CRITIQUE of The Policy Paper issued by the 21st Century Learning Initiative

(Áine Hyland, Education Department, University College, Cork.
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Introduction
The Policy Paper issued by the 21st Century Learning Initiative is an interesting and provocative document. It has been written “to assist those in positions of influence to initiate powerful changes to current educational arrangements”. The paper draws on evidence from research and best practice around the world to argue that the western model of education, in light of the needs of the late 20th century, is largely “upside down and inside out”. It suggests that an alternative model is now available to those countries willing to introduce radical innovation and that better informed, and more effective models of learning could be organised through a redistribution of expenditure and responsibilities, at a total cost no greater than current levels of expenditure.

The Policy Paper refers to a wide range of research from a number of areas and draws in particular on recent research on how the brain operates and on the biological nature of learning. It considers issues related to culture and nurture and how these shape our thinking. The implications of new information and communication technologies for teaching and learning are explored. The role of the home and the community in the education of young people is addressed – the author is critical of the way in which traditional schooling systems have developed in isolation from these crucial elements of a child’s life.

The solutions proposed in the Policy Paper are radical. They include a dramatically different approach to teaching and learning and in the relationship between learner and teacher, taking account of recent research findings on cognitive development. Public expenditure on education should be redistributed so that considerably more resources would be allocated to pre-school education and less to tertiary education. Class sizes and student/staff ratios should be significantly smaller at primary level and larger at tertiary level. The author argues that:

Resource distribution of this kind would provide all young people with such ample teacher support in their earliest years of schooling (classes of 10 to 12) that, as they grow older they would actually need less direct formal instruction and would utilise extensive, richer and more stimulating learning environments which are defined as including books, libraries, museums, information communication technologies, community mentors and significant real-time commitments to community-based projects outside the school.

The paper proposes that up to 10% of national educational expenditure should be allocated to community related educational projects and to initiatives which would link
the community much more closely to the school. It also suggests that governments should make a major investment in information and communication technologies so that “by the age of 18, 20% of all expenditure should be allocated to learning technologies and books”.

The paper acknowledges that these innovations “are dependent on a properly thought through programme of professional development for all teachers, and other staff” and recommends that 10% of total staffing expenditure should in future be applied to teacher development. It recognises that “a new model of learning could not be developed unless, in parallel, new assessment methods were also developed that would measure process skills as carefully as modern techniques assess content. It also recognises that the proposed new approach to education “has to be well understood by society at large – both the reason for its introduction, how it will work, and what will be its outcomes – if it is to have a reasonable chance of success”.

In a strongly worded warning to policy-makers, the author states:

There is too much evidence now available for us to continue deceiving ourselves. Our present community and school structures are finely tuned to outdated assumptions about how humans learn. These new understandings simply undermine the old assumptions on which present structures gained their authority. If we are to capitalise on the understandings and opportunities (described in this paper) we must recognise that the changes necessary are of such a scale that normal processes of incremental innovation are totally inadequate.

While the proposals made by the 21st Century Learning Initiative are well argued and are based on solid and reliable research findings, the paper totally fails to address the complexity of the educational change process. The ideas are presented as if they were novel and unique. A neophyte in this area might be forgiven for thinking that if only policy-makers had had access ten years ago to the research findings and conclusions contained in this paper, educational policy might have taken a very different direction. However, the map of educational change in the western world in recent decades is littered with failed innovations – innovations which failed not because of any intrinsic weakness in the innovation itself, but because insufficient account was taken of the necessary conditions for successful educational change. These conditions have been increasingly explored, identified and documented by educational writers, most notably Michael Fullan, Dean of the Faculty of Education in the University of Toronto.

The paper also fails to take account of the extent to which tradition and history affect the structure and content of schooling in all countries. The educational practices and traditions of over two thousand years will not be dismantled overnight. Educational

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change on the major scale suggested in the paper is not realistic in any democratic state, particularly in the short time-span indicated and given the fiscal and political realities of western democratic society. However, this critique accepts that the proposals and warnings contained in the Policy Paper are useful pointers in the right direction for policy-makers.

The critique is structured under four broad headings. Firstly, the critique considers the historical evolution of schooling and its implications for change. Secondly, the proposals for change set out in the Policy Paper are assessed from the point of view of recent research findings. Thirdly the feasibility of radical change as proposed in the Policy Paper is considered in the light of the literature on managing educational change. Fourthly, issues which the Paper fails to address are considered.

A. The Historical evolution of schooling or How Have Modern Schools Come to be as They Are?

The Policy Paper is critical of modern schooling. It condemnns the extent to which the development of mass schooling in the 18th and 19th centuries was influenced by “the learning of intellectuals based on abstractions and simulations, not the learning of ordinary people as practised and shaped by the harsh realities of making a living”. It is critical of the failure of schooling to incorporate the practices of the apprenticeship system of learning, which it regards as a much more natural learning system. While there is a certain validity in this criticism, it fails to take account of the strength of the western intellectual tradition and the extent to which educational policy-makers, past and present, being themselves a product of this tradition, will inevitably tend to reproduce those aspects of their own upbringing, including education, which have led to their success.

Western education traditions and practices are strongly influenced by the social and educational philosophies of ancient Greece, dating back two and a half thousand years ago. Plato’s ideas of social organisation as outlined in his Republic contributed significantly to the development of the modern democratic state. Broadly speaking, Plato envisaged the state as consisting of Rulers (with legislative and deliberative functions); Auxiliaries (with executive functions) and Craftsmen (with productive functions). The institution of the state would be based, not on birth or wealth, but on natural capacities and attainments. Education would play an important role in selecting and preparing those who would fill the various roles. (The labouring work would be done by slaves who would require no education!)

The notion of specialisation was fundamental to Plato’s social organisation and structure. In his ideal state, specific tasks would be allocated to specific people. He wrote: “We shall need at least one man to be a farmer, another a builder, and a third a weaver….” and added: “… no two people are born exactly alike. There are innate differences which fit them for different occupations” (my italics).2

2 Plato’s Republic, ii., 369.
Throughout the western world, most schooling systems reflected and continue to reflect some aspects of Greek philosophy. Until the 18th century, education was available, generally speaking, only for the select few. While some countries attempted to include an element of meritocracy in their selection mechanisms, the more common model of selection was based on class and/or wealth, thus ensuring that power would continue to be held over time by the same families and dynasties. The influence of Plato and other Greek philosophers on democratic society to-day and particularly on schooling, should not be underestimated. It will not be a simple task to undo two and a half thousand years of tradition and practice. That is not to say however, that these traditions and practices should not be challenged.

The concept of schooling for all, or “mass education”, is a relatively recent one, dating back no more than two hundred years in most western countries. Towards the end of the 18th century, the need for widespread literacy became more pressing in industrialised societies, where mass production was becoming the norm. While the old apprenticeship system of training young people for trades and occupations continued to have its value, it was seen as an inadequate means of preparing large numbers for the new industrial workforce of the 18th and 19th centuries. Schooling also had a social function, particularly in cities and large towns where law and order were matters of concern. Schools would keep poor children off the streets, would inculcate values and norms, which would make them good citizens and would attempt to make them more productive members of the community.

Until very recently, mass schooling was concerned with providing basic or elementary education. It was important not to over-educate, nor to give children or young people aspirations which might be “above their station in life”. As well from teaching literacy, numeracy and the skills of penmanship, schools sought to instil the social values of conformity, obedience and acceptance of the social order.

Notions of equality of educational opportunity are very recent indeed. It is only in our lifetime, i.e. within the past fifty years, that second level education for all has become the norm in the western world. And even then, equality of access was not envisaged. In most countries, until recently, young people were selected or tracked into either an academic or a vocational track. This contributed to the practice of specialisation criticised in the Policy Paper but reflects Plato’s philosophy of innate differences which argued that different people are fitted for different occupations. Entrance or transfer examinations at the end of primary school which purported to identify aptitude were used to allocate pupils to either the academic or the vocational track, although in practice these tests were tests of attainment, not of aptitude. This practice of selection and tracking at the end of primary school continues in some European countries, e.g. Northern Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands, to the present day. In most western countries, however, a more comprehensive and less specialised approach has been adopted at this level, particularly for 12 to 15 year olds.
Within the past decade, there has been a move to retain as many young people as possible in full time education or training for a much longer period than has hitherto been the case. Most countries now aim to provide education or training until at least the age of 18 and there has been an increasing emphasis on providing further and higher education for as many young people as possible. In OECD countries overall, an average of 80% of 17 year olds are in full-time education although this proportion varies widely from country to country – from a low of 25% in Turkey to a high of over 95% in Sweden. Ministers for Education in OECD countries have agreed that a full cycle of secondary education is needed as a foundation for all young people: that without it they face severe risks on the labour market.

Tertiary education has traditionally educated an elite group of young people to higher levels immediately after they complete upper secondary education. Half a century ago, only about two or three per cent of 18 year olds in Ireland went on to tertiary education. To-day, tertiary education provides opportunities for learning to a much larger section of the youth and adult population. In some OECD countries, the transfer rate by school leavers into tertiary education is as high as 40% and up to ten per cent of the population are enrolled even in their late twenties. The concept of lifelong learning has also entered the vocabulary of most western countries and most governments are committed to policies which will encourage a culture of lifelong learning in their societies.

The above overview of the development of schooling has been included here to emphasise that in the history of humankind, mass schooling is a very recent phenomenon. Its purpose until very recently was primarily one of control and discipline and maintaining the social order, and only secondarily one of education. And insofar as its purpose was educational, it was education of the “pouring in”, not of the “drawing out” variety. In the words of Dickens in Hard Times, education was largely concerned with imparting “facts, facts and more facts”. It is important to be aware of this historical context when considering the criticism of the existing system of western education contained in the Policy Paper.

B. The proposals for change set out in the Policy Paper assessed from the point of view of recent research findings.

(i) Learning theories and their implications for Schooling
The Policy Paper correctly states that mass schooling was designed in the 19th century by policy-makers whose assumptions about learning are now known to be “faulty and even incorrect”. They and their successors based not only their educational policies and legislation but also school architecture on these inaccurate assumptions. If we

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4 Ibid., p.80.
6 C. Dickens, Hard Times.
were to start from scratch today to design a schooling system and infrastructure which
would reflect what we now know about learning, it is likely that such a schooling
system would be very different to the one we have inherited. It probably would have
many of the characteristics of the proposals in the Policy Paper. However, we are not
free to start ab initio. A complex and expensive educational infrastructure is well
established in western society and there are many powerful groups and individuals who
have a strong vested interest in maintaining that infrastructure.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, different theories of learning influenced
educational developments at different periods. Theories which have contributed to
current day schooling practices included “the tabula rasa” theory where the child was
considered to be an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge. Much of nineteenth
century schooling was based on this theory and the teacher’s success was measured by
the pupils’ effectiveness in regurgitating this knowledge at an annual examination.
This success was rewarded monetarily through a system of “payment by results” – the
amount earned by the teacher depended on the number of his/her pupils who passed
the examination. Present practices in some western countries, including regular testing
of pupils and school league tables, are a legacy of this approach. And even in countries
such as Ireland where the more extreme forms of regular testing have been avoided,
the public examination system, consisting largely of paper and pencil examinations, has
a major influence on teaching and learning in schools.

By the end of the nineteenth century however, many western countries introduced
educational reforms, which took account of child-centred philosophies and practices.
The writings of people such as Rousseau, Froebel and Pestalozzi were influential in
these reforms and many countries began to place more emphasis on kindergarten (or
early years education) and on practical subjects such as handicraft, elementary science
etc. as well as on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The role of the teacher was
also re-assessed – he/she was now seen more as a facilitator of learning than as a
purveyor of knowledge. Payment by results was abolished and the process of
education was seen to be as important as the product. Many of these reforms contain
elements of the proposed reforms of the Policy Paper. Ironically, these innovations
failed largely because of the lack of support from parents and the community. Parents
regarded education as a vehicle for social mobility and felt that such mobility was most
likely to result from a more academic type of schooling.

During the twentieth century, there have been many changes in educational approaches
in different countries. It is somewhat oversimplistic to suggest, as the Policy Paper
seems to, that all western countries share the same view of education. Some countries
such as the U.K. who espoused child-centred philosophies in the 1960s and 1970s have
reverted to a “back to basics” approach in the 1990s and some of their educational
policies and practices have shades of 19th century thinking. On the other hand there
are countries such as Ireland which are trying to move away from a traditional didactic
approach to education and to introduce active learning methodologies and self-directed
approaches to education. These countries recognise the need to introduce a more
diverse range of assessment techniques to reflect the diversity of their learning goals. Policy documents in these countries echo many of the points being made in the Policy Paper.

However, those who benefit from the current educational system, and these include many powerful interest groups and individuals – middle class families, teachers, churches etc. - are often slow to embrace change as they fear that such change might disturb the social order from which they benefit.

(ii) How do Humans Learn?
The Policy Paper states that “traditional learning theory and traditional schools are based on assumptions about the brain and how humans learn that are now deemed to be of limited value”. It makes the point that in the last decade, there have been considerable advances in brain research which have undermined our traditional assumptions about learning and therefore about schooling. The point is also made that the brain is a complex adaptive system, that it is a biological system, not a machine and states that “it is right to question whether learning as organised in schools is consistent with what we now know about the brain”. This critique agrees that there is a need to embark on this questioning. It supports many of the arguments adduced in the Policy Paper and adds some further points to those raised.

We know that in the past decade there has been an unprecedented explosion of information on how the human brain works. Key findings of recent research might be summarised as follows:

1. The brain changes physiologically as a result of experience. The environment in which a brain operates determines to a large degree the functional ability of that brain. In his book, Inside the Brain (1996) Ronald Kotulak writes:

   The brain gobbles up the external environment through its sensory system and then reassembles the digested world in the form of trillions of connections which are constantly growing or dying, becoming stronger or weaker depending on the richness of the banquet. ... The environment affects how the genes work, and genes determine how the environment is interpreted.

Although a child’s brain at birth has all the brain cells or neurons that it will ever have, the brain is not immutable or fixed at birth.

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2. IQ (as traditionally defined and measured) is not fixed at birth. Early intervention programmes can prevent children from having low IQ scores and have been shown to raise the IQ scores of infants by 15% to 30%.

3. Some abilities are acquired more easily during certain sensitive periods or “windows of opportunity”. Research carried out by Harry Chugani and Michael Phelps at the UCLA School of Medicine suggests that a child’s peak learning age occurs during the period from birth to age ten when the number of synaptic connections within the brain rise rapidly.¹⁰

4. Learning is strongly influenced by emotion. Emotion plays a positive role in that the stronger the emotion connected with an experience, the stronger the memory of that experience. If however, the emotion is too strong (e.g. if the situation is perceived to be threatening), learning is decreased.

5. The brain’s capacity for learning and change is limitless, depending on our willingness to seek new opportunities and experiences. Therefore education should continue for a lifetime.

While it is still early days to come to definitive conclusions, findings from the neurosciences provide us with important insights into how children learn. As well as offering new information to teachers and parents, brain research can provide guidance to policy makers in focusing their priorities. For example, it has now been shown beyond any doubt that the early years are crucial in a child’s development. In this regard, the Policy Paper states:

The significance of the earliest years of life, and the opportunities currently being missed to develop natural pre-dispositions when they are at their most open, is (sic) now well understood.

How these opportunities might best be exploited are a matter for debate, and intervention policies need to be sensitive to individual and family circumstances. One thing however is clear. Babies and young children should be provided with as rich and challenging an environment as possible. Their early years experiences should be such as to provide them with opportunities for brain growth and development that will enable them to benefit optimally from later opportunities for learning. For some, these opportunities will best be provided within the home, for others, publicly funded care facilities will be necessary. The question of how the state can best support babies and children in their early years is one which has occupied the minds of policy-makers in many countries in recent years.

However, no western country is prepared at this stage to turn the education system “upside down and inside out” as the Policy Paper proposes and redistribute a major

proportion of their resources to early years education. It is one thing to support targeted intervention early years programmes where the need is clearly identifiable – as is being done in many countries - it is quite a different issue to introduce the more drastic measures proposed in the Policy Paper.

Although our knowledge of brain functioning has been revolutionised within the past decade or so, it still has a long way to go and many scientists warn against moving too rapidly or too soon in applying the findings to date of brain research to classroom situations.11 However, it is important that research continues in an effort to identify how children best learn and how parents, teachers and the community can contribute to this learning.

(iii) The Nature of Intelligence
The Policy Paper questions society’s traditional views on the nature of intelligence and draws attention to the work of Howard Gardner and David Perkins at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences challenges the traditional view of intelligence as a unitary and fixed capacity that can be adequately measured by IQ tests. Instead Gardner defines intelligence as “an ability to solve problems or create products that are valued in at least one culture”. This theory was first articulated over fifteen years ago in his book Frames of Mind12 and since then it has been further refined and its implications developed. Gardner postulates that every human being has at least eight intelligences (linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, naturalist, interpersonal and intrapersonal) and that he/she draws on a combination of these intelligences in his/her day to day activities. While all human beings are born with all intelligences, the different intelligences can be strengthened and developed through practice and experience.

The most important educational implication of Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory is the realisation that we all have different kinds of minds. It is no longer adequate to classify children as being either “intelligent” or “unintelligent” nor indeed to suggest that intelligence can be measured by a paper and pencil test alone. MI theory challenges teachers to identify the ways in which a child is intelligent and to encourage and help the child to use his/her intelligence strengths to become an effective learner. The teacher should try to use various teaching strategies to build on these intelligence strengths. Parents should be encouraged to understand the theory and become involved in their children’s learning.

Although MI theory is new and indeed controversial in some circles, it has been adopted enthusiastically and effectively by many educators in the western world. Gardner warns however against oversimplistic applications of the theory and he has recently written:

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11 Wolfe and Brandt, op. cit.
It takes time to absorb the full implications of Multiple Intelligences theory, because it is more radical than most educators initially appreciate. It also takes time for educators to work out specific practices, whether they focus on curriculum, assessment, pedagogy or some combination – MI is not an end in itself. To say that one has an MI classroom or an MI school is not meaningful – one has to ask “MI for what?” … Those interested in MI must first state their educational goals and values. Only when educators clearly state and agree upon these larger goals – to teach for understanding, to prepare individuals for the world beyond school, to develop each person’s potential fully and to make sure that students master core knowledge – does it make sense to ask: “Can MI be useful in pursuit of this goal? If so, how?”

(iv) Teaching for Understanding.
The Policy Paper makes the point that findings in the cognitive sciences and developmental psychology help us to understand why learning has to be more than just good instruction. “Learning is a collaborative, problem-solving activity that occurs through progressive construction of individual knowledge; information transfer is only a limited part of learning.”

Although not everybody agrees that learning as a constructivist activity, there is increasing evidence to support constructivist theories of learning. These are predicated on the progressive construction and deepening of meaning – the emphasis is on “understanding”, as a process which is much deeper than transferred information, or even knowledge.

The growing interest in teaching for understanding which has developed during the past decade is partly a reaction to the narrow skills-oriented curriculum that has become a feature of many western countries. There is increasing evidence that large numbers of students are not receiving a worthwhile education – “one that allows them to be critical thinkers, problem posers, and problem solvers who are able to work through complexity, beyond the routine, and live productively in a rapidly changing world”. This concern has led to a refocusing of effort on developing approaches to curriculum design which emphasise understanding, while recognising that basic skills will always be a prerequisite to effective learning. It is a question of relative emphasis, not a question of focusing on either understanding or skills. However, a focus on understanding requires a conscious re-orientation on the part of teacher and learner. It requires more emphasis on depth of learning and understanding and less on coverage of material.

(v) Assessment
The Policy Paper correctly identifies the issue of assessment as one of the key issues in the educational debate today and one which can seriously impede educational reform if

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13 H. Gardner “Multiple Intelligences as a Partner in School Improvement” in Educational Leadership, September 1997
14 Policy Paper, p 17
it is not addressed in conjunction with other aspects of educational change. The paper criticises the extent to which “learning depended upon verbal assimilation and memorisation, checked by tests, all at a specific place, and in a stepped relationship to other learning”. It points to the increasing tendency over the past 100 years to emphasise “quantifiable” learning and how this led to the “teaching for the test” syndrome. The emphasis on testing, sometimes to the detriment of teaching and learning, has reached absurd proportions in some parts of the world. For example, in the State of New York, sixth graders who graduated in June 1998, had taken eight standardised tests over the previous 14 months. This year’s fourth grade reading test, administered to all fourth graders in the State of New York in early January 1999, took three days to administer. A number of schools opened during the winter vacation to prepare their pupils (10 and 11 year olds) for this test. Apart from the fact that excessive time spent on testing reduces the time available for learning, there is evidence from brain research that stressful and negative experiences can militate against learning. And for children whose sense of failure and low self-esteem is reinforced every time they score poorly on a test, testing is likely to be a negative and stressful and counterproductive experience.

It is widely recognised in the research literature that assessment drives the curriculum. Various writers have commented on this. “Assessment is the tail that wags the curriculum dog”. “Assessment commonly has a backwash effect on the curriculum and on the processes of teaching and learning which go on within it”. Since teachers and learners will focus their attention on the aspects of learning that will be examined and rewarded, it is important that the goals of education are reflected in appropriate forms of assessment. If, for example, a significant goal of language teaching is to develop and improve oral communication, then it is self-evident that an oral test is the appropriate way of assessing whether this goal is being achieved. If an educational system aims to develop reflective, creative and self-starting young people, how is this goal assessed? In many countries there is a mismatch between educational goals and assessment approaches. There is clearly a need to develop more authentic forms of assessment - forms of assessment that are more appropriate to the educational goals which are being pursued. In the context of the debate on multiple intelligences, it is argued that assessment should be “intelligence-fair”, i.e. that it should take account of an individual’s intelligences and abilities in areas other than linguistic and logical-mathematical which are the areas which assessment has traditionally focused on.

The importance of developing appropriate forms of assessment is highlighted in the Policy Paper. It states: “A new model of learning could not be developed unless in parallel, new assessment methods were also developed that would measure process skills as carefully as modern techniques assess content”. However, the difficulty of gaining public support for innovative and authentic forms of assessment is not

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addressed in the Policy Paper. There are a number of recent examples of nationally certificated innovative forms of assessment which have come up against obstacles when it comes to their recognition by employers or higher education institutions. These programmes often contain a significant element of work placement and are the type of programme recommended in the Policy Paper where students are gradually weaned away from their dependence on teachers. In Ireland, the example given in the Policy Paper of a 17 year old girl working as a birthing assistant in the local hospital on two days a week would not be “almost unbelievable to most teachers” as the paper suggests (p.27). Most second-level school students in Ireland will have experienced some element of work placement before they sit the Leaving Certificate, either in the Transition Year programme (15 to 16 years olds) or in the Leaving Cert Vocational or Applied programmes (16 to 18 years olds).

However, some employers and higher education institutions have refused to recognise the forms of assessment associated with these programmes, even though they are educationally more sound and more appropriate to the goals of the system – goals which are apparently shared by these bodies - than some traditional forms of assessment. It can be difficult for national policy makers to take effective steps to address this issue – often those who are reluctant to recognise innovative forms of assessment make little or no effort to understand either their purpose or their relevance. Moreover, efforts by policy-makers to persuade these bodies to accept the new forms of assessment can be met by hostility and by accusations of interference with the freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions.

There can also be difficulties in convincing parents and teachers of the value of new forms of assessment. Parents tend to trust that with which they are familiar – in this case, the type of pen and paper tests to which they were subjected themselves. Some teachers feel that new forms of assessment can be unduly time-consuming and that they take up too much time. What they fail to appreciate is that these new assessment strategies should become part of the learning that goes on in the classroom, not something that happens when the learning is over - like end of week or end of term tests or terminal examinations. Teachers must be convinced of the integrity of assessment and curriculum and they must be helped to make the necessary practical and conceptual leaps to implement this reform. This is not going to be an easy task as has been clearly demonstrated in recent years.

(vi) Metacognition and its implications for Learning
The Policy Paper places considerable emphasis on the importance of expertise as opposed to specialisation. It argues that “in a world of continuous change where creativity, personal responsibility and innovation are in ever greater demand, the ability of individuals to plan and implement their own ongoing learning without direction has to be the key to success”. It grapples with the question as to why some people appear to be able to move from one set of problems to another effortlessly while others

19 e.g. the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied in the Republic of Ireland.
founder. It concludes that new understandings from metacognition (i.e. the ability to consider how well one is thinking as well as what one is thinking about) give us some very clear insights into the nature of transferable skills and argues that schooling should consciously set out to improve young people’s metacognitive skills.

In a similar vein in 1996, Jerome Bruner wrote as follows:

> Modern pedagogy is moving increasingly to the view that the child should be aware of her own thought processes and that it is crucial for the pedagogical theorist and teacher alike to help her become more metacognitive – to be as aware of how she goes about her learning and thinking as she is about the subject matter she is studying … Equipping her with a good theory of mind … is one part of helping her to do so.\(^{20}\)

The more vexed question of what strategies might be adopted to develop metacognitive skills is not addressed in the Policy Paper. However, this critique suggests that multiple intelligences theory can be used as a way of helping young people to understand their own learning process, to recognise and value their strengths, and to identify ways in which they can build upon these while developing the areas which are less strong. In this way, students will be enabled to take more control of their learning by helping them to understand themselves as learners, to appreciate and value their strengths and to identify their weaknesses.

The practice of keeping a reflective journal can also be a useful way to help both pupils and teachers to develop metacognitive skills. Journalling can help young people learn – this is one way of encouraging them to become actively engaged in the process of reviewing and recording of developing the skills of planning and target setting. But unless forms of assessing and certifying metacognition are developed and given recognition, there will be no incentive for schools to encourage practices and approaches which lead to metacognition.

The Policy Paper points out that one of the key issues facing policy makers is “the creation of vast numbers of life-long learners with expertise, flexibility and creativity”. A young person who develops metacognitive skills is likely to be a more effective learner than the person whose schooling has emphasised the acquisition of skills and knowledge to the detriment of metacognition. The current emphasis on learning as opposed to teaching is undoubtedly a major challenge for educational systems and one that has to be faced. There is nothing new about the realisation that we cannot teach children and young people everything they need to know – it is much more important that they should become good learners. Over a hundred years ago, a U.S. commentator wrote: “Knowing that you cannot teach a child everything, it is best to teach a child how to learn”.\(^{21}\) Yet in spite of the fact that a century has passed, no

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western educational system has found a satisfactory way of ensuring that schools promote learning, much less “learning how to learn”.

**(vii) Community Involvement and Structures of Decision-making**
The Policy Paper makes a strong case for greater involvement by the community in the education process. It recognises that “opening up the resources of the community” is not easily done and suggests that we have largely forgotten “how to structure that set of informal, intentional, interactions that were once at the heart of apprenticeships and of genuine learning communities”. It suggests that expenditure rising to 10 per cent of total costs, planned and integrated over a period of years, could uncover a whole wealth of otherwise untapped and wasted human resources (the early retired; professionals with a few spare hours per week; senior citizens, mothers working from home etc.). It also suggests that this financial redistribution could be targeted at “the numerous community projects which are currently stillborn for lack of cash, but which could involve enormous learning opportunities for young people.”

While in principle very few people would disagree with the above sentiments, this critique will argue that the proposal as presented in the Policy Paper is somewhat naive and appears to be out of touch with current reality. Many western countries have indeed tried to involve local communities in the education process, with varying degrees of success. The Charter School movement in the U.S. is a recent example of greater devolution of school management to local communities. Similarly, in the U.K. in recent years the “local management of school” initiative, has encouraged greater involvement by local communities in the running of their schools. In Ireland, because of the denominational and the parochial structure of primary education, the principle of “community involvement” has a long history.

But the reality on the ground is very different from the idealistic picture painted in the Policy Paper. Generally speaking, teachers and those involved in school management draw a sharp boundary between the areas of education which are so-called professional areas and therefore reserved for professionals (i.e. teachers) and those in which other members of the community e.g. parents or retired persons etc. can legitimately be involved. While many schools encourage the involvement of members of the community for certain activities, those activities are clearly separated from the ‘professional’ work of teachers. It is very difficult and indeed might well be foolhardy to try and blur this distinction, as appears to be suggested in the Policy Paper. There is not a vast untapped source of community support out there for the asking. The reality is that it can be quite difficult to persuade members of the community to become involved in and particularly to remain involved in school-related activities, especially after the initial “honeymoon period” is over. And while financial incentives (i.e the 10% of budget referred to in the Policy Paper) might in some instances attract support from members of the community, in other areas where there is low unemployment or underemployment and where both parents are working outside the home, financial incentives are unlikely to change the situation.
The Policy Paper argues that ‘the conventional units of change (a single school or state wide government) are no longer appropriate’ and maintains that ‘new, intermediate units which correspond more closely to human expectation and community needs have to be developed’. In practice, there are a wide variety of intermediate structures in place in western countries to administer education. These vary from local education authorities in the U.K. to school district boards in the U.S. Countries such as Ireland and New Zealand, which lack such intermediate structures, have given a lot of consideration to setting up such structures in recent years. In Ireland this issue has been particularly fraught and has become quite a political football in recent decades. There were a number of efforts in recent decades to set up intermediate structures within the education system in Ireland but these were vigorously and successfully resisted by the existing vested interest groups.

Some political commentators have suggested that the support of a previous Minister for Education for Regional Education Boards contributed to her failure to be re-elected in the 1997 General Election. This point about the key role played by the electorate in educational decision-making is not addressed at all in the Policy Paper but at the end of the day it is a key factor in influencing political attitudes to educational change.

(viii) Are Educational Policy-Makers in the Western World taking account of findings of recent research as set out in the Policy Paper?

There seems to be a latent assumption underlying the Policy Paper that policy makers in the western world are either unaware of or resistant to the implications of recent research on cognitive development and how this affects teaching and learning. The paper points out that the dominant assumptions on which educational policy has traditionally been based are as follows:

- Intelligence was regarded as being largely innate, as was creativity.
- The older the child became the more significant would become their learning.
- Learning was seen as being dependent on instruction and extrinsic reward (behaviour).
- Learning was seen as being logical, objective and linear.
- Valid learning was seen as that which enabled people to become functionally literate within an industrial society.
- Valid learning was that seen as being formal and measurable.
- Basic skills were those of reading, writing, and calculation and the acceptance of formal discipline and control.
- Most people, it was assumed, would not need “higher order skills”, as they were not expected to show any form of personal creativity.

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22 Later in this critique, it will be argued that neither centralisation nor decentralisation alone provide the best basis for implementing educational change. What is required is a balance of top-down bottom-up influences.


• All life could be subdivided into separate disciplines, and only those appropriate to a child’s potential status in life would be taught.
• Learning was dependent on the technology of the time: paper and pencil, and textbooks.

This critique challenges the suggestion that these traditional assumptions continue to inform educational policy. While different societies espouse different value systems, it would be unfair to suggest that educational policy-makers in the western world are not taking account of recent research findings. At international level, OECD documents for many decades have been drawing attention to recent research findings and have been encouraging countries to take these on board. For example, eight years ago an OECD report reminded policy makers that

A cognitive conception of the act of learning sees learning as a process of constructing and reconstructing meaning… it sees learning as requiring active involvement on the part of the learner. No longer can the student be regarded as a passive recipient of new information. The approach draws no sharp distinction between ‘lower order’ and ‘higher order’ learning tasks. Cognitive theorists today argue that all students should be challenged with problems requiring ‘higher order’ thinking, given their current level of understanding and skill. The cognitive conception of learning assumes no single learning strategy or mode but rather recognises that individuals differ considerably in the ways they process, assimilate and remember new information.  

The issue of higher order skills is specifically addressed in the Policy Paper where it is stated “What commerce calls commercial skills, cognitive scientists are now calling higher order skills. It is clear that higher order skills and basic skills can only be effectively developed in tandem. John Bruer and many other cognitive scientists have shown that the development of basic skills and higher order skills are not contradictory but are actually developed in concert.”

This critique suggests that the dominant assumptions underlying educational policy in many parts of the western world have moved significantly in recent years. If one were to attempt to summarise how these assumptions have changed, one might come up with a table such as the following: (The left column refers to a traditional view of education and the right column refers to the current emphasis):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional View</th>
<th>Current Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Fixed-term” Schooling</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Teaching</td>
<td>Focus on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as Instructor</td>
<td>Teacher as Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as Expert</td>
<td>Reflective Practitioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus on Knowledge
Knowledge as Truth
Individual learning
Rote learning
Short answer tests
Emphasis on right answers
Fixed, innate intelligence

Focus on Understanding
Constructed Knowledge
Collaborative learning
Active/reflective learning
Authentic Assessment
Problem solving
Multiple intelligences

This change in emphasis is evident in the educational policy documents of a number of countries, including the Irish government’s 1995 White Paper *Charting Our Education Future*. Why then has Ireland not taken up the challenge posed by the Policy Paper and moved to become the first country of the western world to turn the educational system around in the direction proposed? This critique suggests that policy makers are not unaware of the findings of research, nor are they unwilling to take these findings on board. They are however acutely aware of the difficulties involved in managing and implementing educational change and this issue will be addressed in the following section of this critique.

C. The radical changes proposed in the Policy Paper considered in the light of the literature on managing educational change.

In his book *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, Michael Fullan concludes that there are eight basic lessons to be learned about educational change, which he summarises as follows:

*Lesson One:* You can’t mandate what matters. (The more complex the change, the less it can be forced).

*Lesson Two:* Change is a Journey, not a Blueprint. (Change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse).

*Lesson Three:* Problems are Our Friends. (Problems are inevitable and one can’t learn without them).

*Lesson Four:* Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later. (Premature visions and planning can make one blind to reality).

*Lesson Five:* Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power. (There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and groupthink).

*Lesson Six:* Neither Centralisation nor Decentralisation works. (Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary).

*Lesson Seven:* Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical for Success.

*Lesson Eight:* Every Person is a Change Agent.

Let us now look at the proposals contained in the Policy Paper in the light of some of these lessons.

You can’t mandate what matters:

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Nobody denies that policymakers have an obligation to set policy, establish standards, and monitor performance. However, to accomplish important educational goals it is not sufficient to mandate what matters, because what really matters to achieve complex goals of change are skills, creative thinking, and committed action on the part of those involved in implementing the change (my italics). \(^{28}\) The education system is made up of human beings—who hold their own individual views and commitments. Almost all educational change of value requires new (i) skills, (ii) behaviour, (iii) beliefs or understandings and (iv) commitment. If there is one cardinal rule of change in the human condition, it is that you cannot make people change. You cannot force them to think differently or compel them to develop new skills\(^ {29}\). The task of convincing people of the need for and value of change is a major one which has been only marginally addressed in the Policy Paper.

When reading the Policy Paper, one is reminded of the following quotation from Marris\(^ {30}\):

> When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they only have to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions.

**Change is a Journey, Not a Blueprint:**

“Route and destination must be discovered through the journey itself if you wish to travel to new lands...the key to success lies in the creative activity of making new maps\(^ {31}\)”. Implementing educational change on the scale proposed in the Policy Paper is a major expedition into a new and uncharted land. The explorers will have to be fully convinced of the need for and the value of their journey and have the sense of adventure necessary to overcome the obstacles they will come across along the way. They will have to be risk-takers and will have to appreciate that difficulties are a natural part of any change scenario. These explorers will be the teachers and the administrators who will be charged with making the innovation work. Yet their role is barely mentioned in the Policy Paper which concentrates entirely on setting out the ideal destination and hardly mentions how the challenges of the journey might be addressed.

**Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later:**


\(^{29}\) M. Fullan, op. cit., p. 23.


Successful change requires those involved in the change to have a shared vision of where and how the change will occur. There is no suggestion in the Policy Paper that the vision of its authors needs to be shared by those involved in the implementation of that vision. One gets the distinct impression that the authors see no difficulty in imposing their vision on the various individuals and organisations affected by the proposed changes. In his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge suggests that in many corporate programmes, even in corporations which espouse the theory of shared vision, the ‘vision’ is one person’s or group’s vision imposed on an organisation. He maintains that such vision at best commands compliance, not commitment and argues that shared vision is vital for learning organisations because it provides the focus and energy for learning. He states that while adaptive learning is possible without vision, generative learning occurs only when people are striving to accomplish something that matters deeply to them. This critique again suggests, as it has done on the previous page, that the biggest task facing any policy-makers who might be interested in taking on the challenge of change lies in convincing the partners in education to share the vision presented in the Policy Paper.

**Neither Centralisation nor Decentralisation Works:**

“Centralisation errs on the side of over-control, decentralisation errs towards chaos.” It has been known for decades that top-down change doesn’t work. Leaders keep trying because they don’t see any alternative and they are impatient for results. However, decentralised solutions can also fail because groups get preoccupied with governance and frequently flounder when left on their own. Michael Fullan maintains that the centre and local units need each other. He argues that what is required is a dynamic two-way relationship of pressure, support and continuous negotiation – what he describes as “simultaneous top-down bottom-up influence”.

No such relationship is envisaged in the Policy Paper. The proposals are presented as a solution coming from the top (centralised) which it is assumed will be adopted and implemented (at the bottom) by proposed decentralised structures. Fullan argues convincingly that this distinction between centralised and decentralised systems will simply not work.

Many countries are aware of this and are beginning to adopt a partnership model for deciding on and implementing educational change. This approach is particularly evident in developing countries and has been spearheaded by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. In a recent document the Committee states:

> To give substance to our belief in local ownership and partnership, we must use channels and methods of co-operation that do not undermine these (very) values.... Development co-operation does not try to do things for developing

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countries and their people, but with them. It must be seen as a collaborative
effort to help them increase their capacities to do things for themselves.
Paternalistic approaches have no place in this framework. In a true partnership,
local actors should progressively take the lead while external partners back
their efforts to assume greater responsibility for their own development.

While the context of the OECD paper is different to that of the Policy Paper, it
nevertheless contains useful desiderata which are relevant to the current discussion.
There are shades of colonialism and paternalism in the Policy Paper, however
inadvertent. Nowhere in the Policy Paper is it suggested that those whom the Paper
believes would benefit from the proposed reforms should be consulted or asked for
their views about the appropriateness of the suggested policies. The paper is written
from the perspective of the external “expert” who knows what is best for a country or
system and expects his advice to be accepted gratefully by those who are “less expert”.
This approach is no longer acceptable. Change must result from consultation and
discussion. Those affected by the change must be convinced of its value and have a
sense of ownership of the process of change.

**Convincing Society of the Need for Change in Education**
The Policy Paper admits that the present curricula of schools is essentially “a shifting
compromise which reflects public opinion and is usually at least a generation behind
what research and best practice would argue is now desirable (and which commerce is
coming to understand is essential)”. It recognises that if major changes are to occur in
education, such changes will have to be accepted by society:

> For a new model of learning to emerge it is necessary to have the wholehearted
support of society at large including, but not dominated by, Government. It
has to be recognised that such educational innovation, being implemented over
many years, is essential to a nation’s continued well-being. The nation which
first unlocks this quite enormous reserve of energy and expertise will have huge
social and economic advantage internationally”.

It also recognises that the task of convincing society of the need for radical change is a
daunting one. The paper states: “People are nervous about the future of education.
They know that education has to change, but strangely, most don’t want their own
children to be in the forefront of innovation”. Since the proposals in the Policy Paper
go deeper than mere schooling changes, the task of ‘selling’ these proposals to society
is even more formidable than the task normally confronting educational policy-makers
at a time of change. The proposals are complex involving as they do the community as
well as the schools and since they require a major redistribution of resources, they
affect families who may have no involvement in formal education as well as families
with children (and possibly adults) involved at different levels of education. The paper
states:
No innovation of this scale can occur unless society is broadly aware of how all the issues raised here interconnect. This is not solely about schools but about reconnecting children with adults in ways that develop their social, emotional, practical and intellectual skills.

The task is not merely one of making society aware of the issues—it is a much more formidable and complex task—one of building partnership and trust in a situation where, whether they like it or not, their own children will have to be in the forefront of this change.

There are some historical instances in Ireland where a Minister for Education, backed by the government of the day, undertook a publicity campaign to explain to the general public what educational changes were being initiated and why. The most notable of these was in 1969 when the then Minister for Education, Brian Lenihan T.D., distributed a well produced and convincing booklet entitled All Our Children to every household in the country explaining the changes that were about to be undertaken in the New Primary School Curriculum and how these changes fitted in with the new policy of free second level education for all. That campaign was supported by media publicity and was successful in winning public support for the innovation. A similar but more low key campaign was mounted when the new Junior Certificate programme was introduced in 1989 (co-incidentally by Lenihan’s sister, Mary O’Rourke, T.D., who was Minister for Education at that time). However, in both of these instances, the changes were supported by the main partners in education—school management and teachers—and not only did they not involve a redistribution or reduction of resources, they were accompanied by a significant overall increase in resources.

The proposals in the Policy Paper involve a reduction in expenditure in a number of existing key areas of education. As well as suggesting a radical redistribution of resources from tertiary education to early years education, the paper proposes the following specific redistribution of costs:

- 10% of total staffing expenditure should in future be applied to teacher development.
- Expenditure rising to 10% of total costs should be allocated to community involvement in education.
- By the age of 18, 20% of all expenditure should be allocated to learning technologies and books.

The paper recognises that teachers’ salaries are a key element of educational expenditure in all western countries (the overall OECD average is over 80%). Redistributing costs either within a sector of education or across the sectors could only occur at the expense of teacher jobs—this is implicit in the proposal. Thus it is thus highly unlikely that the proposals contained in the Policy Paper would be

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35 In Ireland the percentage of public expenditure allocated to salaries is higher than the OECD average - 91% at primary level and 82% at second level.
acceptable to the teacher unions. Teacher unions are powerful organisations in many western democracies and are likely to use the democratic process to ensure that teacher numbers would not be reduced. The Policy Paper blithely ignores the consequences in terms of teacher outrage and the consequent political fallout which would result from reducing teacher posts on the scale envisaged.

**Issues which are not addressed or are inadequately addressed in the Policy Paper.**

Before concluding, this critique will touch on some issues which have not been addressed or are inadequately addressed in the Policy Paper and which are relevant to the paper’s proposals.

The first of these is the issue of **pupil motivation**. Effective teachers are aware that one of their key roles is that of motivator and facilitator of learning. There is an implicit assumption throughout the paper that if children start off life in a supportive learning environment, they will rapidly become self-starters and self-motivated and will require less and less support in terms of teaching as they get older. While this may well be true for **many children** – especially those who do well in the education system at present - there is no evidence that this would be the case for children who are currently under-performing and underachieving. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that many children who require compensatory and remedial support in the early years of their primary schooling, continue to require ongoing additional support as they proceed through the schooling system. A number of early years intervention programmes have shown that while children show an immediate and short-term benefit from such programmes, this benefit can disappear within a few years unless additional support continues to be provided, sometimes throughout their entire schooling.

A second point relates to the **benefits of small classes** during the early years of primary education. The Policy Paper points out quite correctly that it is more beneficial to have small classes in the early years of primary schooling than in later schooling. As a result of these research findings, some educational decision makers have taken a policy decision to target the junior classes in primary schools in disadvantaged areas for additional teacher support. In Ireland, about three hundred primary schools have been identified for additional teachers under the recently introduced *Breaking the Cycle* initiative. However, this initiative has proved to be politically controversial. Some parents and teachers of children who have had the benefit of small classes in the first four years of their primary schooling find it difficult to accept that these children will have to go into a normal class size when they reach second class (around eight years of age). It has been particularly difficult to convince schools that the additional teachers provided under the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme would not be more beneficially deployed across the total range of primary classes in those schools. In some cases, political pressure has been brought to bear on the Minister for Education for a derogation from the requirement that the extra teachers be

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used only in the junior classes. This has been the case particularly in schools where the senior classes are relatively quite large. And not only were objections raised by some of the schools within the Breaking the Cycle scheme about the distribution of additional resources, schools which had not been designated to take part in the scheme also objected to the criteria by which schools were designated. While this is a recent and small scale example (which has not yet been documented), it indicates the political difficulty facing policy makers in introducing a selective policy of this kind. Research evidence is one thing – convincing parents and teachers is another, particularly when their own interests are compromised.

A third issue, which is inadequately addressed in the Policy Paper, is that of the professional development of teachers. The Policy Paper underestimates the complexity of the issues surrounding teachers’ professional development. Numerous policy documents in various countries in recent years have paid lip service to the importance of the ongoing professional development of teachers and some countries have made genuine efforts to provide for such development. However, to quote Michael Fullan again:

Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classrooms.

Various reports have been critical of professional development approaches which failed to develop a model of collaboration and co-operation between providers and recipients. A recent OECD report which attempted to draw together examples of successful professional development in eight countries concluded that:

Teachers’ practices, attitudes and competencies cannot be changed either by legislative order or by standardised courses designed from above. Even though in some countries education ministries have the authority and the influence to oblige teachers to take a lead from central directives, such models of teacher development cannot in themselves create the initiative at the school level that is increasingly being sought. ... a balance needs to be sought, in which teachers feel some “ownership” of their development, yet are still part of a co-ordinated strategy for change.

Her again, we come across the notion of collaboration and “ownership” — concepts that are notable absent from the Policy Paper.

A fourth point relates to the interaction between the different sectors or levels of education and the influence each successive level has on the level below it. It is naïve to suggest, as the Policy Paper appears to do, that the education system is a seamless

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totality, with each level working in tandem with the level below and the level above. On the contrary, different levels of schooling vie and compete with each other for financial and other resources and the discontinuity between different levels of education in the same country has been well documented.\(^{39}\) We know that the expectations and demands of second level education impact on teaching and learning at primary level, especially where selection or tracking is a feature of the system at the point of transfer. To an even greater extent, the expectations and demands of higher education have an influence on second level schooling. This is evident throughout the western world, both in countries where there is a nationally certified examination at the end of second level education which is used for tertiary education selection (e.g. Ireland; France; Germany etc.) and in countries where such a system does not exist (e.g. the U.S). This influence has been a significant factor in ensuring that second level education has continued to emphasise the academic, often to the detriment of a more holistic and appropriate education, as the Policy Paper points out. Since universities throughout the world assert their right to autonomy and to academic independence, including in most cases, their right to determine selection criteria, the influence of national policy makers on universities is more limited than on schooling below tertiary level. Universities can be politically quite influential since their alumni are usually well connected politically and are articulate members of the electorate. To suggest, as the Policy Paper does, a major redistribution of public funding from tertiary education to earlier education, is unlikely to be a realistic political option.

A fifth point, which the Policy Paper fails to address, is the issue of the educational inequalities which currently exist in western society. It has been argued that the structures of schooling contribute to rather than mitigate inequality.\(^{40}\) This critique questions whether the proposals in the Policy Paper are likely to increase rather than decrease these inequalities. For example, while no modern educator would question the potential value of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning, how can it be ensured that the advantages of modern technologies will be equally accessible to the wealthy and the poor? Already, it can be seen that it is very difficult for national or state-wide programmes, which set out to provide computers for schools, to ensure that access to computers is equally available to all students. Students who have home computers and are supported at home to use them for educational purposes, are at an advantage over those pupils where such technology and support is not available in the home. The proposal in the Policy Paper which envisages that students will become increasingly dependent on technology and less dependent on teachers as they advance through the education system, could inadvertently widen the educational gap between those students who are currently advantaged and those who are disadvantaged.

In its concluding pages, the Policy Paper is critical of the extent to which short term thinking and planning has prevented the implementation of creative strategies in

\(^{39}\) See for example, Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, op. cit.

\(^{40}\) See for example K.Lynch Education and Inequality Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999 (forthcoming).
educational policy making and implementation. There is a suggestion that the age of
the policy makers contributes to the short term nature of policy making- a suggestion
that this critique rejects.\textsuperscript{41} This critique argues that the relatively short term nature of
policy making is inevitable in a western democracy, where the lifespan of a government
is not likely to be more than six years. An incoming government will be anxious to
ensure that the policies it adopts will be such as to optimise the probability of re-
election at the end of its term of office. In an area like education, which affects a large
proportion of the electorate, it is particularly important that any large scale change has
wide support among the electorate. The nature of democracy is such that those who
are disaffected are likely to be the most vocal members of the electorate. There are
few additional votes to be gained from those who benefit from change, but there are
many votes to be lost from those who are (or believe they are) disadvantaged by
change. Too many politicians over the years have learned this lesson to their cost.
Therefore, a Minister or a Secretary of State for Education must keep this electoral
threat to the fore in educational planning. This critique suggests that the scale of the
reform proposed in the Policy Paper is so vast as to be unrealisable within the lifetime
of a government. Not alone could the reforms not be implemented, but it is unlikely
that they could even be ‘sold’ to an electorate, unless that electorate was so
disillusioned with the existing system as to be willing to accept any new policy.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In conclusion then, this critique accepts that the proposals for educational change
presented in the Policy Paper are based on solid and reliable research findings, but
argues that the paper has totally failed to take account of the complexity of the
educational change process. The paper shows no awareness of the political reality of
educational change in western democracy. Neither is there any sensitivity to the
human dimensions of change – of the need to work with people, to respect and take
account of their fears and concerns and more importantly to recognise that their
knowledge and experience of change conditions within their educational system can
make a positive contribution to the change process. There is no recognition that
educational systems differ from country to country and that therefore a proposal for
innovation, which may be appropriate for one country or state, may well be totally
inappropriate for another country or state given its specific context and stage of
development. In that regard, the Policy Paper reflects a somewhat imperialist attitude –
an attitude that there is an expert or authority figure or organisation “out there” who
knows what is best and whose advice should be taken by national or state policy
makers.

\textsuperscript{41} On p. 35 it is stated “If we are dealing only in the short-term (which it seems that sometimes older
people are inclined to do)”.

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on the experiences of either successful or unsuccessful innovations or to learn lessons from these. It does not address the conditions necessary for successful reform, conditions which have been well documented in the past decade.

This critique has highlighted the importance of collaborative and partnership models in educational change. It has emphasised that educational change is a process or journey which involves a wide range of travellers – students, parents, teachers, administrators – all of whom must have a sense of commitment to the process and have a conviction of the need for change. While there will be some doubting Thomases and some laggards, there will need to be a critical mass in favour of the proposed change if it is to have any chance of success. The Policy Paper does not address the issue of how this critical mass might be built up.

The author of this critique enjoyed reading the Policy Paper and found the ideas and proposals contained therein challenging and provocative. She is sympathetic to the vision of a new education system which is presented in the Paper but is not convinced that the proposals in their entirety will be adopted by any country or state in the western world in the foreseeable future.