

Policy, Research and Practice A Highland Journey 2004 – 2009

Fostering the Curriculum for Excellence capacities and raising achievement

Over the last five sessions groups of Highland teachers have worked collaboratively with a number of researchers and leading thinkers to explore what it means to foster the CfE capacities and raise achievement. The focus has been on using the principles underpinning Assessment is for Learning together with an emphasis on developing higher order thinking skills as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities. The general aims of the journey were to:

- develop a coherent conception of formative assessment
- explore the links between formative assessment and approaches to making thinking explicit as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities
- encourage teacher learning communities which foster reflective professionals through a variety of approaches to CPD
- raise achievement, motivation and confidence

The Highland CPD Reflection Framework

During session 2005 – 2006 groups of practitioners and SMT began working on rigorously exploring what it means to embed and extend formative assessment in the classroom. From these deliberations a model of engagement began to emerge which emphasised the principles of *participation, dialogue, engagement and thinking* together with a clear focus on the centrality of peer and self assessment. It was also agreed that fostering the CfE capacities through the principles and practice of formative assessment was not simply a technical matter of tips and strategies but would involve a key component of AifL, engagement with transformational change. In order to meaningfully capture, share and further explore the developing ideas and practices a CPD Reflection Framework was developed consisting of materials to stimulate high quality professional dialogue under the following headings

A	<i>Managing transformational change</i>	
	Unit A1	Reflective Professionals & thinking children
	Unit A2	Promoting and sustaining change
B	<i>Embedding formative assessment</i>	
	Unit B1	So what are the pupils doing?
	Unit B2	Making thinking explicit
C	<i>Extending formative assessment</i>	
	Unit C1	Around the AifL triangle
	Unit C2	Engaging purposes, principles and practice
	Unit C3	A principles based approach to the CfE outcomes and experiences

The Framework was developed as a way of encouraging reflective professionals able to 'exemplify the CfE capacities' as highlighted in *Building the Curriculum 1*. The Framework units, papers and booklets can be obtained at www.hvlc.org.uk/ace/aifl/

The Highland model

The central aim of the developing Highland model has been to explore how we can help 'pupils take greater responsibility for their own learning'. The model is based on an analysis of the CfE capacities in terms of learning dispositions, critical and creative thinking and information processing. This provides a way of addressing the suggestion made in *Building the Curriculum 3* that we should use the 'indicative descriptors' to understand the attributes and capacities underpinning the four capacities. The model is at the heart of Highland's revised *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy*. A brief guide to the model together with

a number of key Framework support materials can be found at www.hvllc.org.uk/ace/aifl/highlandmodel.htm

Co-creating the model

Over the last few sessions the ideas and practices which have underpinned the model were developed, explored and probed by a number of complementary teacher learning communities.

(i) The Highland FLaT Project

The model was further developed through the Highland Council Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) project, *Embedding a Curriculum for Excellence in the classroom (06 – 08)*. The project involved teachers from three clusters working collaboratively to develop a coherent structural model for learning, teaching and assessment.

The government funded evaluation of this aspect of the journey '*Past Direction: Future Travel*' which will be available next month.

(ii) Five subject ASGs '*The high roads and the low roads*'

The proposal was to show that pupils could be better prepared for external examinations by taking greater responsibility for their own learning, rather than through a narrow focus on practice tests and past papers. As the journey progressed, five subject ASGs investigated how a key feature of the model, peer and self assessment, could be used with certificate classes to raise achievement. The aim of this aspect of the journey was to see how structured approaches to peer and self assessment could be used to address the formative / summative tension in the upper secondary. The subject ASGs produced a number of reflection booklets comprising of case studies and peer assessed reflective commentaries.

The SQA commissioned a report on this aspect of the Highland journey '*Just making them think: A tension between teaching and assessment in the high stakes stages*'

(iii) Inter-authority group

During session 2005 -2006 Highland was part of an inter-authority group exploring how the principles and practice of formative assessment could be used to foster critical and creative thinkers. In 2007 the group explored their ideas with colleagues from the then Scottish executive, SQA, HMIE, LTS and practitioners from across Scotland at a national conference in Edinburgh.

(iv) CPD cycles

From 2006 – 2008 the CPD programmes supporting CfE and AifL were based on the three sections of the CPD Reflection Framework. The importance of the Framework is that it provided Highland with a structure within which developing ideas and practices could be captured and further explored. The CPD programmes of courses and seminars had two distinct features (i) providing teachers with opportunities to engage in high quality CPD through pre-reading, reflection and follow up activities in collaboration with colleagues and (ii) the courses were also designed to investigate how effective the key aspects of the Highland model were in fostering the CfE capacities.

Policy, Research and Practice

As part of the formative evaluation of the Highland journey it was agreed that a number of engagement papers would be produced to stimulate discussion regarding possible next steps both within Highland and, where appropriate, nationally. The third paper *Policy, Research and Practice* argues that over the last two decades the most significant developments in learning and teaching have involved the role that **thinking** and **assessment** can play in helping pupils take greater responsibility for their own learning. Although thinking and assessment have been highlighted in a number of policy documents during this period they have not featured as prominently in subsequent classroom practice. Thus while welcoming the suggestion highlighted in Improving Scottish Education HMIe, 2008 that teachers should

‘consciously promote the development of higher-order thinking skills’ we need to consider what this will look like in practice. Similarly, the forthcoming guidelines on aligning assessment with fostering the CfE capacities and raising achievement will require national agencies to have a meaningful and coherent conception of assessment that will help teachers transform policy into classroom practice.

The policy – practice gap

There is an increasing awareness that meaningful transformational change involves engaging with ideas and principles as well as practices. Due to initiatives such as Assessment is for Learning we are now in a position to begin to align policy, research and practice in ways perhaps not achievable in the past. The paper by Professor Paul Black, who worked with Highland Council during session 07 – 08’, addresses a number of identified tensions and makes recommendations, including the need for coherent systemic reform that aligns policies and agencies. The tensions which need to be addressed if we are to obtain any such alignment and fully embrace the opportunities of a Curriculum for Excellence are: (i) principles vs. strategies (ii) formative / summative tension (iii) multiple accountabilities and (iv) learning how to learn and subject knowledge.

Kevin L Logan

Development Officer (04 – 08’) and FLaT project manager

Further information on the Highland CPD Reflection Framework and model can be found at www.hvlc.org/ace/aifl/ and www.hvlc.org.uk/ace/aifl/highlandmodel.htm or from kevin.logan@highland.gov.uk