by attempting to solve existing dissatisfactions' (*ibid.*). This suggestion clearly points to the desirability of shifting the focus from the centre to the periphery, of adopting a model more akin to Havelock's Problem-Solving model, and of employing empirical-rational and/or normative-re-educative rather than power-coercive strategies. In fact, it would appear to indicate that artificial dissemination by donor is not as good as the real thing.

Curriculum negotiation

Support for this view is to be found elsewhere too. For it has further been suggested that this problem goes beyond a mere failure of communication or of the strategies employed to introduce the innovation and is in fact the result of the different views and definitions of a curriculum project that we have already suggested are taken by different bodies of people involved in it (Shipman, 1972, 1973). The question must then be asked whose definition is to be seen as valid. To speak of dissemination or implementation, of the barriers to implementation created by schools and teachers, or of the need to improve the teachers' understanding of the theoretical considerations underlying a project is to make the assumption that the planner's view and definition are to be accepted as valid. For this reason, it has been suggested that 'the process of curriculum dissemination, in so far as it assumes a stable

message, does not occur. The process to which the term “dissemination” is conventionally applied would be more accurately described by the term “curriculum negotiation” (MacDonald and Walker, 1976: 43). In other words, having recognized that a gap exists between the ideals of the planners and the realities of the work of the teacher in the classroom, we should be concerned to close it by attempting not only to bring the latter nearer to the former but also by seeking to bring each closer to the other. To see the need to do this is to recognize that curriculum development is essentially a matter of local development, that it requires a form of ‘household’ innovation.

This, then, constitutes a further argument in favour of school-based curriculum development. For it is clear that, if the social climate of the school is to be supportive of innovation, if, to change the metaphor, the organizational health of the school is to be such as to ensure that there will not be any kind of ‘tissue rejection’ (Hoyle, 1969b), it is necessary for the initiatives to come from within, for the process to be one of growth and development rather than of transplantation. In short, it became apparent that the main reason for the failure of attempts to change curricula from outside was that the dissemination model itself was wrong, so that attention came to be directed towards the development of alternative models, in particular the idea of school-based curriculum development.

School-based curriculum development

It was the relative failure of external attempts at the dissemination of innovation, then, that led to the emergence of the idea of school-based curriculum development. There is, therefore, a real sense in which this must be seen not as a form of dissemination so much as an alternative to it. We have just noted that the failure of descending models of dissemination is in part due to the need for the social and organizational climate of the school to be such as to create the conditions for any planned innovation to ‘take’ in the school, and that this realization, by shifting the focus of attention from the innovation to the school, from the seed to the soil in which it is to be planted, suggests that the process must be considered first from the other end and the initiative sought in the school rather than outside it.

Several major principles are reflected in this notion of school-based curriculum development. First, it acknowledges that a large measure of freedom for both teacher and learner is a necessary condition for curricular provision which is to be fully educational (Skilbeck, 1976). Second, it views the school as a human social institution which must be responsive to its own environ-

ment (Skilbeck, 1976), and which must, therefore, be permitted to develop in its own way to fit that environment. Lastly, it regards it as vital to this development that the individual teacher, or at least the staff of any individual school, should accept a research and development role in respect of the curriculum (Stenhouse, 1975), modifying, adapting and developing it to suit the needs of individual pupils and a particular environment.

Fundamentally, therefore, it is an acceptance of that developmental view of education which we attempted to unpack in Chapter 4 which has provided the basis for the positive arguments which have been offered in support of this shift of emphasis. Malcolm Skilbeck, for example, argues that school-based curriculum development 'provides more scope for the continuous adaptation of curriculum to individual pupil needs than do other forms of curriculum development' (Skilbeck, 1976: 93–4). Other systems are

by their nature ill-fitted to respond to individual differences in either pupils or teachers. Yet these differences ... are of crucial importance in learning ... At the very least, schools need greatly increased scope and incentive for adapting, modifying, extending and otherwise reordering externally developed curricula than is now commonly the case. Curriculum development related to individual differences must be a continuous process and it is only the school or school networks that can provide scope for this. (Skilbeck, 1976: 94)

For these reasons, then, there came to be a growing conviction that the only satisfactory form of curriculum development is likely to be school-based, so that in the years preceding the advent of centralized control of the school curriculum in England and Wales, we saw a proliferation of sub-variants of this generic concept – School-Focused Curriculum Development and School-Centred Innovation (SCI), for example – of supportive agencies, such as Guidelines for Review and Internal Development of Schools (GRIDS), and of consequent schemes for evaluation at this level, such as School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and School-Based Review (SBR).

Key features of these developments

We must now remind ourselves of some of the key features of these developments, not merely from nostalgia but, more importantly, because they contribute to a clearer appreciation of the changes and the losses which recent years have seen.

Change agents

We must begin by noting that, to meet some of the problems this approach creates, some schools made senior appointments of teachers with special responsibility for co-ordinating and guiding curriculum – curriculum co-ordinators or curriculum development officers, change-agents within the school. If the conditions are to be created for the continuous development and evolution of the curriculum, this is a practice which has much to recommend it. It is a step towards achieving that kind of co-ordinated development across the curriculum which we said in Chapter 1 was often lacking, especially in secondary schools where the tradition has been for development to go on within individual subjects in isolation from one another. It also ensures that there is one person in the school who can be expected to attempt to organize support from outside agencies for any group of teachers engaged in any particular innovative activity. Such a person can also act as a focus for curriculum study groups in the school, an essential innovation if teachers are to be made fully aware of what is entailed in school-based curriculum development.

Outside support agencies

Secondly, the importance of outside support agencies became increasingly apparent. We have already noted how the Schools Council in its later phases directed most of its attention to supporting school-based developments, and it is clear that schools need this kind of external support and advice. Perhaps more important, however, was the support provided by local education authorities. Curriculum support teams were created in several areas and the impact of these was often crucial to school improvement and the school-based development of curricula. Furthermore, at this time local authorities employed an array of advisers rather than inspectors, and their role was also to support the schools within their responsibility rather than to police their activities through inspections. This kind of support has now been largely lost with the reduction in the powers of local authorities which current policies have brought.

We have noted the importance of the organizational health of the school in respect of its likely receptivity to change and development. For those schools whose organizational health might be lower than one would wish, strategies must be developed for bringing about the qualities that will make curriculum development possible as well as that curriculum development itself. In short, it is necessary to go beyond Havelock's Problem-Solving model of change by identifying the problem for the consumer when he or she appears to be unable to recognize it for himself or herself. In cases of this kind the external cur-

riculum developer or support team has a major role to play and it is clear that it is not an enviable one.

This kind of link with external agencies is important for at least two reasons. One is that without it what occurs may well be change but will not necessarily be development or lead to improvement in the quality of education experienced by a school's pupils. There has been a tendency, in response to those difficulties of prompting innovations from outside which we noted earlier, to assume that school-based curriculum development must be worthwhile merely because it is school based. There is, however, no guarantee of this. Engagement with outside agencies may contribute to ensuring that it is actually worthwhile.

There is also the related danger that, if teachers' attention becomes too closely focused on their own institutions, and their possibly narrow concerns, they may fail to address curriculum issues at an appropriate level or depth. In particular, there may be a tendency to see these issues largely in managerial or organizational or even bureaucratic terms, again to adopt a technicist rather than an ethical stance towards them, a tendency which has been reinforced in England and Wales by recent governmental policies emphasizing these dimensions of schooling. However, we have seen in earlier chapters the important conceptual issues which curriculum planning and development raise, so that we can appreciate how important it is that teachers are able to address these issues in the course of their school-based curriculum development. Again, therefore, contact with supportive and illuminative outside agencies is crucial.

The centrality of the teacher

The third, and perhaps most crucial feature of school-based curriculum development to emerge was the centrality of the individual teacher to the process. If we have been right to identify the teacher in the classroom as the person whose role is quite fundamental and crucial to the effectiveness of educational provision, then the teacher must be the hub of all this activity. The most important need which arose, then, was that for adequate support for him or her. It is clear that what we have been describing involves a major change in the teacher's role and it entails major changes in the organization and even the staffing of schools if he or she is to have the time and the ability to respond to this.

It also became increasingly clear how important it is for initial courses of training to prepare teachers to take this central role in curriculum development, and that it is even more important that they be given adequate

opportunities for continuing in-service education to enable them to obtain any new skills that the innovations require and a developing insight into the wider issues of education, a deep understanding of which is vital for any kind of adequate planning, research or development.

This is why major curriculum changes such as the introduction of mixed-ability groupings in secondary schools have worked most smoothly and effectively when, as in the West Riding of Yorkshire under Sir Alec Clegg's guidance, suitable in-service courses were made available on demand and tailored not to the advisory staff's ideas of what is needed but to what the teachers themselves asked for (Kelly, 1975). It is for the same reason that, where national projects have developed training courses for teachers wishing to make use of the project materials, teachers who have had this training achieve more success than those who have not (Elliott and Adelman, 1973). Indeed, so striking was this evidence that, in relation to Jerome Bruner's project, 'Man: A Course of Study' (MACOS), it was made a requirement that any teacher who wanted to use the materials must attend a course of training to do so.

In short, there can be no curriculum development without teacher development and if, as we have claimed, the teacher's role is crucial to the quality of the pupil's education, it becomes most important that he or she be given all possible support of this kind. What is needed is help and advice, from the stage of initial training onwards, in the process of becoming 'reflective practitioners', professionals able to evaluate their own work with a view to improving it continuously.

Hence, we must now explore what we have identified as the third major advance which emerged from the work of the Schools Council – the development of the notion of school-based curriculum development into that of action research and 'the teacher as researcher' (Stenhouse, 1975).

Action research and 'the teacher as researcher'

Action research has been defined as 'the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of these actions' (Ebbutt, 1983), and as 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (Elliott, 1981: 1). The important aspect of this notion is that it represents a claim that the only productive form of educational research is that which involves the people actually working on an educational problem or problems and is conducted *pari passu* with the development of solutions to that problem or problems. It is a view which

has developed out of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the pointlessness of much research which has been conducted outside the field of practice and has thus produced generalized findings which it is left to the practitioner to 'apply'. This latter kind of research has often not only failed to be supportive of teachers in the development of their practice, it has sometimes even been counterproductive to that purpose (Kelly, 1981). Its inadequacies, then, are precisely those of centre-periphery models of dissemination. The notion of action research is offered as an alternative form of research and one which it is claimed should provide teachers with a proper kind of support. As Elliot Eisner has said (1985: 264), 'what ... we need if educational research is truly to inform educational practice is the construction of our own unique conceptual apparatus and research methods'.

Continuous self-evaluation

The first aspect of this approach to research is that it requires the teachers themselves to be actively engaged in the activity. They must be constantly evaluating their work, critically analysing it with a view to its development and improvement. It is this feature which brings in Lawrence Stenhouse's associated notion of 'the teacher as researcher' (Stenhouse, 1975). 'The ideal', said Stenhouse, 'is that the curricular specification should feed a teacher's personal research and development programme through which he is progressively increasing his understanding of his own work and hence bettering his teaching' (*op. cit.*: 143). 'It is not enough', he adds later, 'that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves' (*ibid.*).

Several further issues arise as a result of adopting that basic position. It is clearly vital, if teachers are to develop and if the quality of their work is to improve, that they engage in this kind of continuous evaluation of their work. Indeed, it might be argued that this is a *sine qua non* of teaching, certainly of good teaching, and that it is something that all teachers naturally do. It must be said, however, that not all teachers do it well. School-based curriculum development, as was suggested earlier, is not necessarily good just because it is school based; and similarly teachers' own evaluations of their work are not necessarily sound and productive merely because they are their own evaluations. Teachers can be, and should be, assisted to develop the skills and techniques needed for proper and effective self-evaluation, as we shall see in Chapter 6. And there will always remain that psychological difficulty which makes objective self-evaluation difficult in any sphere.

External support

Thus questions now arise about whether there is a role for an external figure or figures in action research, as we saw there is in school-based curriculum development, and, if there is, what that role is and who this external figure or figures might be.

These were among the questions addressed by the Ford Teaching Project (FTP). One of the main purposes of the project was 'to help teachers by fostering an action-research orientation towards classroom problems' (Elliott and Adelman, 1973: 10). This was offered as an alternative to the model of action research in which researchers from outside come into the classroom and work with the teacher. It was felt that this kind of relationship erodes the teacher's autonomy and that, if this is to be protected, he or she must be enabled to take responsibility for his or her own action research as part of his or her responsibility for his or her own curriculum development (Elliott and Adelman, 1973). This the Ford Teaching Project attempted to encourage.

However, a second-order focus of the FTP's research was the question of the role of the outside 'expert'. At the same time as helping teachers to develop the ability to engage in their own 'research-based teaching', the team wanted also to explore how best this kind of teaching might be assisted and supported from outside.

The logic of the FTP's own approach would seem to be that, once teachers have acquired a research-based teaching orientation as part of their basic weaponry, the need for outside support will disappear, so that perhaps the role of the curriculum developer or other external 'expert' is to be seen as provisional only, his or her services being needed only until such times as teachers themselves have acquired the necessary skills.

Two questions, however, must be asked before we too readily accept such a view. In the first place, we must ask how far the average teacher is likely to be able to develop the abilities this will require of him or her. Apart from the problem of adding yet another chore to an already heavy task, it was not easy for the FTP team to develop in teachers the detachment and the security of confidence necessary to be able to make reasonably objective appraisals of their work, although the team did express optimism on this point.

Secondly, however, we must also ask whether, as we concluded in relation to school-based curriculum development, there will not always be a need for someone to come from the outside to take a detached view of what is being done, to suggest possible alternatives and to ensure that all the necessary questions raised by attempts at curriculum planning and development are

addressed and not, as we saw earlier is the danger, only those of a managerial or organizational kind. Few of us cannot profit from this kind of second opinion. Perhaps this is to be seen as a function of teachers from other schools as part of the process of moderation that should be an essential element in all assessment procedures. In this context, it is interesting to note the experience of a research team which sought to support the professional development of early years practitioners through action research. For among the findings of the *Principles into Practice (PiP)* project was the evident importance to practitioners of various forms of 'networking'. And it also appeared that there may continue to be a need for someone acting as a professional consultant. As the report of Phase One of this project (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997: 100) said:

While at the level of the individual settings it seems clear that action research by individuals is more likely to be effective, there is a growing and quite striking body of evidence emerging of the advantages to be gained from creating opportunities for those individuals to meet regularly to 'compare notes' with others pursuing their own action research in different settings. And regular 'conferences' of action researchers and the project team have become an increasingly significant feature of the work as it has progressed.

There is, then, still a role for the wandering expert in curriculum development. That role is to provide teachers with expert advice and the detached appraisal they cannot provide themselves and not to arrive hawking his or her own pet project, cobbled together in a place somewhat removed from the realities of any particular group of classrooms. His or her job is to follow and serve the teachers rather than to lead them into his or her own new pastures. He or she can only support curriculum development; he or she should no longer attempt to direct it.

The teacher's role continues to be central

However, again we must note that the understandings which have developed from all of the work which has been undertaken in order to support curriculum innovation and development, not only in the United Kingdom but everywhere else, have had as their common denominator the centrality of the teacher to effective educational provision. Thus they have been predicated on the need to ensure that any proposed innovation, if it is to be successful, must start from an attempt to obtain the teachers' understanding, support and, indeed, approval. In the terms offered by Bennis *et al.* (1969) which we noted

earlier, it must seek to promote change through 'empirical-rational' strategies, which attempt to demonstrate the validity and desirability of the proposed change, or through 'normative-re-educative' strategies, which try to persuade teachers of the value of what is proposed and to provide them with whatever new skills are needed to implement it. The alternative, as we also saw, is the adoption of 'power-coercive' strategies which simply set about implementing the change by enforcement, a policy which, if we have been right to claim that the teachers' commitment is crucial to effectiveness, cannot lead in the long term to genuine improvement. It may bring about change, but it cannot lead to innovation, in the sense of advance and improvement on current practice. The contrast again is between approaches to change which we might describe as 'ethical', concerned to promote genuine innovation and improvement, and those we might describe as 'technicist', seeking to bring about change for other, less worthy reasons.

In the light of this, it will be illuminating to conclude this exploration of strategies for curriculum change by considering the devices employed to bring about the major changes in the school curriculum which the last two decades have seen.

Changing the curriculum through centralized control

It might be argued that the plethora of official documentation with which schools have been flooded in recent years constitutes an attempt to adopt an empirical-rational strategy for change, although we have already noted the intellectual inadequacies of much of this. And certainly there are elements of the normative-re-educative in the assumption of control over the training of teachers, both initial and in-service, as part of the attempt to ensure compliance with, rather than challenge to, government policies.

These strategies may be said to have had some success in persuading the general public that improvements in educational provision were occurring, and they may also have been effective in winning the support, or at least the acceptance, of the teachers themselves, especially those whose concept of their role has not been changed to any dramatic extent. Those teachers, however, for whom the new policies have involved a head-on clash with their own professional values, as, for example, those working in the early years of education and those who have been responsible for preparing them for such work, have not been, and could not be, won over by these devices. In these cases, nothing less than power-coercive strategies could be employed. And the adoption of such strategies has served to highlight that this is the underlying principle of the

changes implemented at every level. Fundamentally, the concern is to change and control the system, whether this can be done by winning teacher support or not. The model of change is a centre–periphery model, and the hope and expectation is that the inadequacies of this model, as revealed by experience such as that of the Schools Council, can be offset by the application of the means of enforcement which the Schools Council lacked (and, indeed, would not have wanted). We must note, however, that, if we have been right to interpret earlier experience as demonstrating the centrality of the teacher to effective educational provision, then these strategies are fundamentally misguided and, while they might bring about a tightening of centralized control of what goes on in schools and even a temporary appearance of improvement, they can never lead to a raising of standards in any genuine educational sense. The somewhat spurious statistics which have been generated may reveal the effects of these policies on *learning*, but, as we are seeing constantly, they cannot raise *educational* standards. And recently even their effect on pupils' learning has been revealed as well below the level sought.

Power/coercion, however, is the current mode, and, since this is a difficult tactic to employ in a supposed democracy, subtle devices have had to be found to enable the enforcers to operate it. We noted in Chapter 2, when discussing the politics of knowledge, how the use of rhetoric and the legitimation of discourse have been used as one such subtle device. We must note here the equally plausible (although rather less subtle) manipulation through tightly framed systems of testing and inspection.

Testing and inspection

Nothing can be more plainly power–coercive than legislation, since the law, by definition, requires us to do as we are told or to suffer the penal consequences. And this is the point at which current policies for schooling in England began (although we shall trace in Chapter 7 a long history of preparatory build-up). Thus the 1988 Education Act, along with those minor Acts which have subsequently attempted to fill some of the emerging gaps, established the framework of centralized control and initiated the many changes which the last two decades have witnessed. And we must note again that such an approach to change is technicist rather than ethical; it is concerned more with the mechanisms for bringing about change than with the niceties of the nature and worth of that change.

What is more interesting, and indeed more sinister, however, is the subtle strategies which have been employed since then, to bring about further

changes without recourse to the overtly power-coercive device of legislation. In particular, in addition to the manipulation of thinking through control of language and discourse which we noted in Chapter 2, testing and inspection have come to be used as devices for implementing political policies without the need for overt dictation through legislation.

Testing

Assessment and evaluation, in the full and educational sense of these terms, will be the major concerns of our next chapter and we must leave a detailed discussion of them until then. We must briefly note here, however, the use that has been made of those processes which have masqueraded under these titles as strategies of centralized control and power-coercive change.

We will see in Chapter 6 the sophisticated form of pupil assessment which was recommended by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) (DES, 1988) as the essential accompaniment of an educationally effective National Curriculum. In the event, what has emerged is a programme of simplistic testing at 7+, 11+ and 14+, and now 'baseline testing' at 5+ and examinations at 17+ as well as at 16+ and 18+, and with it the publication of 'league tables' claimed to provide information of value to parents relating to the quality of provision in individual schools.

In reality, from the parents' point of view this information is worthless, as the parents' own responses to Ofsted's questions have revealed (unpublished Ofsted report, 1998), and the only justification for this elaborate programme of testing (if indeed this be a justification) is that it provides a mechanism for ensuring that schools and teachers do what they are supposed to do and concentrate their attentions on the limited demands of the National Curriculum. We will argue in Chapter 10 that a national curriculum framed in much looser terms, guidelines rather than tight prescriptions, is likely to offer a much more effective route to quality of educational provision in a democratic context. In the mean time, we must note here that in England we have a far more prescriptive National Curriculum than this, and that that prescription is imposed, maintained and reinforced by a system of testing, combined with the publication of the results of these tests. Again, we should note that the rhetoric surrounding these procedures is that of information to parents, quality control and the raising of standards. The reality, however, as every teacher knows, is very different.

Inspections

This process is further reinforced by the programme of regular inspections by Ofsted teams. These inspections are conducted according to criteria set by

Ofsted itself, albeit in response to government requirements, so that effectively it is Ofsted which is controlling and directing the school curriculum on the government's behalf.

This spares the government the potential embarrassment of further coercive legislation. It can merely issue 'guidelines', as, for example, the pronouncements of David Blunkett on homework. Such guidelines, as he informed us on that occasion, will not be given the force of law. They will, however, figure in the criteria employed in Ofsted inspections. They thus do not need the force and overt compulsion of law, if they are to be enforced on the ground in this covert but equally effective manner. What more evidence could one have of the forked-tongue character of 'eduspeak'.

Perhaps a more telling example of this has been the control which has come to be exercised over educational provision for the pre-school child. The function of Ofsted inspections is to ensure that schools are meeting the requirements of the 1988 Act and its subsequent legislation, albeit having more freedom than perhaps any government quango should have in its interpretation of those requirements. That legislation, however, specifically excluded provision for the pre-school, non-statutory stages of schooling, leaving teachers and other providers and practitioners at that level to pursue the kind of developmental curriculum which they have long regarded as most appropriate for that phase of education.

The response to this was the publication by the Department for Education and Employment, in conjunction with the – now defunct – School Curriculum and Assessment Authority of documentation setting out what were called 'desirable outcomes for children's learning' (although who found them desirable was never stated) (DfEE/SCAA, 1996; SCAA, 1997a). These 'desirable outcomes' have now been transmuted into early learning goals (objectives and targets again) and 'the foundation stage of learning' (DfES, 2006, 2007), and these have become the criteria by which nursery schools are evaluated by Ofsted inspections and, more importantly for us in the present context, the devices by which these schools are being forced to change and to adopt a form of curriculum which both the experience of practitioners at this level (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997) and the research evidence (Blenkin and Kelly, 1996, 1997) indicate to be inappropriate and unsuitable. Indeed, to a large extent, nursery education, once, from the days of the McMillan sisters, a jewel in the crown of British education, has in many places degenerated into a child-minding service for parents who wish to be free for work and careers.

Ofsted inspections have thus become a sinister and covert device by which the school curriculum is changed in accordance not only with legislation