Abstract

This submission to the consultation on public sector reform and local government in Scotland questions the central premise that performance measurement and benchmarking should be further developed. It outlines an alternative approach based on the principles and methods of formative engagement and systems thinking. It points out the drawbacks of the current method and its underlying assumptions, and points to the considerable successes and potential of a very different alternative model. There is a choice of paths forward for public services’ enhancement, yet one which is not widely apprehended.

A misplaced assumption

The consultation document of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee is framed in the conventional assumptions of performance management based on specifications, targets, inspection and benchmarking. Yet these are imposing huge and unnecessary cost on public services. Numeric data has become a goal rather than just one of many means to inform a goal. Its bloat is profoundly harming services’ function. Supposedly objective indicator measurement masks the intentions which frame its collection and the criteria which determine its categories. It subsumes method, as if raising the numbers on the charts of indicator scorings is the goal of public services, rather than receipt of effective services by clients. They are not the same. Instead the sensitive interpretation and adjustment of provider and client at the point of service enactment comprises the knowledge necessary for service enhancement. That must now come to the fore.

Management and audit is currently subsumed in a command, control, policing and enforcement role. Indicators are anything but objective, frequently comprising merely the assertion of opinion by those furthest from the work, with least contact in any genuine participative sense. Being supposedly neutral, indicator measurement enshrines an orthodoxy, forming an implicit and overbearing performative ideology. Enforced adherence to data rather than professionalism, principle and purpose, is causing public services to atrophy. Top-down commands matched to summative inspection, imposing opinions to wrong and outdated criteria, is causing the loss of understanding necessary to enable organic change. It is harming the effective functioning of services at the interface between provider and client because the perceptions of those enacting and receiving the service are elided from the measuring frameworks, constrained to categories which close down knowledge and insight. The very knowledge which should drive service improvement, the insights of those doing the
work and receiving the service at the point of enactment is blocked by blind adherence to centrally prescribed specifications. The stifling requirement to render these as numeric scorings in inspections and audits through all-at-once, one-way determination is draining effectiveness and imposing huge burdens, from monetary cost to individuals’ health and, not least, loss of service function.

The over-riding need for engagement

The principal means to enhance public services at such a time of unprecedented change – technological, social, organisational, policy, values, expectations, infrastructure and resourcing – are new adaptive forms of organisation based on formative development, integral operational understanding and systems thinking. Services’ functioning should indeed be engaged with and externally moderated, but in staged, focused fashion, relating to enhancement goals and their reasons for selection, rather than blanket measurements in supposedly neutral fashion, which are impossible.

There is a profound need to rekindle genuine local responsibility, service professionalism and dynamism, leading to situationally appropriate innovation rather than blind, mandated ‘reform’ imposed by one-size-fits-all prescription. The need is to link front line staff, clients and managers in more fluid and locally responsive forms of organisation with effective, reflective, functional adaptation, away from top-down, directive, data-led approaches, and the current rigid monolith of fixed audit criteria, benchmarking and performance management. The need is to switch from a blind pursuit of performance towards capacity, capability, function and knowledge, to real knowledge of the work in the terms by which it makes sense to those who carry it out and those who receive the service. Function may be informed by data but also in a far greater range of forms than now, particularly enhancing and emphasising interpretative, qualitative interpretations over statistical, quantitised categorisations.

Data is not knowledge. Data, appropriately derived and used, may contribute to knowledge, but does not itself comprise knowledge. That is a critical distinction. Nor is the over-riding emphasis on quantitative forms of measurement based on theory, other than that this is easier for those of a statistical bent and for those who prefer soundbites to knowledge and those seeking the ‘quick fix’ or easy scapegoat. That is why they have grown, exponentially. Statistics do not make good services. Effectiveness does and that requires knowledge. Performance measures are nothing if not formed through interpretation rather than merely read off like the readings on a dial.¹ Nor should interpretations be shoehorned into categories not relevant to their function or to purposes for which their collection was not designed. In education this is why the

¹ For an example a behaviourist approach see the Scottish 2007 National Performance Framework indicator ‘Increase the proportion of schools receiving positive inspection reports’. Its rationale states “This approach is intended to result in improvements in outcomes for learners and, therefore, in positive inspection reports.” But ministers have described Curriculum for Excellence as a transformational change, “different in scale, scope and approach to any kind of educational development we have undertaken before”. In not formally evaluating CfE until mid-2009 and even then not for all schools, the shift in this indicator will measure nothing other than the inspectorate’s late entry into the initiative in terms of evaluation activity, to grasp the far wider range of outcomes now valued. It will merely measure the training of inspectors. The lessons can be extended far beyond schools to other services. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/SchoolInspections
incoming and supposedly ‘transformational’ Curriculum for Excellence is rapidly de-transforming into the curriculum which preceded it, colonising the incoming concepts with the old, appropriating the terminology with the outgoing notions, because the means of measurement of the outgoing curriculum were used to judge the incoming.

Again this is true of any service undergoing major change, which is true of all services now due to the scale and nature of the changes in society. We do not need to tie down organisations to specifications and imposed judgement, to make them, and their staff, more accountable. We need to make them more responsible and thereby more situationally responsive – to be more account able². The need is to shift from performance management and quality assurance, focusing on outputs and its supposed measurement, towards capacity assurance and capability management – the capability and capacity of the system to enable effective functioning. This is something quite different, but not discerned from the conventional performance management mindset.

**Purposes and principles**

The core need is to shift to a focus on purposes and principles, recognising that these vary and shift rapidly by time, place, and client group, as for instance here in Scotland with the transformational education change agenda following the 2004 ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ report³. Purpose itself should not be imposed from on high but emerges from below, set within broad overarching policy objectives and frameworks, as now for this switchover. The function of management is not to direct but to garner organisational perspective to best support those working at the interface between the organisation and its clients to meet core purposes within these broader frameworks. The need is for data to serve purpose, not purpose to serve data, as now occurring.

The public sector has gone through a major shift of approach over the last twenty years or so getting these the wrong way round. Public services staff are orientated to the performance management data factory and the audit silo rather than client need. The need now is to shift away from the behaviourist paradigm of stimulus–response, where improvements are ‘driven’ by improvement edicts and then measured through separated audit as ‘outcomes’ via measuring grids and determined through inspection. We should shift to integral connective purpose and client fulfilment, from measurement towards meaning and towards furthering the meeting and understanding of expectations in service provision.

Different audit models such as formative moderation, enhancement-led review and systems learning are needed. Permanent inspectorates operating via silo-based audit swoops to fixed categorisations of measures and specifications must end, especially when all-at-once, summative, judgemental, without developmental focus, and conducted by individuals who for years on end do little else but ‘inspect’, thereby losing contact with operational subtleties, integral meaning and shifts of operational purpose.

---


and perspective. Inspection as judgement and matched to fixed indicators prevents engagement and consequent mutually constructed understanding.

The functions of assurance and protection from service failure come from openness and regular contacts with clients and front line staff, with external moderation and good internal management contact, but not as prescription, inspection and data driven overload. These can cause the evasive climates of threat, hectoring and fear that dispose towards failure, moreover failure which is then caused by the system itself as the targets, specifications and audit processes impose load but do not enhance perspective or garner organisational response to meet real identified need.

The data swamp masks this and when its collection becomes the central objective, or in times of resource constriction is not scaled back, the audit demands can exceed functional capability and audit can then be the prime cause or trigger of service failure. Worse, remote managers and auditors perceive the failure, if dimly, but then seek to manage their response as commands, imposing new demands and ‘increased expectations’, but triggering new failure due to these further audit and data requirements. This overloads service providers causing service capacity and capability to implode.

The English school inspectorate OFSTED is making this mistake right now. So too the Scottish school inspectorate made a profound mistake in imposing a ‘right way’ of implementation onto the incoming Curriculum for Excellence as a specification, moreover one over and above the complex conceptual framework outlined in Building the Curriculum. The core framework was quite enough, and should be engaged with in open-ended, open minded fashion, not closed down by a specification imposed from outside. But such would only be possible from a formative engagement / systems learning mindset, and that is what we do not have in the Scottish public sector. It is specifications based.

This prevents the exploration of concepts through contextually sensitive engagement to enable genuine professional responsibility, necessary to service dynamism. It disposes to measurement in place of understanding, and leads to presumptive, imposed categorisations which stifle genuine local conceptual exploration and consequent practice innovation. Conceptual innovation becomes impossible, preventing new forms of organisation, leading to organisational atrophy and change stagnation as initiatives, such as Curriculum for Excellence, cannot proceed as per their original philosophy and intentions.

What is needed is what the late Susan Wong called ‘good listening’. Four fifths of the data factory and audit silo should be stripped away and replaced with just this quality

---

5 HMIE, (2011) HMIE Inspection Advice Note – Progress with Curriculum for Excellence for inspections which are announced from January 2011, HM Inspectorate for Education
6 Wong, Susan (2006), Morningside’s Late Community Council Chair: “Listening is not just hearing but is taking on board what is being said, thinking yourself into the position of the other person and trying to see things in the way
and its genuine enactment. The savings would be enormous, of time, cost, health and morale. What is now happening in Scottish education is walking straight out of Seymour Saracen’s book *The predictable failure of education reform*, because teachers and classrooms are not at the centre of the change process. They are constrained to specifications.

What is so sad is that the implementation pathway of *Building the Curriculum* was set out in terms of reflective questions, not indicators, offering a way round this barrier, but one only comprehended by those developing the framework, not by those auditing it. It is this blockage which caused Jenny Reeves to argue that Curriculum for Excellence was unlikely to succeed without a drastic reform of the quality control system.\(^7\) I contend she was right, for the reasons which I further elaborated in my 2011 journal article *The urgent need for new approaches in school evaluation to enable Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence*.\(^8\) There are parallels right across public services. It is not specific to education.

**The need to ‘get knowledge’**

For the service workers caught between performance management layers, deluged with data collection demands, and tied down to the conceptual constraints of imposed specifications, there needs to be a rethink. For the current situation is unsustainable and the way forwards is not to continue as now, or worse, further continue along this direction, but to shift perspective and method, requiring a shift in ethos and approach.

Staff meeting the needs of clients at the front line need a wholesale shift from performance management to capacity management, from measurement to integral understanding, from ‘how good is’ to ‘what works’, from quantitised linear measurement to systemic interconnectedness, from centralised conceptual stricture to localised innovative potential. The system has to cultivate what John Seddon terms ‘the capacity to absorb variety’ and then on to ‘get knowledge’. The knowledge is of ‘what works’ in best fulfilling client need and expectation, and how best to organise the work from the point of view of those doing it: ‘the work which makes the work work’\(^9\). All else is waste, another central insight of Seddon’s. Centrist performance management measuring indices and audit compliance are the principle cause of service underperformance, not a tool to its enhancement, due to the overload engendered by this focus on distractive performance activity. This is especially true of schools. The overemphasis on ‘improvement’ is leading to what I term ‘overbettering’, a negative change process caused where a hectoring desire to ‘improve’ service function degrades in a welter of they do, checking that you have got their points correctly as they see them. Then talking about all the influences and circumstances that affect any decisions.” Private correspondence.


threats and invective. When overly imposed or demanded, to criteria not determined by knowledge of ‘how the work works’\textsuperscript{11}, the implications of change are then not grasped, and when capacity factors have not been properly factored in, the bloated audit demands cause service function to implode. Invective, castigation and demoralisation then soar. Far more organic change is needed and a softer discourse.

Changes can also be imposed when the right thing to do is often simply not to do them. Change for changes sake, when dreamed up sometimes just to ‘be different’ in a form of pseudo-innovation, is the wrong thing to do. Change as altered principles and processes should derive from deep understanding of the work, at the interface between those carrying it out and those receiving the service, and far more integrally as the clients may even come to form part of the services themselves. An example would be Scottish school parent councils acting as an integral functioning part of schools operational management and part of its processes of internal and external accounting, not ‘holding schools to account’.

That is my view also as to how quality review and developmental engagement should work more broadly. The shift from performance to responsibility is also to be matched by the recipients of services. David Cameron, the prime minister, spoke recently that parents should ‘demand excellence’ of schools. But effective schools require community and family cultures, and forms of involvement with schools, which build trust and respect and cultivate the values in children and families which dispose to schools being able to function effectively. A rights based approach matched to a performance and judgemental audit culture builds barriers not bridges. It sets a negative tone, fosters hostility and demotivates. This is true right across public services.

**A product model of learning**

Top-down command-and-control management styles, particularly prevalent in the public sector must be rethought from core principles. The central insights of W.E Deming (1982)\textsuperscript{12} applied in the mid-twentieth century need to be revisited. These have been brought into modern contexts by a range of management commentators. My own perspective has arisen from the genuine attempt as a practitioner to embrace the expressed ‘transformational’ change principles of Curriculum for Excellence. But this has been made difficult in an audit management culture not focused on the altered purposes of the ‘Building the Curriculum’ implementation advice, and which sought to micro-manage through overly prescribed audit of truly labyrinthine elaboration in multiple and ever changing schedules from a number of different audit bodies. Such micro-management, devoid of function, knowledge and purpose is not the way to realise new transformational principles.

The central insights of the 2007 Crerar Review, particularly the ‘sunset clause’ and single scrutiny body could pave the way to new integral forms of linked audit-management, using quality review as a collaborative, assistive tool to understand the

\textsuperscript{11} op.cit
work and harness the collaboration of the workforce, in conjunction with close client contact, to enhance and improve it. I outlined that in my submission to the Crerar Review\textsuperscript{13} which I subsequently elaborated as a functioning model quite different to that brought in by the Crerar Review implementation committees and subsequent legislation. It set out a functioning proposal for the operation of the single scrutiny body on the basis of systems thinking\textsuperscript{14}.

Audit and evaluation needs to be thought of as evidential understanding, as connection linking enhanced perspective to the means to effect change. Within the framework of the ‘Four Capacities’ and ‘Building the Curriculum’ Scotland is ready to embrace such a shift in ways which England is not, being so hidebound in quantitised data and rigid narrow performance criteria. But Scotland is not seizing the opportunity and in so doing the renamed\textsuperscript{15} Curriculum for Excellence is turning into what Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg terms a ‘product model of learning’\textsuperscript{16}.

There are signs of change, not just in Scotland, or even the UK but internationally. The Finnish model in education offers an entirely different approach to change management and quality enhancement, as outlined in Pasi Sahlberg’s recent book \textit{Finnish Lessons}\textsuperscript{17}, one far more closely suited to Scotland’s incoming curriculum, in stark contrast to the existing quality assurance methodologies based on elaborated indicators, such as \textit{How Good Is Our School?}, \textit{Journey to Excellence} and their equivalent schedules in other audit bodies also impacting on schools. Again there is a parallel right across public services. In the book Sahlberg outlines his model of the GERM, or Global Education Reform Movement, a set of assumptions which has underlain an unofficial education agenda based on market orientated reform ideas and test based accountability and which has been followed by most Western countries. This is in stark contrast to what he calls ‘The Finnish Way’ based on learning from the past and owning innovations, customizing teaching and learning, encouraging risk taking, and shared responsibility and trust. Sahlberg quotes my own work in exemplifying the role of role of audit in constricting competing models in service change as part of the GERM:

\textsuperscript{15} For the distinction between the original ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ and the difference which the loss of the indefinite article has made in the shift to ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ see Walter Humes ‘\textit{Little words can mean a lot}’ http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6040793
\textsuperscript{17} Sahlberg, Pasi. (2011) \textit{Finnish Lessons – What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?} Teachers’ College Press. http://www.finnishlessons.com/
Niall MacKinnon, who teaches at Plockton Primary School, makes a compelling appeal for “locally owned questions and purposes in realising practice within the broader national policy and practice frameworks (MacKinnon, 2011, p98). He gets right to the point of how GERM affects teachers and schools:

There is the real practical danger that without an understanding of rationale and theoretical bases for school development, practitioners may be judged by auditors on differing underlying assumptions to their own developmental pathways, and the universalistic grading schemas come to be applied as a mask or front giving pseudo-scientific veneer to imposed critical judgments which are nothing more than expressions of different views and models of education. Through the mechanism of inspection, a difference of conceptual viewpoint, which could prompt debate and dialogue in consideration of practice, is eliminated in judgmental and differential power relations. One view supplants another. Command and control replaces mutuality, dialogue and conceptual exploration matched to practice development. Those who suffer are those innovating and bringing in new ideas. (MacKinnon 2011, p100)

In Scotland there is a stark parallel with the switch to (A) Curriculum for Excellence which is why I wrote my paper. The Finnish way is one we must adopt, or at least adapt to our own conditions and circumstances if the CFE initiative is to succeed and proceed as intended, and in accordance with its underlying founding philosophy. There are parallels with education and other services in many countries.

The essence of quality

Quality is subtle, its achievement often realised in a moment of satisfaction, an essence achieved, a bridge crossed, a moment of insight realised, or a new opportunity opened up. The process is not linear, and certainly not when embarked on as a transformational change programme. It is most definitely not ‘from A to B’, but rather an endless interplay of swirls, loops, zig-zags, and even set-backs followed by forward leaps as hurdles are identified and then overcome. There are parallels across services. Moreover progress cannot be measured in linear fashion, as for instance the attempt to measure the quality of a lesson in a short observation, even down to twenty-five minutes as now occurring for the English school inspectorate OFSTED. Any given moment may appear humdrum or unexceptional, or even sticky and problematic, but may contribute to an overall pattern of activity which is achieving its core objectives very well indeed. So too problems may be no more than reactions to changing circumstances. Change may not

20 As the school inspectorate has sought, mistakenly in linear fashion, to impose on schools: HMIE, (2011) HMIE Inspection Advice Note – Progress with Curriculum for Excellence for inspections which are announced from January 2011, HM Inspectorate for Education
look like progress as apparent stability can flash-transform into a new state through the interconnectedness of many factors over a long process of preparation which may be invisible in a ‘snapshot’ audit approach. Much of children’s learning presents itself in this way.

The process has to be worked at, interpreted and reflected upon, with essential mutuality and respect. It is not a simple ‘if this then that’. Snapshot graded measurement can never penetrate these factors. They are not about performance, but about knowledge, the knowledge of an organisation as a system, at all levels, focused on purpose. The micro, meso and macro layers have to interconnect, over time. Again this is true right across public services.

The essence of integral service fulfilment is lost if service function is defined as performance management and audit compliance. Major change objectives are then made impossible\(^{21}\). Meeting the precepts of performance management indicators has become separate to meeting needs and identifying and codifying these into purposes and then on to actions. An edifice of data and an overloaded requirement to collate and process it gets in the way of service function and subsumes purpose. Audit compliance has even become the principal aim of service function, one which I would contend has become true of schools, and a major impediment to small schools with limited and contracting management time allocations. Instead purpose must be central.

Data must serve purpose, not purpose serve data. Data does not only mean numbers, it also means interpretations, and these are not universal. They depend on rationales and models, which vary. They must be probed, not pronounced or imposed. Data in the absence of purpose or locally-owned interpretation is meaningless. The quantitisation of performance management data and functions and the centralisation of audit criteria in the attempt to impose supposedly objective measuring instruments on services, all of which must then be utilised and maintained in ongoing real time to meet the compliance obligations of the audit industry, is causing an immense drain on services.

It is causing immense harm, and worse, when what comes to be looked for is not then the service function itself, and the perceptions of those realising it (workers and clients) but those of the data management factory and its audit police. Self-evaluation then transforms into self-inspection, which I contend has happened to schools, a point taken up by a number of commentators such as John MacBeath and colleagues\(^{22}\). The process can become so unwieldy that the failure to maintain the data stream by service providers can mistakenly be perceived by auditors as a failure of the service itself, whereas it is the unwieldy, cumbersome data requirements which are driving services downwards, even to service failure.


Shifting away from performance management

Conventional performance quantifies but in reducing complex interpretative meaning to numbers and scales destroys meaning. Complexity increases, almost exponentially. The measures become latched onto by auditors who then see them as somehow objective when they are anything but. The measures then substitute for purpose, the very goals and objectives whose achieved operation and fulfilment the service is there to serve. Worse the performance measures can then substitute both for service objective, professional responsibility and even the views and purposes of clients. It is back to front.

Benchmarking and fulfilling numeric specifications and targets come to substitute and replace, and then even negate the very purposes for which the services were established. The complexity becomes self-serving and drives out trust and meaning, and as the complexity rises and scaled measurement becomes the definition of success, social reality in service operational fulfilment is shoe horned into that which can be quantitised, and that which cannot is filtered out. Often these aspects are the very essence of the service.

For school education this is the very worst of worlds and the performance measurement mania which has enshrouded schools for the last fifteen to twenty years is doing enormous damage. The OFSTED English school inspectorate is perhaps the case study exemplar, but Scotland is not far behind, and in some respects worse through lack of failsafes, checks and balances. It so different to what went before, even under the same term inspection, as outlined in the autobiographical works of English inspector Gervase Phinn\textsuperscript{23} and as noted by Mitchell\textsuperscript{24}.

In education, performance measures came to focus on very narrow measures – that of targetised attainment and that to very narrow criteria. But the development of the whole person is so much more – and indeed the narrow performance measures of attainment themselves were also so narrowly drawn, particularly in the performance management indicator schedules. The skill sets needed and personal capabilities needed are so much wider, so more varied, so changing that conventional measures of school success were becoming outdated, as indeed was the content and structure of the curriculum. Whilst core skills are necessary, beyond certain levels they may be distractive and even counter-productive to the necessary wider skills, dispositions and capabilities for a person’s most appropriate development. This is where the trailblazing 2004 report ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ came from, from what had just preceded it. But audit did not shift. There are huge parallels for other services. The curriculum review report set out a fundamentally restructured set of purposes.

The four capacities were a groundbreaking development from the conventional curriculum. ‘Successful learners’ was only one of the four capacities to be fostered in a child’s potential, and equal to the others: ‘effective contributors, responsible citizens and

\textsuperscript{23} Phinn, Gervase (2005). \textit{Up and Down in the Dales}, Penguin
\textsuperscript{24} Mitchell, John (2003). \textit{Lament for inspectors of days gone by}, Times Educational Supplement for Scotland, 16 May \url{http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=379629}
confident individuals’. But just as the teaching profession and school ‘communities of interest’ were engaging with the new principles through a process of professional reflection, guided by reflective questions termed *Building the Curriculum*, the existing performance measures also went through major changes, in very different fashion, and layer upon layer of schedules and measuring instruments grew, compounding each other and imposed by different audit bodies.

The requirement to fulfil them has ground out schools. But there is a further distraction. The performance measuring instruments appear to be comprehensive but are anything but. They are so unwieldy that not even the inspectors can utilise them properly. Again there are strong parallels with other services. My central conclusion is that transformational change in impossible in such a culture. I contend that this consultation is framed in the wrong premises.

It is locked into the dominant business management ethic still pervasive in public sector services of ‘deliverology’, as assiduously adopted by Tony Blair’s New Labour government. But whilst management journalist Simon Caulkin railed that ‘Labour's public sector is a Soviet tractor factory’ 25 this policy imperative goes far deeper and has been the dominant public services improvement model across all political parties in the subsequent UK and devolved administrations, including Scotland and into this present SNP administration, and the UK and the coalition government.

The inspection control system of ‘independent evaluations’, indicators and imposed commentary has had us all looking over our shoulders, creating monstrous piles of waste – paper, time, health, morale – driving in underperformance, but which has been caused by the system because it is not functioning in system terms but in command- and-control terms. 26

**Rolling in change**

Enormous potential can be released at considerably reduced cost once it is realised that most performance variation is contained in the system (as Deming found roughly 95%), and not the individuals (5%). Then managers, workers and external moderators can work collaboratively. The managers’ job is to set the conditions for optimal performance, not performance-manage the workers through ‘quality assurance’, inspection and fixed measures. The revalued process drives out fear, literally because the workforce is now valued, seen as partners in understanding and harnessed to the collaborative task of improving the work rather than as the cause of underperformance and to be ‘frog-marched’ to ‘improvement’ by central diktats. A re-established professionalism focuses on purposes, but liberates method to realise purposes. Change is then rolled-in, not rolled out, a turn of phrase reconfigured by Vanguard Consulting. Altered purposes are

---

http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/may/04/economics.labour

26 Johnston, Philip (2008). This waste of our money is just madness Daily Telegraph, 17 March.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/philipjohnston/3556249/This-waste-of-our-money-is-just-madness.html
at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence and why they have been so sidelined by indicators and inspection.

Connectivity

Systems learning is about connectivity – between agencies, institutions, people, processes, functions, ideas – towards achieving purpose. It is found in interpretations far more than in numbers, though sensitively utilised and appropriately derived measures can be used. But they are only a tool, a realisation lost to the present culture where driving up the numbers is the main show in town. Evaluation itself needs to change – not ‘forming evaluations’ i.e. grades to fixed measures, but forming interpretations, matching purpose to the means of realisation. Evaluation becomes an integral and reciprocal process, not an act of judgement. It needs to be formative not summative.

Systems thinking strengthens accountability by setting up strong links with clients, and also between managers and the workforce, probing the factors which dispose towards or against effective services’ functioning. This is defined as achieving purpose in meeting needs from the customers/clients point of view, not matching to an imposed a specification and the auditors point of view. Switching to the core focus on purpose at the point of enactment is how to realise the plea of teachers to ‘just let me do my job’, and of course lots of others services too. It liberates method, restoring professionalism. It is not the job of auditors to determine method.

Understanding the work

The difference to the conventional view of public sector reform has to be fully grasped. It is not benchmarking or performance measurement from managers and auditors point of view. It is understanding the work from the point of view of the client who receives the service as enabled by the workforce who enact the service, both working in a synergy. Command and control coupled with unilinear audit negates this. It claims to give assurance but stifles innovation and service change. Assurance comes from ensuring due process and ensuring that due contact and engagement is occurring. The management factory, data stream and audit silo is not a core purpose but a distraction. Management is indeed needed, data may indeed be utilised and processes of review and moderation should occur, but within a systems thinking mindset and approach they function in terms completely oppositional to the conventional ‘command and control’ manner of specifications, measures and inspection.

The behaviourist paradigm of do this, get this result and then measure it, and independently audit the result is severely hampering service functioning. Understand the functions of the work from the worker point of view and the outcome of the work from the client point of view. Ensure rich engagement of both. Define the function of the service around purposes, not indicators and measures, and answer questions in terms

---

27 Caulkin, Simon (2007) Make a decision? We're too dumbed-down, The Observer, 27 May
http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007/may/27/theobserver.observerbusiness5
of achievement of purpose. Focus on enhancements, appropriately derived, not on all-at-once judgement.

Certain measures may be used, sparingly and contextually, and specifically with local ownership of their deployment. Do not retreat into performance measures, into forms of beseeching which turns into hectoring and worse, decrying and denigrating staff, which merely breeds resentment as staff are criticized for that which they are not given the mean to accomplish, or goals and performance criteria which have become irrelevant to locally determined purposes under conditions of unprecedented change. Understand the service in terms of fulfilment of purpose as a client appropriately and contentedly receiving the service and look at the capacity and self-knowledge of the organisation as a system to be able to organise and structure itself to best fulfil that purpose.

Move away from behaviourism, even from ‘achieving outcomes’. A client and service provider working together is not stimulus-response, an ‘outcome’, but is a synergy of expectations, functions, perceptions and integral communication. The systems thinking approach also runs counter to the rush to shared services, back office forms of functional organisation and rampant (over)centralisation. This is because they are not working and are imposing unnecessary cost and organisational ineffectiveness28.

What is needed is the most appropriate scale of activity to that which enhances professional responsibility and the identification and meeting of client need at the point of service delivery at the moment of enaction. Once services are cut up and their functions separated, or overly separated, then the systems perspective is annulled, and layers of organisational functioning with their camp followers of performance management, benchmarking and inspection-audit follow in their wake setting up layers of organisational waste.

Management itself is redefined from a systems thinking perspective Seth Godin writes about turning the traditional top-down power structure up-side down:

> I always took the position that my boss (when I had a job) worked for me. My job was to do the thing I was hired to do, and my boss had assets that could help me do the job better. His job, then, was to figure out how best give me access to the people, systems and resources that would allow me to do my job the best possible way.

> Of course, that also means that the people I hire are in charge as well. My job isn’t to tell them what to do, my job is for them to tell me what to do to allow them to keep their promise of delivering great work.”29

That is the counterintuitive notion of management that systems thinking opens up. The supreme success of the Finnish model of education derived not only from what it did, but more pertinently from what it did NOT do, and that was not submerging itself in performance management overload matched to centralised audit compliance. Once

---

28 See the January 2012 newsletter of Vanguard Consulting, Buckingham.
29 Seth Godin Quoted in: Bower, Joe, Mistrust drives manipulation online article in For the Love of Learning June 2, 2010 http://www.joebower.org/2010/06/mistrust-drives-manipulation.html
freed up it blossomed, but from locally enabled professional responsibility within broad frameworks of policy rather than tight strictures of measured performance accountability. There is not even a word for accountability in Finnish. Yet their education system is flourishing\(^{30}\). Might this be why?

The lessons go far beyond education. We are grinding out our services in performance management diversion and audit waste. Deliverology has had its day. Yes services need to work well, and we need to think about them evidentially and systematically, and bring about enhancements. But we need to think very carefully about their central organisational dynamic, about what makes them work and work well – and better – and how to get the best out of people. Services aren’t so much delivered as owned once worker and service recipient move closer together in more direct consultative patterns.

Driving them ever harder and smothering with them with targets, specifications, measures and imposition through overbearing audit regimes does not bring about improvement. It does the opposite, especially when the measures are considered to be somehow neutral or objective, but are anything but. They always belie an underlying perspective or model of education. A shift in organisational and public services’ management paradigm is needed. This consultation needs to reframe its questions and its own core purpose.

To put it in Sahlberg’s terms the consultation has been shaped in the GERM, when what is needed is needed is to grasp the GERM free alternative. We are not getting the right answers because we are not asking the right questions. We should not just focus on what we in Scotland must now do, but think more laterally and, taking the example of education and Finland, focus specifically also on what Finland has not done\(^{31}\).

A choice of routes forward

Just as there are actions we in Scotland should now take to enable more effective and efficient services, there are also things we should not do and which we should stop doing, and certainly stop doing as central imperative. We need far less benchmarking and performance management, not more, and the eradication of summative judgementalism as an evaluatory method. We need to strip out a host of audit functions, and bodies, and replace them with systems learning engagement, moderated by the single scrutiny body as conceptualised by Professor Lorne Crerar in the 2007 Crerar Review.

We need systems learning, formative engagement and qualitative, integral understanding. We should reflect on why Finland’s school performance is high,

\(^{30}\) MacKinnon, Niall (2011) Finnish Lessons for Scotland, online article in Bower, Joe ‘For the love of learning’, Alberta, Canada (15 November) \url{http://www.joebower.org/search/label/Finnish%20Lessons}

MackInn0n, Niall (2011) Kills 99% of GERMS Times Educational Supplement for Scotland (15 November) \url{http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6134006}

\(^{31}\) Bower, Joe (2011) What has Finland NOT done? Online article in Bower, Joe ‘For the love of learning’, Alberta, Canada (7 November) \url{http://www.joebower.org/2011/11/what-has-finland-not-done.html}

professional satisfaction high and client satisfaction high. Then look at England and the performance management developments in early 2012 and their consequent motivational meltdown. And then reflect on Scotland, poised geographically and functionally between the two. We should then make conscious decisions, focused around purpose as to what we want. The Crerar Review signalled an alternative pathway, as did the 2004 ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ report. But both have been waylaid due to the failure to examine method and ethos and a genuine attempt to ‘get knowledge’.

The implementation pathway of ‘Building the Curriculum’ was stymied by mandating it from the centre with imposed categories not found in the original framework. Do we want Scotland to be more like England and its OFSTED school inspectorate, or more like Finland and ‘The Finnish Way’ as outlined by Sahlberg? It is a conscious choice, one applicable to all services. They are fundamentally different methods enshrining different orientations of what is valued. They come from different ways of being and different ways of seeing.

I have written about schools but it could just as readily be social care, or careers services or any other public service to which systems thinking approaches are now being applied, with profound success32, linking service enhancements, increased morale and enabling substantial cost savings. This consultation boils down to two simple questions and the way forward for public services reform will be given in the answer. But once framed they really answer themselves. Where is the locus of service demand, organisational design and work function? And where should it be?

---------------------------------

Niall MacKinnon
February 2012

*Niall MacKinnon is head teacher of Plockton Primary School, Highland. Though formed in the context of my professional duties this statement of observations and reflections is written in a personal capacity*

---

Let's re-energise 'living learning'

Curriculum for Excellence is becoming a problem. Its capacities are turning into slogans. The outcomes and experiences are sinking into the ugly 'Yes and No', abovetted, parcelled and dismembered into what we had before.

Education has not embraced the responsibility and professionalism of building the curriculum. The audit constraints us to six point specifications of yesterday. Seven-point implementation constraints thinking. Imposed commentary finishes us off.

We hear little of de-cluttering now. We just cannot shed prescription and elaborated procedure. Pinning something down does not let it grow.

The pursuit of excellence has become a mythic quest. Journey to excellence has it that: "Excellence describes the furthest end of the quality spectrum. When we think of excellence, we think of an outstanding aspect, a model of its kind – the very best there is."

But excellence is an idealisation. Excellence in these terms takes us on a hiding to nothing. Unachievable, it stokes fear. Need we head in this direction?

I have known staff engage with the most challenging children, and gain their respect and engagement. Walk into the room and nothing leaps out as "excellent". But get to know those pupils and staff and you will find they have excelled themselves in what they have achieved. That is the difference.

The incoming framework embodies a more profound inner kernel. Its core is the living of learning. This switches on children and staff. Once children find purpose in their activities, they come to live through them (experiences), then readily seek knowledge or skills to enhance them (outcomes). In doing so, they grow as a person (capacities).

The essence of a child forms in learning through living and being. Therein lies the purpose of formative assessment, not disembodied next steps "feeding back to the teacher the same marbles that the teacher gave out to the class", as Edward Rothman put it.

Let us create a culture to get the best out of people – not a culture aspiring for "the very best there is", but a humane endeavour to bring out "the very best in us". We should be "for excellence", not "for excellence".

Such capacity-building needs to join evaluation as a single process, not be tagged on afterwards. It should apply in fair weather and stormy, halcyon calm and normal bluster. All schools go through all such states, which is why a "snapshot" audit is so inappropriate.

Pupils, staff and institutional learning should be the basis for a staged developmental review. What aspects of richer, experiential learning are we seeking to enable? How are we doing this? How are we getting on? What is helping, or hindering? For this we need a conversation, not a monologue, or a diatribe.

Shovel-in has had its day. That was the rationale for the shift to capacities, outcomes and experiences, not scores of "I can" statements cross-matching to 5-14 attainment targets, as is now occurring. We must not wrap the new concepts in the practices of the old.

The merger of HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland offers a new prospect. Suppose the new merged agency became the Scottish Network of School Learning Engagement or the Educational Enhancement Agency? Suppose its ethos shifted from "support and challenge" to "engagement and understanding"? Words form social reality; a name change is essential.

Stifling, pervasive micromanagement must end. As funding outbacks beckon, drastically cutting specifications and judgementalism will release substantial resources now allocated to pointless audit and induced stress-related absence. Living Learning is a plausible, affirming and energising prospect.
Kills 99.9% of GERM

Finland Lessons by Pasi Sahlberg was published last Friday. Its subtitle is: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland? It has come at the right time for Scotland.

The official message here is that the big curriculum change debates are settled. But if we take a step back, it is clear that a new change is taking place. The 2004-07 phase was about opening up wider capacities, decluttering, deepening learning, personalisation, choice, creativity, professionalism, and the visionary “building the curriculum”. Curriculum for Excellence was a subtle, complex whole. It heralded a professional climate of reflection, responsibility and dialogue.

But there is now an overlay: “required” characteristics of successful implementation: auditing “to” experiences and outcomes – hundreds and hundreds of strong-grade matching to existing indicator schedules, “increased expectations” in inspection, and to cap it all: “rolling out” across Scotland, standardised testing. What happened?

The central message of Sahlberg’s book is that Finland established a high-performing education system by adopting policies counter to that which came in across most Western education systems. Sahlberg calls these the GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement.

The features of the GERM are: standardising teaching and learning with common criteria for measurement and data, increased focus on core subjects, particularly literacy and numeracy, teaching a prescribed curriculum, transfer of models of administration from the corporate world: high stakes accountability policies – control, inspection, division between schools and an ethos of punishment (for educators).

Sahlberg observes: “As Finnish teachers were exploring the theoretical foundations of knowledge and learning and redesigning their school curricula to be congruent with them, their peers in England, Germany, France and the United States struggled with increased school inspection, controversial externally-imposed learning standards, and competition that disturbed some teachers to the point that they decided to leave their jobs.”

For us too he notes: “Scotland is currently recovering from a rather serious GERM infection a few years back.”

Indeed. But are we now about to undergo a relapse? Perhaps, without a diagnosis, the infection had not gone away.

The treatment is a full course of Finnish lessons.

Niall MacKintosh, Plockton Primary
Finnish Lessons for Scotland
Here is a guest post by Niall MacKinnon who is a principal of a primary school in Scotland.

by Niall MacKinnon

I am the principal of a small rural primary school in Scotland. I am honored that Joe has asked me to write a guest blog. It is an exciting time to do this.

From half way round the globe I share the excitement of Pasi Sahlberg’s new book Finnish Lessons. Its subtitle What can the world learn from educational change in Finland? has come at the right time for us here in Scotland.

We have just gone through a curriculum review seeking to re-vision education. A welcome policy mix was coming in: opening up wider capacities, de-cluttering, deepening learning, personalisation, choice, creativity, professionalism, and a visionary ‘building the curriculum’. This explicitly gave us local ownership of pathways forward in our own institutions.

The official message here is that the big curriculum change debates are settled. But now there is an overlay. As we embraced principles to ‘build’ in our schools, our inspectors gave us ‘required’ characteristics of successful ‘implementation’. We were asked to declutter through rounded, non-target-driven outcomes based on experiences, but were handed a specified listing hundreds and hundreds strong and told to cross-match our practice to these. We had to continue grading to the existing audit indicator schedules, then were told that inspectors had ‘increased expectations’ in inspections. Now we are to get standardised testing. What happened?

It is Sahlberg who shows how this happened, from the Finnish alternative. We tried to bring in a new curriculum approach without re-thinking the basic underpinning values which would frame it. Whilst our new curriculum asked us to rethink practice, it did not give us the means to think. Scotland could not break free from audit indication, inspection and targetised attainment. Its culture remained top-down.

The critical shift needed is to purposes and principles, giving professional ownership of the means to realise them at the local level. Sahlberg shows that this is what Finland got right. It embraced dialogue basing practice change in reflection over theories and models of education. This is not possible if loaded down with top-heavy audit indication schedules, micro-specification of actions and of curriculum content from the center.

The central message of Sahlberg’s book is that Finland established a high performing education system by adopting policies counter to that which came in across most Western education systems. Sahlberg calls these the GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement. The features of the GERM are: standardizing teaching and learning with common criteria for measurement and data; increased focus on core subjects, particularly literacy and numeracy; teaching a prescribed curriculum; transfer of models of administration from the corporate world; high
stakes accountability policies – control through testing, inspection, division between schools and an ethos of punishment (for educators).

That is what went wrong. These remained in place in Scotland and so our new vision was never going to succeed. Finland’s success has been achieved by the simple solution of framing the development of the system around professional dialogue. We need to do the same. But to do that we have to strip out the blockages. If we want to rediscover our professionalism and our ‘love of learning’ we need to be GERM free. The real problem in a GERM ridden system is that the simplicity of professional conversation is lost. Of course, what we may then talk about is anything but simple.

This is a lesson for Scotland, and for the world. We all need a course of Finnish Lessons.

http://www.joebower.org/search/label/Finnish%20Lessons

11 November 2011
The school inspections consultation was a lost opportunity (Holyrood 28 February). The notion of inspection is utterly outdated for the changes under way in society. Education has to match these. They derive from deep changes in values, technologies, and interaction with knowledge. Inspection only works if there is something to inspect against. Since it needs a template or specification it is inherently constraining and restricting. We need to move beyond inspection, but not accountability. Unfortunately the two terms have become intertwined, but they are very different. External review needs to engage in terms of what an institution is setting out to do. We need to focus on purposes, what we are seeking to achieve, not crawl up the notches of imposed measures and indicators. An all at once inspection is overwhelming and becomes a burden, second guessing ‘what they are looking for’. Without fixed specifications there is nothing to inspect. But there is everything to discuss, review, develop, implement, communicate, moderate, disseminate, enhance, build and learn.

The great insight of those working from a systems perspective is that 95 per cent of the variability of performance is in the system, not the individual. The most effective way to bring about improvement is to work on the system. Thereby it is necessary to understand performance as a system.

We have a new agency merging quality and curriculum, announced after the inspections review. The new agency must not be an inspectorate. It should be the centre of a network of moderated engagement. The task is to learn about learning. There now needs to be a genuine debate on accountability, quality enhancement and the role of the new agency.

NIALL MACKINNON
Head teacher,
Plockton Primary School
I can feel the weather changing
I can see it all around
Can’t you feel that new wind blowing?
Don’t you recognize that sound that sound?
And the earth is slowly spinning
Spinning slowly, slowly changing.

— Neil Young: Rambin’ (2010)
Race to the Top (RTTT), launched in 2009, is a $4.35 billion U.S. Department of Education program designed to spur reforms in state and local district education, and includes many of the elements of GERM. It encourages competition among states and also between schools as they seek more effective practices and practitioners. Teacher and leader effectiveness as measured by standardized student tests have a central role in this initiative. Table 4.1 also illustrates how education policies in Finland since the 1980s have been almost orthogonal to those of the RTTT.

There are also others who have analyzed the global educational change efforts. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley have done so in their book *The Fourth Way* (2009), to which I will refer later in this chapter. Michael Fullan, a Canadian educational change scholar, has come to a similar conclusion in his analysis of whole system reform policies and strategies (2011). He speaks about “drivers of change,” such as education policy or strategy levers, which have the best chances of driving intended change in education systems. “In the rush to move forward,” writes Fullan, “leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers” (p. 5). “Wrong drivers” include accountability (vs. professionalism), individual teacher quality (vs. collegiality), technology (vs. pedagogy), and fragmented strategies (vs. systems thinking). These ineffective elements of education reform that resonate closely with the aspects of GERM discussed above have fundamentally missed the targets and continue to do so, according to Fullan. In his analysis of whole-system reforms in the United States and Australia, he goes even further:

There is no way that these ambitious and admirable nationwide goals will be met with strategies being used. No successful system has ever led with these drivers. They cannot generate on a large scale the kind of intrinsic motivational energy that will be required to transform these massive systems. The US and Australian aspirations sound great as goals but crumble from a strategy or driver perspective. (Fullan, 2011, p. 7)

None of the elements of GERM shown in Table 4.1 has been adopted in Finland in the ways that they have within education policies of many other nations. This, of course, does not imply that there is no educational standardization, learning of basic skills, or accountability in Finnish schools. Nor does it suggest that there is a black-and-white distinction between each of these elements in Finland vis-à-vis other countries. But, perhaps, it does imply that a good education system can be created using alternative policies orthogonal to those commonly found and promoted in global education policy markets.

GERM has had significant consequences for teachers’ work and students’ learning in schools wherever it has been a dominant driver of change (Sahlberg, 2011a). The most significant consequence is standardization of educational and pedagogical processes. Performance standards set by the educational authorities and consultants have been brought into the lives of teachers and students without

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Finnish Way: Competitive Welfare State</th>
<th>103</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 4.1. The Key Elements of Global Educational Reform Movement in Comparison with Finnish Education Policies Since the Early 1990s</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)</td>
<td>The Finnish Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standardizing teaching and learning</strong></td>
<td>Customizing teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting clear, high, and centrally prescribed performance expectations for all schools, teachers, and students to improve the quality and equity of outcomes. Standardizing teaching and curriculum in order to have coherence and common criteria for measurement and data.</td>
<td>Setting a clear but flexible national framework for school-based curriculum planning. Encouraging local and individual solutions to national goals in order to find best ways to create optimal learning and teaching opportunities for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on literacy and numeracy</strong></td>
<td>Focus on creative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and the natural sciences serve as prime targets of education reform. Normally instruction time of these subjects is increased.</td>
<td>Teaching and learning focus on deep, broad learning, giving equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual’s personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching prescribed curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Encouraging risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching higher standards as a criterion for success and good performance. Outcomes of teaching are predictable and prescribed in uniform way. Results are often judged by standardized and externally administered tests.</td>
<td>School-based and teacher-owned curricula facilitate finding novel approaches to teaching and learning, and encourage risk-taking and uncertainty in leadership, teaching, and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Borrowing market-oriented reform ideas</strong></td>
<td>Learning from the past and owning innovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of educational change are management and administration models brought to schools from corporate world through legislation or national programs. Such borrowing leads to aligning schools and local education systems to operational logic of private corporations.</td>
<td>Teaching honors traditional pedagogical values, such as teacher’s professional role and relationship with students. Main sources of school improvement are proven good educational practices from the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Test-based accountability and control</strong></td>
<td>Shared responsibility and trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School performance and raising student achievement are closely tied to processes of promotion, inspection, and ultimately rewarding schools and teachers. Winners normally gain fiscal rewards, whereas struggling schools and individuals are punished. Punishment often includes loose employment terms and merit-based pay for teachers.</td>
<td>Gradually building a culture of responsibility and trust within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students. Targeting resources and support to schools and students who are at risk to fail or to be left behind. Sample-based student assessments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
full understanding that most of what pupils need to learn in school cannot be formulated as a clear standard. New forms of student assessments and testing that have been aligned to these standards are often disappointments and bring new problems to schools. However, because the standardization agenda promises significant gains in efficiency and quality of education, it has been widely accepted as a basic ideology of change, both politically and professionally.

The voices of practitioners are rarely heard in the education policy and reform business. Educational change literature is primarily technical discourse created by academics or change consultants. Therefore, I give space here to a school improvement practitioner from Scotland. This example is particularly relevant because Scotland is currently recovering from a rather serious GERM infection a few years back. The symptoms included top-heavy planning, rigid curriculum, fixed measures through audits, external snapshot-inspection and externally judged accountability. Many of them are gradually now fading away and giving room to more intelligent curriculum and evaluation policies. Niall MacKinnon, who teaches at Plockton Primary School, makes a compelling appeal for “locally owned questions and purposes in realising practice within the broader national policy and practice frameworks” (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 98). He gets right to the point of how GERM affects teachers and schools:

There is the real practical danger that without an understanding of rationale and theoretical bases for school development, practitioners may be judged by auditors on differing underlying assumptions to their own developmental pathways, and the universalistic grading schemas come to be applied as a mask or front giving pseudoscientific veneer to imposed critical judgments which are nothing more than expressions of different views and models of education. Through the mechanism of inspection, a difference of conceptual viewpoint, which could prompt debate and dialogue in consideration of practice, is eliminated in judgmental and differential power relations. One view supplants another. Command and control replaces mutuality, dialogue and conceptual exploration matched to practice development. Those who suffer are those innovating and bringing in new ideas. (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 100)

GERM has gained global popularity among policy makers and change consultants because it emphasizes some fundamental new orientations to learning and educational administration. It suggests strong guidelines to improve quality, equity, and the effectiveness of education, such as putting priority on learning, seeking high achievement for all students, and making assessment an integral part of the teaching and learning process. However, it also strengthens market-like logic and procedures in education. First and most importantly, GERM assumes that external performance standards, describing what teachers should teach and what students should do and learn, lead to better learning for all. By concentrating on the basics and defining explicit learning targets for students and teachers, such standards place strong emphasis on mastering the core skills of reading and writing and mathematical and scientific literacy. Systematic training of teachers and external inspection are essential elements of this approach.

Second, GERM relies on an assumption that competition between schools, teachers, and students is the most productive way to raise the quality of education. This requires that parents choose schools for their children, that schools have enough autonomy, and that schools and teachers are held accountable for their students' learning.

By contrast, a typical feature of teaching and learning in Finland is high confidence in teachers and principals regarding curriculum, assessment, organization of teaching and inspection of the work of the school. Another feature is the encouragement of teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches, in other words, to make school a creative and inspiring place to teach and learn. Moreover, teaching in schools aims to cultivate renewal while respecting schools' pedagogic legacies. This does not mean that traditional instruction and school organization are nonexistent in Finland; it is quite the opposite. What is important is that today's Finnish education policies are a result of 3 decades of systematic, mostly intentional, development that has created a culture of diversity, trust, and respect within Finnish society, in general, and within its education system, in particular.

I have named this alternative approach to the global educational reform movement the Finnish Way. A similar attempt in development of the information society and economic system is called the Finnish Model (Castells & Himanen, 2002; Routti & Ylä-Anttila, 2006; Saari, 2006). What distinguishes Finland from most other nations is that the proven level of performance of the education system has occurred simultaneously in learning outcomes and equity in education. These are both the next generation applications of the Third Way, or radical centrist, that became well-known in the 1990s through the leadership of Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and Gerhard Schröder. In education, the Finnish Way seems to have strongly inspired the Fourth Way (2009):

The Fourth Way is a way of inspiration and innovation, of responsibility and sustainability. The Fourth Way does not drive reform relentlessly through teachers, use them as final delivery points for government policies, or vacum up their motivations into a vortex of change that is defined by short-term political agendas and the special interests with which they are often aligned. Rather, it brings together government policy, professional involvement, and public engagement around an inspiring social and educational vision of equity, prosperity and creativity in a world of greater inclusiveness, security and humanity. (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 71)

In the quote above, the word Fourth could be replaced by the word Finnish. The Finnish Way is a professional and democratic path to improvement that grows from the bottom, steers from the top, and provides support and pressure from the sides.
From: Sahlberg, Pasi. (2011) *Finnish Lessons – What can the world learn from educational change in Finland*, Teachers College, Columbia University

http://www.finnishlessons.com/

http://www.joebower.org/search/label/Finnish%20Lessons

http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6134006

http://www.amazon.com/Finnish-Lessons-Educational-Change-Finland/dp/0807752576