

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth

THE REVISED LEAVING CERTIFICATE HISTORY  
SYLLABUS, 2004: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND  
PRACTICES

Thesis

Presented to the Department of Education

Faculty of Arts

The National University of Ireland

Maynooth

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Education (M.Ed.)

By

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October, 2005

## DEDICATION

To my mother, Veronica, my first teacher,

And

In loving memory of

My son, Robert, 1976-2000,

And

My father, Frank, 1917-1995,

Requiescant in Pace.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If it takes a village to raise a child, as the African proverb has it, it takes a supportive family and a vibrant academic community to generate the understanding and insights that inform a research dissertation. To my family, to my M.Ed. classmates and to the members of the Education Department, NUIM, who contributed to the M.Ed. programme, 2003-2005, I owe an incalculable debt of gratitude. Another debt of gratitude is owed to the teachers who gave generously of their time to assist me in my research and whose perceptions and practices I have sought to capture in the study that follows.

While it is always invidious to single out individuals for special mention, there are certain people without whose advice and/or help the study would not have come to fruition:

Professor John Coolahan, for his understanding and support, in making it all possible;

Mr. Jim Callan, for his immense contribution to developing my understanding of the challenging, but exciting and vital, field of curriculum; for his patient, thorough and insightful analyses of my draft chapters; and for his generous sharing of his own wealth of experience and width of reading;

Dr. Anne Lodge, Dr. Pdraig Hogan and Mr. Gerry Jeffers, for early encouragement and constructive criticism;

Philip, Catherine, Trish, Lloyd, Siobhán and Bryan for 'little acts of kindness' along the way;

Dr. Pat Callan, National Coordinator, History In-Service Team (HIST), for advice and support;

Br. Declan Loughnane, Principal, St. John's College, for his support;

My wife, Margaret, for her encouragement throughout, and tolerance of a frequently desk-bound husband; and my daughters, Louise and Stephanie, for keeping me 'grounded' and accepting me as a fellow student.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September, 2004, a revised syllabus in Leaving Certificate History was introduced into schools in the Republic of Ireland, replacing a syllabus that had been in place since 1969. Reflecting many decades of change in history teaching internationally, the revised syllabus places greater emphasis on history as activity and seeks to widen the breadth of coverage beyond the predominantly political focus that has been evident heretofore. Its underlying principle and the changes in practice it seeks to encourage present an agenda for significant educational change. As teachers attempt, for the first time, to meet the challenges of implementation, this dissertation seeks to shine a light on their perceptions and their practices.

Chapter 1 gives a brief outline of the national and international context, discussing change initiatives in history teaching in recent decades. The innovative features of the revised syllabus are discussed, and the challenges these are likely to present are delineated.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on school change and curriculum and seeks to identify the scope of the challenge that the implementation of the revised syllabus presents. The complexity of educational change is discussed, and the implications of the institutional nature of curriculum are analysed.

Chapter 3 describes the nature of the research conducted, and the emergent design that culminated in in-depth interviews with nine teachers. The choice of qualitative mode

is discussed in the context of the desire to capture what teachers are 'doing and thinking' in the crucial early stages of syllabus implementation.

In Chapter 4, the teachers themselves speak and their perceptions and practices are presented and analysed. Factors inhibiting successful implementation are identified and the extent of changes in practice is subjected to scrutiny.

In Chapter 5, the emerging issues and challenges are discussed in the wider context of past experience and previous research. The key argument put forwards is that curriculum development, teacher development and school development are inextricably linked, and that, for curricular change to succeed, the development needs of teachers and schools must be addressed in tandem: curriculum cannot be developed in isolation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SETTING THE CONTEXT

#### **Section I: Change in the Leaving Certificate History syllabus - the international and national context**

##### **1.1 Introduction**

The revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus introduced into schools in September 2004 replaces a syllabus that was introduced in 1969. In the intervening period, many developments have taken place internationally that have challenged traditional thinking on why and how we teach history. Some of these developments have roots that go further back in time than 1969. Some arose as a result of teacher initiatives, for reasons intrinsic to the subject itself or to the wider educational landscape; some as a result of external forces, such as moves towards European co-operation. Despite many decades of change in the history curriculum in many countries, traditional methods of history teaching persist and influential defenders of traditional methods find a ready audience.

In an Irish context, the wider, international debate on the teaching of history has prompted some debate and some changes to the history curriculum; yet, the available evidence would suggest that traditional methods remain prevalent.

This opening chapter will review the international and national contexts of changes in the teaching of history over recent decades. It will clarify the nature and purpose of the changes in the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus, outline the changes and consider the challenges they are likely to present.

## **1.2 Traditional conceptions of history teaching**

The role of education in transmitting a body of knowledge through a didactic mode of teaching is evident in traditional conceptions of history teaching. Sylvester (1994) writes of the 'great tradition' which dominated history teaching in England for the first seventy years or so of the twentieth century:

This tradition of history teaching was clear cut in both its aims and its methodology. The history teacher's role was didactically active; it was to give pupils the facts of historical knowledge and to ensure, through repeated short tests, that they had learned them. The pupil's role was passive; history was a 'received subject'. The body of knowledge to be taught was also clearly defined. It was mainly political history with some social and economic aspects .... (p.9)

This formulation will have a familiar ring for students of school history in Ireland and other jurisdictions for much of the twentieth century. To its critics, 'traditional' history places undue demands on students to memorise historical data and neglects the use of sources and the development of skills. Those who favour more active approaches to history teaching have sometimes been accused of favouring 'skills' over 'content'.

That such accusations are far from *passé* is evident in a recent article from Christopher Woodhead, former chief inspector of schools with Ofsted in England,

wherein he derides education ‘experts’ (his emphasis) who lobbied the government over the content and approach of the National Curriculum. In Woodhead’s (2004) view, “One of the results ... has been the removal of the knowledge base from subjects like geography and history.” (p.3)

Notwithstanding such criticism, the need for a balance between historical skills and historical knowledge is widely acknowledged by history educators and the best means of acquiring an acceptable balance is a matter of on-going debate. However, while significant developments have taken place from the 1970s on, traditional modes of history teaching have proved remarkably resilient.

### **1.3 Persistence of traditional history**

The Council of Europe sponsored a symposium on ‘History Teaching in the New Europe’, held in Brugge, Belgium, in December, 1991. In his report, Charriere (1993) discusses the main methods used to teach history in the European countries represented at the symposium. He identifies two broad categories:

1. The lecture system – Charriere notes that this type of method is practised where resources are limited or where a premium is placed on skills of note-taking and memorisation. He also refers to its major limitation: “... it is recognised as an obstacle to attempts to develop the pupils’ intellectual independence.” (p.9)

2. Active methods – Such methods are seen as placing greater emphasis on pupil autonomy and are closely linked to the acquisition of skills. Among the methods listed by Charriere are group work, projects, writing commentaries on various types of historical documents and role-playing. Charriere acknowledges that these methods are “... more demanding on the teacher and more time-consuming ....” (p.9)

In discussing objectives, Charriere (1993) also identifies two broad categories which may be readily linked to the types of methodology referred to above:

1. Cognitive objectives – There is an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and, frequently, the idea of transmitting an historical inheritance that helps students to appreciate the political/cultural/social unit(s) to which they belong. One danger noted by Charriere is “... encyclopaedism, where the volume of information to be absorbed is so excessive as to prevent any proper evaluation.” (p.5)
2. Qualitative objectives – There is an emphasis here on developing the ability to use historical methods through a skills-based approach (i.e. allowing students to practise the methods used by historians such as interrogating documents and undertaking historical research). An associated objective is increasing pupils’ awareness that “... views on historical questions differ.” (p.5)

The ‘lecture system’ with its focus on cognitive objectives is a reasonable approximation of what many commentators refer to as ‘traditional’ history. The more

active approaches to history teaching and learning with their focus on more qualitative objectives have been variously described as the 'new history' (in a British context, from the 1970s), skills-based teaching, source-based teaching and 'progressive' history. However described, one constant in this type of teaching is the use of primary sources within a framework that seeks to develop pupils' critical skills. For purposes of consistency and clarity, the term 'progressive' will be used throughout this chapter to identify the more active approaches, save where allusion is made to the origins and impact of the 'new history' of the 1970s. The tensions between the traditional and progressive approaches to history teaching may be better understood if we examine some examples of the political context of curriculum and history's place within it.

#### **1.4 The political context of traditional history**

The practice of history in second level schools inevitably reflects the purposes that underlie its inclusion in the school curriculum. Milne (1997) notes that, following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, history "... was viewed quite explicitly as an agent for the promotion of the Gaelic ideal ...". (p.107) He quotes a remark of the historian and first Minister for Education, Eoin MacNéill: "I think that ignorance of Irish history is the chief cause of want of interest in the Irish language." (p.107) To correct this deficit, the government of the new state strove to ensure that its young people acquired an understanding of the Gaelic tradition that the founders of the new state believed was re-asserting its subdued sovereignty.

While this policy was principally pursued through the primary schools, it also had implications for the secondary schools. As Holohan (1994) notes, the course



prescribed for Intermediate students (Year 1 to Year 3) included "... a general outline of Irish history and of the historical relations of Ireland with Britain and the continents of Europe, America and Australia ...". (p.54) The consequent emphasis on the classroom transmission of a corpus of historical knowledge to develop students' sense of identity had important implications for the manner in which history was taught in schools. History was a narrative to be learned and there was little room for any classroom activities other than learning off and regurgitating.

The emphasis on history as a decisive factor in the formation of national identity was not peculiar to the Irish Free State. Writing in 1970, in a British context, Ballard (1970) acknowledged that, "History has been used as a subject by which children are indoctrinated in patriotic and military virtues." (p.4) Since the notion of 'indoctrination' is one we tend to associate more with totalitarian regimes, it is salutary to be reminded that democratic states are not immune to using (or misusing) history in a politically convenient but – arguably – morally questionable manner.

### **1.5 The political roots of progressive history in a European context**

It is clear, then, that the form and content of history teaching is often influenced, and sometimes determined, by prevailing political considerations. In newly emergent states, history is frequently used to help create or revivify a sense of national identity in a manner that prioritises memorised 'knowledge' and frowns on critical inquiry. In Marxist states, history has played a critical role in the dissemination of official doctrine and the discourse of the discipline has been ideologically constrained. In such cases, the emphasis in teaching has frequently been on transmission of officially

approved versions of past events and the validation of the state's creation as a political entity.

Conversely, movements such as the Council of Europe that seek to minimise international tensions have promoted a more critical approach to the teaching of history and a more tolerant understanding of other nations' histories and viewpoints. The conviction that history teaching has an important role to play in combating prejudice and intolerance and promoting democratic values underlies much of its educational work since the 1950s. Through its Committee on Culture, Science and Education, the Council has sought "to promote improved history learning in Europe, free from stereotypes and distortions based on national, racial, religious or other prejudices." ([http://assembly.coe.int/committee/CULT/Role\\_E.htm](http://assembly.coe.int/committee/CULT/Role_E.htm), p.2) This objective has been pursued through a variety of means e.g. commissioned research and reports, sponsored publications and sponsored conferences. The Brugge symposium of 1991, mentioned above, is one example of such a conference. It took place at a significant point in the history of Europe as the 'Cold War' ended, borders were re-defined and nationalist aspirations re-ignited. While heretofore the educational work of the Council had been focused on its member states in Western Europe, the Brugge symposium was the first pan-European symposium on history teaching since the major political changes in Central and Eastern Europe.

For teachers in former Communist states who had been expected to disseminate and justify Marxist doctrine through their history classes, the challenge of adapting to the changed social and political circumstances required not just a change in textbooks and teaching methodologies but also a change in underlying values.

## **1.6 Tensions between traditional and progressive history – an Eastern European perspective**

One country undergoing a 'values shift' in history teaching at this time was Estonia, a former constituent republic of the Soviet Union. Where previously history was used to serve an ideological and political agenda in the Communist states, the ending of the Cold War led to demands for a more critical and authentic approach to the study of history in schools. This was not necessarily easy to achieve in a situation where one political agenda replaced another. In discussing history education in Estonia before and after the withdrawal of Soviet control, Finnish historian and educationalist, Sirkka Ahonen (1992) explains how a stronger sense of national identity supplanted the socialist identity and, "History was used to reinforce the national identity," (p.112)

The parallel with the experience of the Irish Free State mentioned earlier is clear. Ahonen, writing of the new syllabus adopted in 1990, comments: "It was in accordance with the nationalistic interpretation, present in the textbooks of the 1930s, of the whole of Estonian history as a struggle for the restoration of the ancient ethnic independence that existed before the Baltic German invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century." (p.122) As Ahonen cautions, "The critical nature of the historical process can be lost in the quest for enhanced experience of common destiny." (p.123)

A countervailing trend to this nationalistic impetus was also evident. Ahonen recalls a slogan of the demonstrators who, in 1988, sought to reclaim an authentic version of their past: "We want to live without lies." (p.111) She also reports that, "... critical

process and multiperspectivity, as well as the student as the subject of the process, were repeatedly referred to in the discussion around history in new Estonia.” (p.124)

This concern with critical process has led to the initiation of many programmes to develop resources and equip teachers with the appropriate skills for source-based work in many countries of the former Soviet bloc. The Council of Europe plays an important role in many of these initiatives. Currently, the Council of Europe has programmes promoting the reform of history teaching in each of the following regions: the Russian Federation, the countries of the Caucasus region, the Black Sea countries and South-Eastern Europe.

The capacity of history to contribute to political and social harmony is thus expressed by Gallagher (1996): “History teaching has a potential contribution to make to the development of citizens who are open-minded, aware of diversity, willing to accept difference and to respect peoples of other, religions and languages.” (p.22) The type of history teaching envisaged by Gallagher is one that is based on the use of sources in the classroom, the development of student understanding through working with evidence and the perception of historical knowledge as provisional and contested. While such approaches to teaching have been promoted for wider societal and political reasons, they also have roots that are intrinsic to the profession itself and the educational milieu in which it operates.

## 1.7 The educational roots of progressive history

Although the use of sources in history teaching has become popular from the 1960s on, the roots of source-based teaching lie further back.

In the United States, Yarema (2002) reports that: "... as far back as 1892, the National Education Association's Committee of Ten recommended in its report that various activities could be used to teach history including selected use of primary sources". (p.394) Wineburg (1998) also refers to the Committee of Ten is asserting that, "... the notion that history should be a site for *critical* engagement with the past ... has been a constant in the statements of curriculum groups for over a century ...". (p.233)

In a British context, McAleavy (1998) identifies an early pioneer, M.W. Keatinge, Reader in Education at Oxford University, who in 1910 produced a book entitled *Studies in the teaching of history* (Black) As McAleavy explains: "He argued that teachers who made extensive use of original sources ... would be able to provide a more stimulating experience for their students and would, thereby, be better able to justify history as part of a core curriculum for older students." (p.10) Another advocate of source-based teaching cited by McAleavy was F.C. Happold who, in the late 1920s, managed to persuade the Oxford Local Examinations Board to introduce an 'O' Level syllabus that included source-based questions.

Despite such recommendations and initiatives, it was not until the 1960s that a significant shift began to occur in the use of sources. Nielsen (1998) describes how, in Denmark, concerns about the traditionalist nature of history teaching in the 1960s

prompted a shift towards a focus on skills. In a period of 25 years up to the time of writing, Nielsen reports that more than 500 books and booklets with source material for history at upper secondary level were published. McKellar (1998) identifies a significant development in Scotland in 1969 when the Scottish Examination Board introduced an alternative syllabus and examination at 'O' grade which broke new ground with its inclusion of source-based questions. McKellar emphasises the importance of this: "... it was that exam change in 1969 which confirmed and consolidated the use and value of sources in history lessons in Scottish schools ...".

In the United States, change appears to have come more slowly. Brophy (1995) notes a lack of research in this area: "Research on the learning and teaching of history has been an active area of scholarship in Great Britain since the 1970s. The area has been slower to develop in North America ...". (p.97) Yarema (2002), in referring to the debate on improving history education that began in the late 1980s, remarks that, "Traditionally, history teachers had utilized the textbook-lecture approach in teaching history." (p.389) The establishment in 1988 of the Bradley Commission on History in Schools provoked a widespread debate on a range of curricular issues, including the limitations of a content-laden, textbook-focused approach. In Britain, by this stage, significant change was underway.

### **1.8 An influential initiative in the promotion of progressive history**

An important catalyst for change was the Schools Council History Project, a project that has had an influence far beyond the time and place of its origins in the University of Leeds in 1972. Sylvester (1994) suggests a number of factors that encouraged

significant moves away from traditional modes of history teaching at that time: the general climate of curriculum development; the growing emphasis on inquiry as a mode of teaching and learning; and the seminal work of Coltham and Fines (1971) in formulating objectives for the study of history.

Although they were not the first to challenge the limitations of traditional history in English schools, the Project leaders had a greater impact than their predecessors. As McAleavy (1998) acknowledges, "The Project was very influential in shaping the direction of school history over the following 20 years." (p.12) The Project contained a unit which addressed the question, 'What is history?' and placed emphasis on the use of sources throughout the course. Realising the importance of changes in the public examinations if changes in classroom practice were to be sustained, its first director, David Sylvester, and his team developed examinations which included a Paper II with a specific emphasis on source skills. What began as a limited experiment gradually became the established orthodoxy; as McAleavy (1998) notes: "The Project philosophy contributed to the way all public examinations in history evolved in the 1980s." (p.12) At both 'A' level and the new (from 1986) 'GCSE' level, the inclusion of source-based questions became obligatory. As a consequence, a new style of textbook emerged containing large amounts of source material. The National Curriculum model for history as it developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s continued the dual emphases on source-based work in the classroom and source-based questions in the public examinations.

The 'new history' which the Project espoused had an impact overseas. McAfee (1985) acknowledges the impact of the Project in Northern Ireland; the introduction of

source-based questions at 'A' level and 'GCSE' level extended and reinforced that influence. The extent of its influence in the Republic of Ireland is less clear. However, the new approaches certainly had their supporters here by the 1970s. The Project was influential in Australia, where in the 1970s there was a revival of interest in school history. Taylor (2000) refers to "... a sea change in approaches to the teaching and learning of the subject, particularly in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland." (p.3) The new approaches were skills-based and evidence-based and presented history as a process of inquiry. The significance of such approaches may be better apprehended if examined in the context of postmodern approaches to the purposes of education.

### **1.9 The postmodern context of progressive history**

One of the fundamental tenets of postmodern thought, as espoused by Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1988), is a distrust of grand narratives or 'metanarratives' that purport to assign organised patterns of meaning to past events. In discussing the ideas of Lyotard, Hogan (1995) writes: "... a 'metanarrative' is a body of beliefs, writings, and claims which presupposes that human existence as such is purposeful or meaningful." (p.110) In his own seminal work, Lyotard (1979) defines 'postmodern' as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. (p.xxiv) The body of beliefs that portrayed a 'Gaelic' nation struggling against an evil oppressor for 800 years may fairly be described as a 'metanarrative' underlying much nationalist ideology in twentieth century Ireland. Its influence on the teaching of history in schools was far from negligible, as already noted. Lyotard's definition suggests that, in a postmodern context, such grand conceptions of past and present realities cannot be sustained and should be treated



with profound scepticism. As Hargreaves (1994) argues, the explosion in knowledge fuelled by developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has "... created a collapse of certainty in received wisdom and established beliefs." (p.57)

Where does this leave the role of education and the place in the school curriculum of a subject such as history with its traditional role in the formation of identity?

Hargreaves (1994) argues that, in a world where even scientific knowledge becomes increasingly provisional,

... the validity of a curriculum based on given knowledge and incontrovertible fact becomes less and less credible. Processes of inquiry, analysis, information gathering and other aspects of learning-how-to-learn in an engaged and critical way become more important as goals and methods for teachers and schools in the postmodern world. (p.57)

Since 'processes of inquiry, analysis, information gathering and other aspects of learning-how-to-learn' are fundamental to the practice of history in a general sense, it may be argued that the practice of history in schools offers unique and critical opportunities to construct a curriculum that is alive to the challenges and needs of our postmodern age. As we have seen, attempts to improve the status of process in the practice of school history have been underway for some considerable time. The fortunes of some early Irish initiatives will now be considered.

### **1.10 Progressive history in an Irish context – early stirrings**

In January, 1966 a study group on the Teaching of History in Irish Schools held its first meeting. Its seven members included the historians Margaret MacCurtain (or Rev. Sister Benvenuta, OP, as she was styled at the time) and Professor T.D. Williams. The group was formed by invitation from the Comh Chomhairle, Fianna

Fáil. Its report published, in the periodical 'Administration' (Vol. 15, No.4, Winter 1967), urged the revision of Leaving Certificate History. Its recommendations included the following:

At this level ... some consideration should now be given to the historical method and to developments in historiography. Original sources should be studied and conflicting interpretations of historical phenomena should be examined. A general critical outlook should be encouraged. (p.278)

The impact of these recommendations at any official level appears to have been negligible. When a revised syllabus was introduced to schools in 1969 (for examination from 1971), it did not resemble the model envisaged by the study group. The syllabus offered a choice of two survey courses and contained no reference to historical methods or encouraging a critical outlook. The examination was to feature traditional, content-based essays and there was no provision for source-based questions.

At the Intermediate Certificate level, with the revision of the syllabus in 1973 (for examination from 1976) the importance of work with sources was to some extent acknowledged by the inclusion of a mandatory source-based question. Otherwise, however, the syllabus was traditional in its approach. Most of the textbooks were written in a traditional, narrative style but included some visual and written sources. The National Library of Ireland published packs of historical documents intended for classroom use and these encouraged some teachers to integrate the use of sources into their teaching. With the introduction of the Junior Certificate History syllabus in 1989, the stage seemed set for a more extensive and coherent focus on source work.

## **1.11 The pursuit of progressive history in an Irish context – the Junior Certificate History syllabus**

The Junior Certificate History syllabus reflects many of the emphases in the ‘new history’. It includes a unit on the job of the historian and an introduction to historical methods which are to be exemplified throughout the course. The Teacher Guidelines offer the following rationale for the approach adopted: “When students gain an understanding of how we find out about the past they can approach historical knowledge in a more enlightened and critical way.” (p.1) The Guidelines also emphasise that the introduction to historical methods is not intended to be a theoretical study but, rather, “... a practical and concrete introduction to the process of historical investigation.” (p.1)

The Junior Certificate examinations feature a number of questions in which sources are used. Clearly, in the emphasis on process and a critical approach, the syllabus is intended to mark a departure in practice from traditional history. Crowley (1990) makes explicit the necessary linkage between process and a critical approach: “It is only when students learn to ... deal with the process, as well as the end product of historical enquiry that they can really know what history is and that they can look in a mature and critical way at the past.” (p.108) Not all of the aspirations of the syllabus-framers, however, have been realised.

To date, the following recommendation in the Guidelines has not been implemented:

It is recommended that provision be made for a History Research Assignment. Initially, such an assignment will be optional, but, in the long term, it will become an integral part of the course. (p.21)

Given that this was to be the principal medium through which research skills would be developed, the capacity to translate the rhetoric of the syllabus document into some kind of meaningful classroom reality was thereby diminished. In general, the extent to which the introduction of the syllabus has led to changes in history teachers' *practice* is unclear. Callan (1997) identifies the time factor as a structural issue which militates against the use of the type of active learning methodologies which were envisaged in the syllabus statement for History. For example, a timetable allocation of three forty minute periods per week, to cover a course which has an ambitiously-wide time span, leaves history teachers little room to devote to such activities as visits to field monuments, project work and the systematic development of research skills. The problems are exacerbated where a teacher is only allocated two class periods.

O'Donoghue's (1997) self-acknowledged response to such limitations is probably typical: "Too often I find myself returning to the textbook to ensure progress." (p.102)

Such trends may also be encouraged by examination practice. Source-based questions in the Junior Certificate examinations have been criticised as being little more than exercises in comprehension. Collins (1993) is critical of the first two examinations on the new syllabus: "The failure to test skills is serious and discourages teachers from trying to cultivate them." (p.1) Such concerns help to bring into focus the extent of the challenge involved in attempting to bring about change in Leaving Certificate History.

### **1.12 Conclusion**

We have seen that the roots of progressive history go back a century and more; and that the adoption of more 'progressive' approaches has made strong advances in some

jurisdictions since the 1960s. It is also clear, however, that the traditional model of history teaching has not been superseded and retains strong adherence. Even in Britain where the influence of the 'new history' has been considerable, the traditional model has its champions and the contested nature of curriculum is clearly in evidence. The political dimension of that contestation is especially evident in the case of history.

It is beyond the parameters of this study to examine why progressive history appears to have made greater inroads in some jurisdictions, e.g. Britain, than in others, e.g. the United States. International experience, however, suggests that there are some factors that inhibit and other factors that facilitate attempts to move from a traditional to a progressive model. In an Irish context, some of these factors became evident in the less than successful attempts to move towards a more progressive approach at Junior Certificate level.

The introduction of the revised syllabus, then, raises important issues. Are the prospects for successful implementation any better than in the case of Junior Certificate History? What meaning does the change that is underway have for teachers? What do teachers see as the factors that are facilitating or inhibiting the moves towards curricular change? These are among the questions explored in the course of this study.

## **Section II: Change in the Leaving Certificate History syllabus – the revised syllabus 2004**

### **1.13 Introduction – the nature of the syllabus**

Many features of the progressive approach to history teaching are to be found in the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus e.g.

- An emphasis on the use of primary sources in the teaching of history
- An emphasis on the development of critical skills in working with historical evidence
- A focus on history as a process of enquiry

In the formulation of the principle that underlies the syllabus, the traditional approach to teaching history through the transmission of a corpus of knowledge is implicitly refuted. The underlying principle of the revised syllabus is expressed as follows: “that the study of history should be regarded as an exploration of what historians believe to have happened, based on enquiry into available evidence.” (p.4)

The emphasis on *exploring* “what historians believe to have happened”, coupled with the emphasis on “*enquiry into available evidence*”, suggests that students are expected to develop a level of critical engagement with historians’ accounts of the past. The provisional nature of such accounts is also emphasised. The objectives propose that students should learn to “recognise that historical knowledge is tentative and incomplete and, accordingly, subject to revision and/or reinterpretation.” (p.4) The

link between historians' accounts of the past and the evaluation of evidence is also highlighted. The objectives specify that students should learn to "recognise that historical writing must be based on reliable evidence and that the available evidence may be open to more than one valid interpretation." (p.4)

There is recognition, also, that, if students are to develop an understanding of the role of evidence and its centrality in historical discourse, they need opportunities to work with sources of evidence themselves. Students are expected to develop the ability to "evaluate the usefulness of particular sources and their limitations" (p.4) and "think critically by making judgements based on an evaluation of evidence." (p.4)

Opportunities to work with sources in a manner that develops their critical acumen are, therefore, of key importance.

All of these characteristics infuse a syllabus that has a markedly different profile to the syllabus it replaces and that is likely to present a formidable challenge in the tasks of implementation.

#### **1.14 How the revised syllabus differs from its predecessor**

The revised syllabus differs in several important ways from the syllabus it replaces. That syllabus was introduced in 1969 and, henceforth, will be referred to as the previous syllabus. Some of the main differences are as follows:

- The syllabus document itself is considerably more substantial, with greater detail on the parameters of study, the underlying purposes and the arrangements for assessment.
- Instead of a choice between two survey courses as in the previous syllabus, there is a choice between two ‘fields of study’ – Early Modern, 1490s to 1815, and Later Modern, 1815 to the 1990s – with one prescribed topic and three other topics to be chosen from a range of options. The options include topics not previously studied at this level, such as the Irish diaspora during the post-Famine century of high emigration and the United States in the decades following World War II.
- All topics have a range of ‘perspectives’ to be explored: typically, these are Politics and Administration, Society and Economy, Culture and Religion (and, in many cases, Science). According to the Guidelines for Teachers (2004), the intended purpose is “... to ensure a balanced coverage of past events and the people who participated in them.” (p.8) Whatever the intentions of its creators, the previous syllabus was seen as heavily political in content, and the aspects on which questions were set in the examination were predominantly political.
- The syllabus objectives contain a direction that, “In studying human activity in the past, attention should be given to the experiences of women”. (p.3) This emphasis is new and reflects developments in historiography as well as societal concerns around gender issues.

Perhaps the most significant differences, however, are those aspects that focus attention on the *practice* of history and afford opportunities to students to *do* history



as well as learn history. Whether those opportunities are grasped will depend to a large extent on the readiness and responsiveness of teachers.

### **1.15 The new emphasis on ‘doing’ history**

The new emphasis begins with an introductory module that focuses attention on the question of what history is and what historians do. Insofar as historians examine and offer interpretations of evidence and conduct investigative research into issues of historical significance, these are aspects of their work that the syllabus encourages students to emulate. In studying the four topics that constitute the bulk of their course, there are structured opportunities to use evidence in the classroom and students are to be encouraged to think critically about the content of the sources.

The use of a wide range of historical sources is envisaged; the learning outcomes in the syllabus document include a statement that students should be able to “identify such different types of historical sources as eyewitness accounts, public records, memoirs, letters, maps, photographs and political cartoons”. (p.10) The use of such materials to develop critical skills – primarily through work on the case studies - is examined in section 1.16. (The reference here is to Chapter 1, section 16. This style of referencing will be used throughout to facilitate ease of reference.)

Since a research study is an integral part of the syllabus, students are also to be encouraged to develop research skills in carrying out an investigation of a subject of their choice in a manner that exemplifies two stated aims and principles of the Leaving Certificate programmes viz. promoting a *spirit of inquiry* and allowing

students to engage in *self-directed learning*. (The two italicised phrases feature in a general statement of Aims and Principles of Leaving Certificate Programmes found inside the front cover of Leaving Certificate syllabus documents.) For those teachers and students who have a deep-rooted adherence to traditional methods of transmission, the notion of students engaging in a measure of ‘self-directed’ learning is likely to present a challenge.

The end product of the process of research itself represents a significant point of departure from the previous syllabus. From the early 1980s, students sitting the examination at Higher level had the option of preparing a research topic (or special study topic as it was known until 1992). That topic, however, was assessed through the terminal examination. Under the new arrangements, the end product of the research study – the research study report – is to be pre-submitted prior to the terminal examination, thus constituting a second assessment component in a subject traditionally constrained within the limits of a written examination paper. While this may have the effect of relieving examination pressure on students, it also creates a potential pressure point for teachers as the deadline for submission of the report looms.

### **1.16 Student work on sources**

In order to illustrate how the syllabus seeks to promote the use of sources in the classroom, it is necessary to examine some aspects of the syllabus framework. Much of the students’ work in the classroom revolves around what are described as ‘topics for study’. Students study four historical topics over the two years of their course and

each topic has three case studies where specific aspects of the topic (or 'elements', as they are called) are examined in greater depth. While teachers may use primary sources in dealing with any element of a topic, it is intended that the in-depth case studies provide the principal foci for such work. As the Guidelines for Teachers suggest: "The in-depth approach affords an opportunity to work with sources in a structured manner within a contextual framework." (p.36)

The purposes of such work become clearer when one examines the syllabus objectives and learning outcomes. A key syllabus objective is that students develop the ability to "think critically by making judgements based on an evaluation of evidence". (p.4)

One of the learning outcomes set down in the syllabus is that students be able to "look at a contentious or controversial issue from more than one point of view, with particular reference to the issues highlighted in the case studies". (p.13) The manner in which this applies is illustrated through the use of an exemplar topic in Appendix A.

The use of sources in the classroom raises a number of significant issues for teachers. For many, their undergraduate education in history did not include any course in the use of primary sources. They may see a need to develop their own skills in working with sources before they can attempt to develop the skills of students. Old competence may not be adequate to cope with the requirements of the revised syllabus. While much work has been done in Britain and Northern Ireland on strategies for using sources in the classroom, the issue has attracted only sporadic attention in this jurisdiction. Teachers may have concerns about access to appropriate sources for the topics they are teaching since they have limited time to seek out sources themselves.

There are likely implications too for schools as organisations. While the internet provides unprecedented access to a wealth of materials, issues of access may create difficulties as, also, access to photocopying or printing facilities. Where special needs have to be catered for and the need for judicious selection and editing arises, the issue of time looms large in a typically crowded timetable.

Teachers' responses to these challenges may well reflect their own underlying assumptions about their role as history teachers. The behemoth of the Leaving Certificate examination may continue to exert an educationally unhealthy influence on history teachers' perceptions of the purpose of their work in the classroom. However, one aspect of the new examination is likely to influence how teachers view source-based classroom work.

### **1.17 The documents-based question**

Conscious of the role of the public examinations in determining classroom practice, the syllabus-framers have sought to promote the use of sources in the classroom through the introduction of a documents-based question in the examination. This marks a major departure, as such a question has not previously appeared in the history examination at this level.

For the purposes of this documents-based question, one of the topics studied is a prescribed topic on which the documents-based question is set in the terminal examination. The documents used in the examination relate to one of the listed case studies.

The format of the question is set down in the syllabus and comprises four sections: Comprehension, Comparison, Criticism and Contextualisation. The Guidelines for Teachers (2004) indicate that, “Candidates will be required to compare two or more accounts of the same historical experience and to note similarities and contrasts.” (p.57) The Guidelines also indicate that, “Candidates will be required to recognise bias and propaganda; to note viewpoint; to identify contradictions; and to make judgements about the reliability of various sources.” (p.57)

The documents-based question, then, is an important nexus for attempts to achieve those critical thinking skills identified in the syllabus objectives. It also marks a significant shift in the approach to using historical sources at Leaving Certificate level. Undoubtedly, under the previous syllabus, some teachers (including this writer) used primary sources in their teaching – at least, occasionally. However, courses based on the syllabus were *not* required to include the study of documents and the terminal examination did *not* include a documents-based question.

Because this type of question is new, teachers are likely to have concerns about the documents-based question in the examination. They may wish to see examples of the kinds of questions envisaged and to tease out the implications of this new mode of examining for teacher and student alike. For the teacher, a key question is likely to be, ‘To what extent do I need to adjust my teaching to meet the requirements of this new mode of questioning?’ The answer to this question may well reflect the teacher’s underlying values as much as the pressure exerted ‘from above’ through the syllabus document and the examination paper.

### **1.18 The research study**

There are a number of reasons why the research study has been made an integral part of the new syllabus. Some of these reasons relate to the nature of history as a discipline. Conducting research is a fundamental part of what historians do and allowing students to engage in research helps impart important insights into how historians go about their work. In discussing the purpose of the study, the syllabus statement suggests that, “It allows students to engage in a measure of self-directed learning that is grounded in the procedural values of the historian.” (p.8)

In acknowledging that the research study is the principal medium through which research skills are to be developed, the Guidelines for Teachers identify another important role that it has to play: “It also provides further experience in the collation and evaluation of evidence.” (p.14) Taken in tandem with the other opportunities for evidence-based work (primarily, as we have seen, through work on the case studies), the research study is seen as having an important role to play in helping students to think historically through a focus on the gathering and evaluation of evidence.

The research study, however, is also seen as having a wider educational role in its promotion of “self-directed learning”. The emphasis on ‘learning how to learn’ would appear to have more in common with postmodern conceptions of educational purpose than the traditional transmission and regurgitation of historical ‘knowledge’. It would also appear to be in accord with current educational thinking on the motivational value of students’ involvement in their own learning. In discussing the merits of the research study process, the Guidelines for Teachers note that, “the student is given the

opportunity to engage in a measure of self-directed learning, where s/he has considerable freedom in choosing a subject about which s/he is genuinely enthused". (p.33) This recalls Fullan's (2001) observation that, "... involving students in constructing their own meaning and learning is fundamentally pedagogically essential - they learn more, and are motivated to go even further." (p.162) And, in a subject that is traditionally seen as academic rather than vocational, the Guidelines suggest that the skills to be developed through the research study are transferable skills, which '...are widely applicable in the world of work today.' (p.3)

For teachers, however, the introduction of a research study for all students raises issues of concern. Many of these concerns have been raised at in-service courses. Some foresee difficulty in persuading poorly motivated Ordinary Level students to undertake a research study. Some anticipate that providing individual advice to each student in the class on choice of subject, and monitoring each individual's work in progress, will be demanding and time-consuming. Many teachers have argued that there are major resource implications: that some schools lack proper school libraries; that there is unequal access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT); that access to public library facilities is inequitable; that smaller, more isolated rural schools are seriously disadvantaged; that most schools will need a grant to increase their resources to cater for the wider range of students and subjects involved in research. The concerns outlined are not untypical in a situation where significant syllabus change occurs.

In tandem with the emphasis on sources discussed in section 1.16 and the new challenge of a documents-based question in the examination, as discussed in section

1.17, the issues surrounding the preparation of a research study provide a particular focus of interest in this study.

### **1.19 Conclusion**

In the history classroom, traditional practices have often proved impervious to initiatives for change. Sometimes, their persistence may be supported by political imperatives that retain significance for supportive constituencies. In a postmodern context these practices appear increasingly redundant, and a host of educational and political imperatives support the case for significant change. Why, then, is change so hard to accomplish? Why is there often a wide gap between the aspirations of syllabus-framers and the realities of classroom practice? What are the parameters of the challenge that is involved in moving from a didactic, transmission mode of teaching to a more active and enquiry-focused approach? Is failure to adopt new modes a case of personal failure multiplied on the part of individual teachers? Are there wider cultural, organisational and systemic parameters that we need to understand? These are some of the issues that will be explored over the course of the next four chapters.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 The nature of educational change

Why is change in the curriculum hard to effect? What are the dimensions of the challenges that the pursuit of curricular change involves? What measures can different parties to the process take to effect change in ways that benefit teaching and learning? In any attempt to address these questions, a number of fundamental issues very quickly come to the fore. One of these issues is the nature of educational change.

The last forty years have seen an unprecedented growth in the scale and ambition of attempts at educational change, not least in the area of curriculum. Fullan (2001) writes that, "Remarkably, the history of intensive educational change is less than half a century old." (p.4) However, despite the proliferation of ideas and stratagems for change, by the mid 1970s there was a recognition that curriculum innovation did not necessarily result in change at the level of the classroom. Fullan (2001) notes that, "The term 'implementation' (or more accurately, 'failed implementation') came into the vocabulary of reform ...". (p.5) Since the 1970s, a substantial body of literature has been published that deepens our understanding of the challenges inherent in implementing educational change. If there is one point of agreement that unites the holders of a range of disparate writers on attempts at educational change, it is the acknowledgement that change is a complex process. As Fullan (2001) comments,

“Putting ideas into practice was a far more complex process than people realized.”

(p.5)

What is the nature, then, of this complex process that promoters of the revised syllabus have to negotiate? Fullan (2001) identifies three dimensions that are at issue in all attempts to bring about educational change viz. “the possible use of new or revised *materials* ... the possible use of new *teaching approaches* ... the possible alteration of *beliefs*” (p.39). All three have relevance to the revised syllabus.

At the level of *materials*, teachers of the revised syllabus may be using a different textbook – possibly a different type of textbook to that used previously. They may be using the Guidelines for Teachers and the HIST (History In-Service Team) website, [www.hist.ie](http://www.hist.ie), as classroom resources or resources to help in the preparation of classes. While the use of such materials may be a necessary dimension of change, if change does not extend beyond the use of new materials, then it is hardly ‘significant’ change as that term is understood in the literature. Fullan (2001) argues that, “... the use of a new textbook or materials without any alteration in teaching strategies is a minor change at best”. (p.40) Change at this level is likely to focus on changes in ‘content’ and there may be no change in classroom practices. In discussing failed attempts at reform, Evans (2001) describes how the reforms “... ended up being grafted on to existing practice, and they were greatly modified, if not fully overcome, by those practices.” (p.5) The extent to which teachers acknowledge a need to change their practice is a key consideration in this study.

At the level of *teaching approaches*, the revised syllabus clearly signals the need for new approaches. History is to involve “an exploration of what historians believe to have happened”, rather than a transmission of established facts. History is presented as an enquiry into available evidence and the Guidelines for Teachers encourage teachers to adopt an enquiry-focused approach. The considerable emphasis on the evidential base of history includes structured opportunities for students to work with evidence and this has implications for how teachers conduct their classes. At this level, change may be threatening to teachers whose existing skills have stood them in good stead for many years. Evans (2001) notes, “Change immediately threatens people’s sense of competence, frustrating their wish to feel effective and valuable”. (p.32) Resistance to such change is inevitable and the task of changing teaching approaches fraught with difficulty. In the case of the revised syllabus, therefore, there is a need to identify the aspects that teachers find threatening and the new competencies that they consider necessary to acquire.

At the level of *beliefs*, the revised syllabus explicitly sets down its credo in identifying historical study as, “an exploration of what historians believe to have happened based on an enquiry into the available evidence”. It also emphasises the provisional nature of historical knowledge. These emphases differ from the less critical transmission model to which many teachers have become accustomed. O’Boyle’s (2004) interviewees, in referring to history, used terms such as ‘a body of facts’, ‘coverage of content’ and ‘true facts’. (p.422) Such perceptions of what history entails would appear to be inconsistent with a commitment to the underlying principle of the revised syllabus. Whether teachers retain such perceptions or whether they have embraced the

new credo set down in the syllabus is a matter on which this study may offer some insights.

While the adoption of new teaching materials may be the most visible aspect of change and also the easiest to accomplish, the other aspects present greater difficulty, as Fullan (2001) acknowledges. Changes in teaching approaches may require the learning of new skills. Changes in beliefs may challenge teachers' core values and are most difficult of all to accomplish. However, these are important in giving teachers what Fullan (2001) describes as, "a set of criteria for overall planning and a screen for sifting valuable from not-so-valuable learning opportunities". (p.44) Changing the materials may achieve some limited educational objectives but Fullan (2001) argues:

... it seems obvious that developing new teaching skills and approaches and understanding conceptually what and why something should be done, and to what end, represents much more fundamental change, and as such will take longer to achieve but will have a greater impact once accomplished. (p.45)

These insights raise important issues in relation to in-service supports for teachers. In-service sessions have promoted evidence and enquiry-based approaches that, for many history teachers, represent a departure from established practice. However, the extent to which teachers will take on board practices exemplified at an in-service session is unclear. The sessions held to date have been 'cluster' sessions, usually held in an education centre, with 20 to 30 teachers in attendance. There have been three such sessions to date – in Spring 2004, Autumn 2004 and Spring 2005. Another round of in-service is to take place in Autumn 2005. Whether the nature and frequency of such sessions is sufficient to act as a catalyst for changes in teaching approaches is an



issue on which it is to be hoped this study may offer some insights. The issue is revisited in section 2.4 in considering the role of teacher development.

The interplay between behaviour (i.e. teaching approaches) and beliefs is another significant issue. Fullan (2001) discusses the possibility that, “beliefs can be most effectively discussed *after* people have had at least some behavioural experience in attempting new practices”. (p.45) For some teachers of the revised syllabus, the conception of historical study as an exploratory process of enquiry leading to provisional answers may be difficult to engage with unless and until they have begun to apply an enquiry-focused and evidence-base pedagogy in the classroom. Early, faltering steps may lead on to significant change as teachers’ underlying beliefs begin to shift. Fullan (2001) suggests that, “The relationship between behavioural and belief change is reciprocal and ongoing, with change in doing or behaviour a necessary experience on the way to breakthroughs in meaning and understanding”. (p.92) The significance of slow, incremental change is underlined by Darling-Hammond (1990): “... small changes in practice in the short run may be accompanied by larger changes in teachers’ thinking that will occasion much more obvious transformation in classrooms later”. (p.239) Some caution must, therefore, apply in interpreting the results of a study situated in the early stages of implementation, where for many teachers change in underlying beliefs may have barely, if at all, begun. On the other hand, one would look for indications that “small changes in practice” are underway.

What is clear from the foregoing discussion is that significant educational change takes time to accomplish. Implementation is not to be thought of as a matter of simply introducing a new syllabus or other change into schools. Law and Glover (2000)

characterise it as “an especially complex and intricate process” (p.134), which involves much greater numbers of people than those involved in planning the change; and these people are working in a wide range of school organisations and social environments. In the case of curricular change, the nature of curriculum itself is an important aspect of the complexity.

## **2.2 The nature of curriculum**

Reid (1975) defines curriculum in the following terms: “... the curriculum is a set of activities involving teachers, learners and materials, and ... these activities are provided through permanent institutions”. (p.247) The practical aspect of curriculum as presented here is of fundamental importance for those who seek to bring about curricular change. For example, it is important to be aware, as Reid (1975) points out, that, “change involves the abandonment of practices as well as their adoption”. (p.p247) One would look for indications, therefore, that teachers of the revised syllabus are abandoning practices that are not in harmony with the approaches associated with the revised syllabus.

It is also important to focus on the “permanent institutions” through which curriculum is provided. Reid (1999) highlights the institutional nature of curriculum: “The key characteristics of curriculum – structure, sequence, and completion – cannot exist outside an institutional framework: institutions structure learning in a way that reflects some wider reality”. (p.97) Both the “institutional framework” and the “wider reality” require attention.

It is in schools that the institutional framework of curriculum finds expression. Any attempt to implement curricular change, therefore, must seek to understand the ways in which schools may serve to help or hinder such endeavours. In this regard, Sarason's thoughts on the role of behavioural and programmatic regularities offer important insights. Sarason (1996) explains behavioural and programmatic regularities as follows:

An overt behavioral regularity, for example, would be the rate at which teachers ask questions or the rate at which children ask questions. An example of a programmatic regularity is the fact that for every school day from first grade through high school a child is expected to do something with or learn something about numbers. (p.4)

As Sarason goes on to argue, any attempt to introduce change into the school setting involves changing or supplanting an existing regularity. In the case of Leaving Certificate History, the extent to which classroom work revolves around the use of a textbook constitutes such a regularity. Since the revised syllabus aims to encourage a more active methodology and, specifically, more emphasis on 'doing' history, one would expect to see an adjustment to this regularity if the syllabus is to achieve its objectives. It will be important, therefore, to look at whether and how teachers are using a textbook in teaching the syllabus. Sarason's (1996) own conclusion is hardly encouraging:

It is probably true that the most important attempts to introduce change into the school culture *require* changing existing teacher-child regularities. When one examines the natural history of the change process it is precisely these regularities that remain untouched. (p.116)

Reid's (1999) analysis of curriculum describes a model that represents curriculum as, "... in some of its major aspects, the resultant of a balance that exists between three

salient features of the school as an organization – technology, social system and theory”. (p.126) ‘Technology’ is used here to refer to “the means that an organization employs to get its work done”. (p.126) Reid (1999) argues that there is an inherent propensity towards the maintenance of internal equilibrium between the three features of technology, social system and theory and, also, between the school and the surrounding environment. Externally imposed change has a tendency to focus on the technology of the school but, “without compensating movements in social system or theory” (p.128), the previous equilibrium is likely to reassert itself. Reid (1999), however, acknowledges that, “Sometimes ... the other elements move to adjust themselves to the one affected by an innovation” (p.128), and that this is most likely to happen when a change takes place in the theory of the school. Given what Reid (1999) refers to as, “the need for congruence between the activities of the school and the demands of outside forces” (p.128), it is inevitable that the theory of the school and, consequently, the content of the curriculum “will reflect the range of knowledge thought to be important and, in the case of academic subjects, the way they are conceived of and practised in industry, higher education or learned societies”. (p.130) This is part of the “wider reality” that sustains the structures of learning in schools.

In considering some aspects of that “wider reality”, Reid (1999) uses the concept of ‘constituency’ to describe people who “... believe they have interests in common that can be served by certain kinds of more or less uniform curricula”. (p.156) Reid argues that the existence of supportive constituencies may help to account for change in situations “... where the structures of schooling seem to embody only obstacles to evolution ...”. (p.157) Sarason (1996) questions why so many proponents of change have failed to address a very obvious issue: “Why have they paid so little heed to the

need to develop constituencies?" (p.293) As Sarason suggests, "The more committed more groups are to a proposed change, the more likely the goals of change will be approximated." (p.295) From an implementation perspective, an important lesson is the role of supportive rhetoric in creating a climate that is conducive to change and the evolution of shared meaning among a critical mass of interested individuals and groups.

In this respect, attention given to the revised syllabus in newspaper media may be significant. For example, Professor Dermot Keogh, head of history at University College Cork, writing in the *Irish Times* in September 2000, had this to say about the impending introduction of the revised syllabus:

History is set to make a significant recovery with the introduction of a new curriculum that will expose students to the complexity and inter-relatedness of the subject. There is an emphasis on the student doing original research and on being trained in the interpretation of primary source documents. Gone ... is the emphasis on the 'one true interpretation'.

One would look for indications as to whether teachers have 'bought into' this vision of recovery, given the significance of change in beliefs in effecting significant change.

For Sarason (1996), the failure to develop constituencies is an obvious hiatus in successive attempts to institute educational change. What he identifies is the need "... to seek and to obtain the support of individuals and groups without whom the proposed change will not occur". (p.293) Foremost among these groups is the constituency of teachers, whose engagement with and ownership of change proposals is fundamental to the prospects for success.

### 2.3 Teacher engagement with and ownership of change

Sarason (1996) argues that teachers need, "... to be informed and involved at all stages of the change process". (p.293) The need to involve teachers arises less from pious aspiration and more from political reality. Since, as McLaughlin (1990) reports, "policy cannot mandate what matters" (p.12), the role of the teacher is pivotal. As Sarason (1996) acknowledges, teachers have power that can impede or promote the change effort. And winning the support of teachers takes time. As Sarason (1996) argues:

It cannot be done by letters, memoranda or speeches. It requires face-to-face discussions only through which competing self-interests stand a chance of being reconciled. To get an individual or group to see the change process as *theirs* (or *ours*) - not as *yours* requiring sacrifices by *them* - is not a task that can be described in some "how to do it" book. (p.293)

In his analysis of certain core 'tasks of change', Evans (2001) suggests, "The beginning task is to make the case for innovation, to emphasize the seriousness of a problem and the rightness of a solution". (p.55) In the first round of in-service on the revised syllabus in Spring 2004, the initial presentation considered the then current syllabus and the problems associated with it, before proceeding to address the question, "Why change?" Among the aspects addressed were: the excessive focus on memorisation, the limited opportunities for the use of primary sources in the classroom, the relative neglect of 'non-political' history and the enormous examination pressure on students.

In identifying shortcomings in and constraints on current practice, and making the case for the kinds of changes promoted by the revised syllabus, the in-service

presenters may be said to have been engaging in a process that Evans (2001), borrowing from the work of Edgar Schein, refers to as 'unfreezing'. This typically involves encouraging people to confront inadequacies in their current practice and to overcome anxiety about attempting new practices. It is not a task that can be encompassed in the course of a single in-service day. Evans (2001) describes it as "a task of daunting proportions". (p.55) One of the reasons for this is that it has to be accomplished person by person. This presents a considerable challenge for change agents. Evans (2001) notes that, "Unfreezing is time-consuming, labor-intensive work". (p.287)

In the case of the revised syllabus, some important questions arise. What opportunities have teacher had for "face-to-face discussions" with the promoters of change? Are the effects of 'unfreezing' evident? Are teachers acknowledging the inadequacy of previous or - in many cases, perhaps - current practice? Are there expressions of anxiety or hostility in relation to the change that is underway? Or are there signs of disengagement from the change process, where materials have changed but practices and underlying beliefs remain the same? If teachers are unwilling or unready to 'let go' of established practices and beliefs, then there is bound to be a shortfall in their engagement with new ones.

Marris (1975) argues that all real change involves anxiety and loss. If the people involved are to become committed to the new ways, they must be able to make sense of the loss involved and the possible benefits of the new requirements. Evans (2001) argues that, "Meaning is the core issue that determines how people cope". (p.59) Individuals need to be able to make sense of the change in terms of their own inner

beliefs and values: Do I think this change will really be of benefit to my students? Does it facilitate or inhibit what I really value in my role as a teacher? For the purposes of this study, one would be concerned to explore what meaning the syllabus changes have for teachers in the classroom and the extent to which their ability to make sense of the change is helping them cope with the anxieties of adaptation.

Making sense, of course, requires that confusion and uncertainty be addressed. Curricular change will often induce uncertainty in teachers: How are we supposed to teach this? How will this be examined? How will students cope with these new demands? Those charged with facilitating implementation need to be able to offer clarity on questions such as these, and implementers need to be given time to see how the various elements fall into place. Some important questions for this study arise. Are teachers satisfied with the degree of clarity available from in-service presenters and through other official channels? Are teachers satisfied that they have sufficient time to see how the different elements fall into place?

One aspect of change where there is often a shortfall in clarity is the issue of what teachers are expected to *do* differently. Attention may focus on new content, to the neglect of underlying principles and associated teaching strategies. A new textbook may readily become a kind of pseudo-syllabus for teachers who crave certainty and clarity between two covers. The result may be what Fullan (2001) describes as 'false clarity' which occurs "... when change is interpreted in an over-simplified way; that is, the proposed change has more to it than people perceive or realise" (p.77). It behoves the change agent, therefore, to focus on the essential behaviours that incorporate the underlying principles of a new syllabus or curriculum for, as Evans



(2001) puts it, "Clarity's corollary is focus" (p.216). As Evans suggests, "Because few people can accomplish more than one significant change at a time, choosing where to concentrate one's efforts is crucial...." (p.217).

Given the emphasis on the concept of 'evidence' in the revised syllabus, it is hardly surprising that in-service sessions have reflected that emphasis. For example, at the in-service sessions of Spring 2005, much use was made of sources and related activities which placed emphasis on enquiry (asking questions of the sources) and exploration (considering different, possible interpretations of the evidence). Since coherence is the objective, one would anticipate that these lessons will need to be reinforced at future sessions. "Clarity", as Fullan (2001) notes, "...cannot be delivered on a platter" (p.77). One would look, however, for indications as to whether there is an increasing clarity for teachers on syllabus issues arising from their involvement in the in-service sessions.

In a system so dominated by written examinations, it is inevitable that one of the areas of teacher uncertainty will be the assessment arrangements. McLaughlin (1987) suggests that the initial attitude of implementers will be a desire to,

... learn the rules of the game. What is supposed to be done? What are the legal requirements ...? (p.174)

Although teachers have been teaching courses based on the revised syllabus since September 2004, to date no sample papers have been issued by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). Teachers have been informed that sample papers will be issued in September 2005. The parameters for research study were the subject

of a circular letter issued by the SEC in May 2005. Questions have been asked at in-service sessions regarding the SEC's plans for sample papers and the parameters for research study. McLaughlin (1987) writes that, "Generally, it is only after ... compliance concerns have been understood that implementers can move on to address issues of program development or the *quality* of implementation". (p.174) Whether such concerns are an impediment to teacher ownership of the change is a key question.

Inevitably, some teachers will have a greater sense of ownership than others. Goodson (1993) observes that, "... subjects are not monolithic entities but shifting amalgamations of sub-groups and traditions". (p.3) Implementing curricular change requires an appreciation of the sensitivities of those with allegiances to traditional approaches, and an understanding of the scale of the task involved in creating a 'new tradition' that can attract the support of a critical mass of teachers. In welcoming the impending introduction of the revised syllabus, Holden (2003) writes:

... it will mark a divide between those who took the old course with its perceived lack of objectivity, its gender bias and its obsession with militarism and politics, and the new breed of young historian who understands that women did play a part in history, that not all change was down to a figurehead, and that, as Napoleon Bonaparte put it, history is a 'set of lies agreed upon'.

One would look for indications of such a shift in perception among the research cohort and, perhaps, some teacher perspectives on how they can be best equipped to deal with the demands of new approaches, new content and a new underlying philosophy.

## 2.4 Teacher professional development needs in addressing significant change

It behoves all involved in the provision of in-service support for teachers to reflect on Fullan's (2001) finding that, "Most professional development experiences for teachers fail to make an impact". (p.255) The 'skill-training workshop' model serves a purpose but by itself is insufficient. Fullan (2001) reports that,

Teachers need to participate in skill-training workshops, but they also need to have one-to-one and group opportunities to receive and give help and more simply to *converse* about the meaning of change ... Purposeful interaction is essential for continuous improvement. (p.124)

Skill-training is necessary because as Evans (2001) puts it: "Change redefines proficiency". (p.63) Skills that a teacher has developed over many years may become redundant or devalued. New competence has to be learned and the quality of training provided is of key importance. The new emphasis on working with documents in the revised syllabus may be daunting for teachers who have not themselves had training in the use of primary sources, and that emphasis has been reflected in the in-service sessions.

If training is to be effective, however, Evans (2001) argues, "it must not only precede innovation but also accompany it through the early and into the middle stages of implementation". (p.64) Evans (2001) reports that the conclusions of educational researchers are straightforward: "to help teachers develop new competence, training must be coherent, personal and continuous". (p.63) Training sessions must be well-planned and responsive to teachers' felt needs.

For teachers of the revised syllabus, to date, the provision of training has occurred through the medium of in-service 'cluster sessions'. Eisner (1998a) identifies some of the deficiencies of the in-service seminar as a means of developing teacher competence. Since the "advice-giver", typically, has never seen the participants teach and is unaware of their strengths and weaknesses, "The situation is much like a voice-coach giving advice to a singer whom he or she has never heard sing". (p.161)

General recommendations have a limited impact. As Eisner (1998a) argues, "Feedback needs to be specific and focused on the actor in context". (p.16) In this, as in so many other aspects of the change process, Eisner's case is that "we have greatly underestimated what it will take to improve what teachers actually do in their schools". (p.162) Some indications of the impact of in-service for the revised syllabus will be sought in this study, as well as teachers' perceptions of their own in-service needs.

While training tends to focus on the mastery of new concepts, materials and methods, such mastery is the final stage of what Evans (2001) describes as "a complex cognitive and affective process". (p.64) The first stage is survival, as teachers try to cope with the new demands. The second is consolidation, "as they try to integrate the various aspects of their new training into their traditional roles and routines". P.64) All the while, teachers need to be given time and opportunities, "to consider, discuss, argue about, and work through changes in their assumptions". (p.65) If this does not happen, technical changes in pedagogy are unlikely to make a lasting impact.

Like Fullan (2001), therefore, Evans (2001) emphasises the importance of personal contact and group interaction: "It is an axiom of organizational development that the

greater the change, the more interaction it requires". (p.64) Again, the question arises as to whether teachers of the revised syllabus have had sufficient opportunities for such interaction with in-service personnel and other agents of change.

In emphasising the importance of interaction, it is important to recall Fullan's (2001) reference to *purposeful* interaction cited at the beginning of this section. The purpose that Fullan has in mind is learning: learning how to improve one's practice, learning to make better judgements on the desirability of proposed changes. Sarason (1996) focuses on both student and teacher in setting out what he sees as the two basic criteria for the realisation of school change. His first criterion emphasises the need to help students accept greater responsibility for their own learning; his second places similar emphasis on the responsibility of teachers for their learning. And he makes the following challenging assertion: "*Teachers cannot create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions exist for them.* (p.367) [Author's emphasis] If teachers of the revised syllabus are to help students accept greater responsibility for their own learning through the preparation of a research study, then the corollary of this is that they themselves need to take greater responsibility for their own professional development, and to be helped to do so by those who share responsibility for their working arrangements. This presents a formidable challenge in a context where the 'skill-training workshop' model has tended to predominate. The nature of the challenge assumes a greater poignancy when one considers the voluntary nature of membership of the subject association – the History Teachers' Association of Ireland (HTAI) – and the precarious nature of the financial support for its activities from the Department of Education and Science. For the purposes of this study, one

would look for indications of teachers' productive learning around the innovations in the revised syllabus either through the in-service sessions or by other means.

Whether productive learning can be sustained over time is a function not only of the school culture, as Sarason and other researchers have highlighted, but also of the wider system in which it is rooted. Sarason (1996) argues that teachers need to "accept the obligation *as a group* to develop a forum specifically devoted to their growth and development, a forum that acknowledges that there is a world of ideas, theory, research and practice about which they should be knowledgeable ... if they are not to wither on the vine, if they like their students are to avoid passive resignation to routine". (p.369) Fullan (2001) writes of the need for "*reculturing* [author's emphasis] the teaching profession – the process of creating and fostering purposeful learning communities". (p.136) While the wider aspects of 'reculturing' lie outside the bounds of this study, it is appropriate to focus attention on a central tenet of the 'reculturing' debate viz. the need for the development of what Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) refer to as "collaborative work cultures".

Many researchers emphasise the role of collaboration in helping teachers to establish new regularities in the classroom. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) report that, "A collaborative community of practice in which teachers share instructional resources and reflections in practice appears essential to their persistence and success in innovating classroom practice". (P.22) Sharing "reflections in practice" enables teachers to figure out what works best and combine their own strong sense of professional autonomy with a strong sense of community. However, collaboration *per se* may be either good or bad as Fullan (2001) points out: "Strong teacher

communities can be effective or not depending on whether they collaborate to make breakthroughs in learning or whether they reinforce methods which do not get results". (p.133) Hargreaves (1994) makes a useful distinction between "collaborative cultures", that are spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable, and "contrived collegiality", which is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space and predictable. (pp.192-196)

For teachers of the revised syllabus, a number of questions arise. If a "collaborative community of practice" is essential in sustaining changes in classroom practice, as McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) suggest, where does that leave the prospects for significant change in the teaching of Leaving Certificate History? What experience of collaboration do teachers have? What role do they see for collaboration in their attempts to implement the revised syllabus? In tandem with the History inspectorate, the History In-Service Team (HIST) has sought to encourage the development within schools of History departments – lacking in many schools – so that the prospects for collaborative communities of practice may be enhanced. To date, these efforts have been pursued mainly through the provision of advisory and planning materials. If such initiatives are to bear fruit, it is important as Hargreaves (1994) cautions, that they are "development-oriented" rather than "implementation-oriented" and, also, that they are "pervasive across time and space". (p.192) This underlines the need for teachers to have access to on-going opportunities for professional development if the success rates for the implementation of significant curricular change are to be improved. This study examines teachers' perspectives on their own future needs as they struggle with the pressures of implementation.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This review has focused on those issues in the literature that are most germane to the parameters of the present study. Many important factors have been passed over as a consequence. One of the most significant of these is the role of the school principal. Evans (2001) cautions that a truly collaborative culture is difficult to achieve and is inconceivable without a confident and conviction-driven principal. (p.242) As an intermediary in the relationship between teachers and outside agencies, the principal is, in Fullan's (2001) phrase, "the most immediate source of help or hindrance" (p.136). Like the change agent on the national stage, the principal needs to inspire confidence and trust. Such 'authentic leaders', in Evans's (2001) words, "...know that change often requires power and pressure; that it means responsibility not license; and that it needs a framework that they must provide" (p.243) An informed and supportive principal is, therefore, indispensable to the implementation of change at the school level. The role of the principal, however, is a focus for another study.

In the course of this review, a number of research questions have been raised. These questions relate to a number of broad areas of inquiry. In respect of teacher practice, one would wish to establish whether any changes in practice have occurred and whether old practices been abandoned; whether textbooks are still being used and, if so, whether there are any changes in how they are being used; whether teachers act in isolation or whether collaborative practices are present. The area of teacher perceptions is another where important questions arise. Has the emphasis on history as exploration and enquiry supplanted the perception of history as 'content'? Does the revised syllabus provoke hopes for a recovery in history's fortunes? Are there aspects



that provoke hostility? What meanings do the syllabus changes have for teachers? Do teachers have sufficient clarity in relation to the changes required? What new competencies seem to be required? Finally, there is a need to consider teacher views on in-service and support needs: what impact the in-service sessions have had; whether there is any evidence of productive learning arising from sessions attended; whether teachers are satisfied with the supports provided and what they themselves see as their support needs.

It is hoped that the research conducted may supply some insightful answers to the above questions.

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#### **Internet**

History In-Service Team website: [www.hist.ie](http://www.hist.ie)

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Epigraph: “The qualitative researcher is advised to follow the carpenter’s rule: estimate the amount of time it will take for the job and then double it”. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.145)

#### 3.1 Purpose of the research

One of my reasons for undertaking the Master of Education (M.Ed.) course in September 2003 was to deepen my understanding of the challenges inherent in the attempt to translate the rhetoric of a syllabus document into the realities of classroom practice. Specifically, for the purposes of this dissertation, I wished to attempt to identify the factors that are impeding or facilitating the implementation of the revised syllabus in Leaving Certificate History.

What was critical to me from the outset was to listen as closely as I could to teachers to develop the best understanding possible of *their* perspectives and *their* perceptions. The validity and value of such a research approach was confirmed for me by my reading of relevant literature – which I shall draw on in the course of the chapter. The following observation by Hargreaves (1994) sums up well the value of this type of engagement:

If we can understand teachers' own desires for change *and* for conservation, along with the conditions that strengthen or weaken such desires, we will get valuable insights from the grassroots of the profession, from those who work in the frontlines of our classrooms, about *how* change can be made most effectively ... Getting up close to teachers in this way does not mean endorsing and celebrating everything that teachers think, say and do. But it does mean taking teachers' perceptions and perspectives very seriously. (p.11)

My central concern throughout was to discover how teachers were *using* the syllabus in the classroom and what their thoughts and feelings were on the syllabus and the implementation process.

### **3.2 Research mode orientation**

Given that my central concern was to gain an understanding of how individual teachers were experiencing the syllabus, the qualitative research mode seemed to offer the best prospects for developing such understanding. I had no hypothesis to prove or disprove; what I had was a deep curiosity to discover and understand.

The field in which I was proposing to tread – the implementation of educational change – is recognised as one of great complexity: the mode of research had to be one that was capable of acknowledging that complexity. Since I was not concerned with product or outcomes but, rather, with the *process* of responding to a change in syllabus, I needed a mode of research that reflected that emphasis. And since I was concerned above all with the *meaning* that the revised syllabus had for teachers in the classroom, qualitative research seemed to offer the best opportunities to discover 'participant perspectives'.

Fundamentally, the nature of qualitative research is more in accord with my own philosophical position than the 'scientific' paradigm that underlies quantitative research. The recognition in qualitative research that, as Merriam (1988) writes, "... there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception" (p.17) is one that equates with my own world view. The following credo from Eisner (1998b) struck a deep chord: "I do not believe in 'last words' in human affairs, only better conversations". (p.7) I hoped that my research would culminate in a series of purposeful conversations that would contribute to our understanding of how teachers view and experience attempts at curricular change.

Besides the use of purposeful conversations or 'interviews', two other means were used to facilitate my identification of a purposive sample of teachers who were currently teaching courses based on the revised syllabus:

1. Questionnaire – This enabled me to identify a sample of interviewees with different levels of experience and working in a variety of school situations. It also ensured that those interviewed would already have done some preliminary thinking about issues that would be discussed in more detail in the interviews.
2. Observation – I attended two in-service sessions presented by a colleague. As well as listening to the issues raised, I sought to identify teachers who would be willing to complete the questionnaire and eligible to do so, since not all teachers attending the session were currently teaching the syllabus.

### 3.3 The emerging design of the study

What is of critical importance in relation to the three methods used is that the design of the study was not fully formed at the outset but, rather, emerged as the process unfolded. Issues raised at the in-service sessions influenced the form of the questionnaire which, in turn, influenced the form and detail of the interview schedule. This is very much in line with one of the key features of most qualitative studies, expressed thus by Merriam (1988):

A qualitative design is emergent: One does not know whom to interview, what to ask, or where to look next without analysing data as they are collected. (p.123)

In this case, while a number of potential interviewees were identified at the in-service sessions attended, the final choice of interviewees was not made until the completed questionnaires had been analysed and a purposive sample identified.

The emergent design paradigm is an important indicator of the inductive nature of qualitative work. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) observe:

Qualitative researchers avoid going into a study with hypotheses to test or specific questions to answer. They believe that shaping the questions should be one of the products of data collection rather than assumed a priori. The study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas or any precise research design. (p.49)

The manner in which the emergent design of this study developed will now be examined.

### **3.4 Field study observation**

Following preliminary discussion with my supervisor regarding the drafting of a questionnaire for teachers, I attended two in-service sessions in November, 2004, one in County Dublin and one in County Kildare, as an observer. The principal reason for my attendance was to identify teachers who would be willing to fill in a questionnaire for me a number of weeks hence, and who would be eligible to do so i.e. teachers who were currently teaching 5<sup>th</sup> year History. Since the ultimate intention was to interview a number of those who completed the questionnaire, this would also allow me to make initial acquaintance with potential interviewees. An ancillary reason was to listen to the issues raised and to consider how these issues might inform the design of the questionnaire.

I am currently on secondment from my teaching post and working as a regional development officer with the History In-Service Team (HIST). The in-service sessions were presented by one of my colleagues. On his invitation, I explained the reasons for my attendance. He also sought to ensure that there were no objections to my presence. Field notes were taken to record issues raised by participants. On two occasions during the day there was group discussion. On these occasions I sat in with one of the groups, with their approval, and occasionally joined in the discussion, at their invitation or when I was in a position to assist on some matter on which they sought clarification.

A number of issues raised at the sessions were subsequently pursued in the questionnaire and/or the interviews. Most, if not all, would have been pursued in any



event; however, their relevance as relevant lines of enquiry was confirmed. The main such issues were: access to resources, different views on the assessment arrangements, different views on the attention given to women in history, the use of a textbook in the classroom.

Because of lower numbers than average in attendance at the two sessions and the low number of teachers present who were currently teaching 5<sup>th</sup> year History classes, I did not identify a sufficient number of teachers to complete the questionnaire. Since it was not feasible for me to attend any further sessions, my colleague offered to seek further volunteers to fill in the questionnaire from participants at his remaining Dublin sessions. (See Appendix B for a copy of the cover note sent to both categories of teacher viz. those I had met at an in-service session and those contacted, subsequently, by my colleague.) In all, twenty teachers were identified who were prepared to fill in the questionnaire. All were based in the Dublin South / North Wicklow, Dublin West and Kildare regions. This was important in that prospective interviewees would be within a reasonable travelling distance of my home base.

Of the nine teachers eventually interviewed, four were teachers that I met with at the in-service sessions.

### **3.5 The questionnaire**

#### **3.5.1 Design**

The design of the questionnaire was influenced by two main considerations viz.

1. The need to establish a reasonably informative profile of the teachers involved, to assist me in identifying a good mix of teachers for interview.
2. A wish to gather a data bank that would be helpful in shaping the emergent design of the interviews which were to be my principal source of data. The generation of the data would involve prospective interviewees indicating their views on matters that – in many cases – would be addressed in greater detail in the interviews.

I was also conscious that busy teachers who were struggling with the demands of curricular innovation might have reservations about completing a very detailed questionnaire. Therefore, I wished to produce a questionnaire that would not be unduly demanding of time to complete it while, at the same time, offering sufficient scope for views to be articulated and concerns expressed. The format adopted combined ‘multiple choice’ questions where volunteers ticked boxes in answer to questions and were invited to give reasons for their choices with other, more open questions where there was the opportunity to identify concerns.

### 3.5.2 Piloting

Prior to finalising the questionnaire, the draft was forwarded to three colleagues who were asked to comment on the spread of questions, the format and clarity of the questions and the overall ‘user-friendly’ nature of the document. Two expressed full satisfaction with the questionnaire as drafted. The third identified a slight element of ambiguity in one of the questions and the question was re-worded to remove the ambiguity.

### 3.5.3 Format

The questionnaire, in its final form, is provided in Appendix B. The first set of questions sought some basic data on the teacher and the school in which s/he teaches. Areas covered included type of school (sector, mixed or single sex, size), number of teachers teaching Leaving Certificate History, level to which teacher had studied History, length of experience, number of students in 5<sup>th</sup> year class, timetabled allocation and types of resources used with the class. In the case of resources, a list was provided, with a set of boxes relating to frequency of use. It also provided a number of lines for resources to be recorded that were not included in the list. All other questions up to this point involved ticking or writing a number into a box. Much of the data garnered here was used in identifying a sample for interview e.g. type of school, length of experience, number of students in class. Data relating to resources, including frequency with which textbook was used, provided useful focus points for the subsequent interviews.

The next set of questions related to certain features of the revised syllabus, including the introduction of a second assessment component. In each case a box was to be ticked indicating teacher's appraisal of that feature, from strong approval to disapproval, and a number of lines was provided where teachers were asked to give a reason or reasons for the category ticked. The intention here was to gather data on teachers' responses to some important features of the syllabus, and to identify specific points of criticism or emphasis that could be further explored in the interviews. The features chosen were ones that differentiate the revised syllabus from its predecessor and/or would seem to require a significant shift in classroom practice. These included the emphasis on 'doing' history, the emphasis on developing critical thinking skills,

the greater emphasis on social and cultural history and the emphasis on giving attention to the experiences of women.

The final two questions asked teachers to identify the main challenges presented by the revised syllabus and the supports they considered essential. Nine to ten lines were provided for answers to be written in. The intention was to gather data on matters on which teachers were prepared to express concern and to provide a basis for further exploration in the interviews.

Finally, teachers were asked to indicate if they were prepared to meet with me to discuss the syllabus in more detail. Of the twenty teachers who completed the questionnaire, seventeen indicated that they would be prepared to do so.

#### 3.5.4 Advantages in using questionnaire

The use of the questionnaire may be seen as a departure from a strictly qualitative approach. However, Woods (1986) acknowledges that questionnaire responses “are sometimes used to assist the production of qualitative work”. (p.117)

In this case, the use of a questionnaire provided undoubted advantages in the pursuit of my research objectives. Firstly, it enabled me to identify a good mix of interviewees from a variety of schools, with varying levels of experience and with a wide range of views and concerns. This helped to ensure a good spread of perspectives on the issues discussed in the interviews. Secondly, in the case of those who were subsequently interviewed, it ensured that they had already given some thought to issues being further explored in the interviews. In a sense, the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee had already begun, albeit in a format that was

neither naturalistic nor interactive. Thirdly, the interviews provided a data bank which could be used to provide discussion points for the interviews. For example, where challenges were identified on the questionnaire these provided a significant focus for the interviews. Fourthly, the data bank could also be drawn on to check on the consistency of views expressed in the case of two events: completion of the questionnaire and the interview. (The questionnaires were circulated in December 2004 and most were returned in that month. The interviews took place in March 2005.) Fifthly, it was a convenient means of collecting data from a wider sample than I could reach by personal interview. The fourth and fifth points listed here are among the criteria identified by Woods (1986) as justifying the use of questionnaires in a qualitative study. In overall terms, the questionnaire was used in a manner that Woods (1986) describes as “a strategic bridge to more qualitative data”. (p.117)

### 3.5.5 Disadvantages in using questionnaire

It is important to note that the use of the questionnaire had certain disadvantages also. From the point of view of qualitative research, the medium is neither naturalistic nor interactive, as noted above. There may be a tendency in completing a questionnaire to put on a ‘performance’, in the sense of giving answers that one thinks will appeal too the researcher. Thus, in the case of one teacher – whom I subsequently interviewed – some of the responses to questions on the syllabus used wording that seemed to echo the wording of the syllabus and guidelines in a way that raised some doubts in my mind as to the genuineness of the response. Another kind of difficulty arises where, despite one’s efforts to remove every element of ambiguity from the wording of the questionnaire, a respondent or respondents assign a different meaning to a word or phrase or question than that intended. In question 5(d), where teachers were asked to

indicate the frequency with which they used certain types of resources, a reference to “self-prepared notes” was correctly understood by a majority as referring to notes prepared by the teacher. However, one respondent understood the term to refer to notes prepared by *students*, a point that would not have been evident to the researcher if the respondent had not been subsequently interviewed.

### **3.6 The interviews**

#### 3.6.1 Purpose

Since my central concern was to gain an understanding of how individual teachers were experiencing the syllabus, the qualitative interview seemed to me to offer the best prospects for achieving this. Woods (1986) notes that interviews are often “the only way of finding out what the perspectives of people are”. (p.62) Besides, as Woods (1986) also notes, an interview can be “a means of ‘making things happen’ and stimulating the flow of data”. (p.62) It seemed to me that I could develop a much better understanding of certain questionnaire responses in an interview context where I had the opportunity to seek clarifications and ask ‘probe’ questions.

Given the importance of demeanour in carrying out a qualitative interview, I strove to match the characteristics set down by Maykut and Morehouse (1994):

The characteristics of a good qualitative interviewer are much the same as those that characterize people who are able to tactfully inquire and hear what others are saying. Bet perhaps most critical ... is deep and genuine curiosity about understanding another’s experience. (p.81)

### 3.6.2 Nature of interviews

The nature of the interviews conducted was in correspondence with many of the standard criteria of qualitative interviews as defined in the literature. Firstly, the typical length was *circa* one-and-a-half hours in length, allowing for reasonably prolonged engagement with the interviewee. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) note that a time frame of one-and-a-half to two hours “allows the competent interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee and to foster a climate of trust”. (pp.80-81)

Secondly, and crucially, the term ‘interview’ is used as a convenient form of shorthand, since the encounters that took place might be more accurately described as “a conversation with a purpose”. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.79) Woods (1986) refers to “more of an open, democratic, two-way, informal, free-flowing process” than the connotations of the more formal ‘interview’ suggest. As Woods acknowledges, that formulation is easier to represent than to accomplish but, nevertheless, it is the spirit in which I sought to handle the interviews. Woods (1986) also notes “the potential therapeutic element in this kind of encounter”. (p.69) In general, interviewees seemed pleased that they had an opportunity to ‘speak their minds’; one said at the conclusion of the interview that she reckoned she had got everything ‘off her chest’. Each interviewee responded in the affirmative when asked if they would be prepared to meet with me again, if I needed to seek clarification or elaboration of points made.

### 3.6.3 Form of interviews

Since I had no previous experience in this area, the interview schedule seemed the most promising format that would enable me to fulfil my purposes. It would help me

to ensure that the broad range of areas I wished to explore would be addressed with each interviewee. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) advise that, "Beginning interviewers are more likely to find an interview guide providing too little direction for the interview". (p.86) Merriam (1988) comments that, "Working from an interview schedule allows the new researcher to gain the experience and confidence needed to conduct open-ended questioning". (p.78)

However, the schedule (See Appendix C) was used sensitively in that lines of enquiry were sometimes pursued that did not strictly fall within the parameters of the schedule. Interviewees whose responses went beyond those parameters were not 'reined in' if they clearly had a story they wished to tell or if their responses were relevant to the broad dimensions of the research issue. In allowing this degree of latitude, I was conscious of Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) observation that, "When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range". (p.96) The schedule was also used sensitively in the sense that the order of questions was not rigidly adhered to but, rather, questions were often raised in response to a comment made by the interviewee. This ensured a more natural flow of conversation and allowed for a more equitable sharing of the direction of the interview. Woods (1986) nicely captures the spirit of the qualitative interview in his observation that, "... the interviewees, ideally, come to provide the structure in their own terms, in their own order, and in their own time". (p.78)

Some consideration was given to circulating the interview schedule in advance. This was decided against, since there was a danger that answers might be rehearsed in



advance and the natural flow of conversation inhibited. However, a short list of ‘areas of focus’ was circulated in advance so that interviewees would have the opportunity to do some thinking about the proposed areas of discussion. Some of these had already been raised through the questionnaire. Each interviewee was contacted by telephone and, subsequently, by letter prior to the interview. (A sample copy of the letter sent is provided in Appendix D.)

The following broad objectives informed the drafting of the interview schedule:

- (a) to allow a number of teachers currently teaching courses based on the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus – in the initial stage of implementation – to discuss their perspectives on key features of the revised syllabus;
- (b) to establish a profile of the teaching practices of the teachers interviewed in relation to the revised syllabus and to identify any changes in practice that have been prompted by the introduction of the syllabus;
- (c) to identify, in the case of the teachers interviewed, their views on the factors that are facilitating or obstructing movement towards change.

Fullan’s (2001) dictum may be said to have provided the underlying rationale:

“Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it’s as simple and as complex as that”. (p.115) The interviews were designed to explore what teachers of the revised syllabus are *doing* and *thinking* at this crucial, early stage of the implementation process.

#### 3.6.4 Style of questioning

In preparing the questions for the interview schedule, close attention was paid to the need to ask open-ended questions. Such questions, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explain are, "... not easily answered with a discrete response, such as 'yes' or 'no', or a brief word or phrase". (p.88) Thus, closed questions that invite such a response and provide little opportunity for participant perspectives to be expressed were avoided as much as possible. In the majority of cases, interviewees were generous in their responses to the questions posed and eager to share their own perceptions and perspectives.

Probe questions were used as appropriate. Many of these were clarification probes where I wished to ensure that my understanding of what the interviewee was saying was correct. Detail-oriented probes were also used: for example, where detail on the particular textbook being used with a class was sought. Elaboration probes were also used. For example, in discussing the use of the textbook I often found it necessary to explore matters a little further than the detail provided by the interviewee's initial response.

#### 3.6.5 Piloting and selection procedures

Of the seventeen respondents to the questionnaire who indicated a willingness to meet with me to discuss the revised syllabus, nine were eventually interviewed. The numbers that could be interviewed were limited by considerations of time, and this was regrettable in that there were eight others who were willing to be interviewed.

Two of the nine were interviewed for piloting purposes. The purposes of this were to see how the interview schedule worked out in practice and to test my own qualities as a researcher so that any unhelpful traits could be identified and corrected before the remaining interviews. While the piloting did not lead to any substantive revision of the interview schedule, it did alert me to the types of probe questions that were likely to prove helpful. It also alerted me to a slight tendency on my own part to ask 'loaded' questions or be overly suggestive in my phrasing of questions. This tendency was evident in one of the pilot interviews where my interviewee was a teacher who was well known to me and where there was a tendency, perhaps, to be less guarded about the types of questions asked. It helped to ensure that, for the remaining interviews I was more conscious of the need to leave questions as open as possible.

As indicated in section 3.5.4, the questionnaires were invaluable in enabling me to select for interview a good purposive sample of interviewees. Unlike the random sampling associated with quantitative research, in qualitative research, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explain, "... participants ... are carefully selected for inclusion, based on the possibility that each participant ... will expand the variability of the sample". (p.45) The goal is not to identify a representative sample that will allow the results of the research to be generalised but, rather, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explain, "gaining deep understanding of some phenomenon experienced by a carefully selected group of people". (p.56)

Of the seven interviewees who were interviewed subsequent to the pilot interviews, three were teaching in community schools or colleges, three in voluntary secondary schools and one in a fee-paying secondary school. One had not previously taught

Leaving Certificate History, while the others had varying levels of experience. Three were male and four were female. Where questionnaire respondents had raised issues of contention or described practices that were untypical of the questionnaire sample overall, these were kept in mind in the selection of interviewees, to facilitate the generation of a varied range of data.

All nine interviewees are currently teaching courses based on the revised syllabus in the first year of its introduction into schools.

To protect confidentiality, different names from their real ones have been used to identify the interviewees.

The pilot interviews were conducted with Joan and Sinéad. Joan teaches in a voluntary secondary school in south Dublin. Sinéad teaches in a voluntary secondary school in north Kildare.

Rory teaches in a community college in west Dublin.

Philomena teaches in a fee-paying school in south Dublin.

Helen teaches in a voluntary secondary school in south Dublin.

Michael teaches in a community school in south Dublin.

Marie teaches in a voluntary secondary school in north Kildare.

Fiachra teaches in a community school in west Dublin.

Cathy teaches in a voluntary secondary school in county Wicklow.

### 3.6.6 Site of interview

All interviews took place at the interviewees' school. This was by the interviewees' own choice, as the option of meeting elsewhere was broached in each case. In some cases, the interviews took place in the teacher's own classroom; in other cases, a meeting room was used - where this was the preference of the interviewee.

### 3.6.7 Recording and transcribing the interviews

The issue of whether to record interviews on audio-tape is one that has been a bone of contention among qualitative researchers, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) acknowledge (p.98) Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommend the use of a tape recorder, "When a study involves extensive interviewing or when interviewing is the major technique in the study ...". (p.121) For my purposes, I considered that the use of a tape recorder would give a fuller and more authentic record of the interviews than any other possible means. In practice, I was satisfied that my experience confirmed Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) observation that, "In most cases, the presence of the tape recorder quickly fades to the background ...". (p.98) The permission of the interviewee was sought before the interview commenced in each case. All assented.

The issue of whether to transcribe the interviews in full or in part had to be considered. Given the time constraints under which I was operating, transcription in full was bound to eat into my available time. Transcription, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) note, "is a time-consuming and demanding task". (p.100) However, the importance of 'working' the data was always uppermost in my mind. I reasoned that by transcribing in full, I would improve my acquaintance with the data and that this would be invaluable when it came to the stage of analysis. As Merriam

(1988) argues, “Ideally, verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best data base for analysis”. (p.82) While the process was very time-consuming, I believe the value of the exercise was evident at the stage of analysis.

### 3.6.8 Validity

Because a qualitative study is based upon a different world view and different assumptions than a quantitative one, the criteria for assessing the validity of the study must also be different. For example, as traditionally understood in research terms, the concept of ‘objectivity’ implies a detached and impartial presentation of data whereas ‘subjectivity’ suggests an account which is imbued with personal biases and, therefore, less trustworthy. However, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) point out, “From the phenomenological point of view, subjective is synonymous with agency or with the actor’s perspective”. (p.20) Since qualitative research is concerned with trying to understand the world of the ‘actor’ or subject, it is, in that sense, subjective rather than objective.

There is another sense in which qualitative research has a subjective rather than objective character: qualitative researchers do not see themselves as impartial observers but, rather, as fellow actors who have their own perspective on the matters they are exploring – but whose investigations seek to understand and accurately interpret the perspectives of other actors.

In my own case, a number of public roles ensure that I am personally acquainted with a large number of history teachers. As an education officer with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) from 1995, I worked with the Leaving

Certificate History course committee that drew up the revised syllabus in Leaving Certificate History. As a regional development officer with the History In-Service Team (HIST) from January 2004, I am one of a group of five seconded teachers charged with providing support to teachers of Leaving Certificate History. I also have substantial experience as an advising examiner and as an officer of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland (HTAI). Of the nine interviewees, five were known to me prior to the process getting underway; all nine were aware of my current role with the History In-Service Team (HIST).

Radnor (2001) argues – in respect of data collection and analysis - that, “The key criterion is trust”. (p.38) The interviewees' familiarity with me was a significant factor in a context where it was important to win their confidence and trust. On finalising arrangements with interviewees and again before the interviews began, I emphasised that what I wished to hear from them was their own story, their own experience, their own views on the revised syllabus. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given. Since a tape recorder was used at each interview – with the agreement of interviewees, as mentioned in section 3.6.7 – interviewees were invited to signal for the recording to be stopped at any point if they felt uncomfortable: this option was not exercised. As a fellow actor with long years of experience in the classroom, in my disposition as interviewer I strove to be sensitive to a range of shared interests and problems. As a reflexive subject, making my own impact on the interview setting, I was careful to avoid judgemental responses that might offend the dignity of interviewees and/or inhibit their articulation of their views and experiences. Throughout my interaction with the interviewees, I sought to enact the principle of

ethics-in-action which – as Radnor (2001) writes – “focuses centrally on the need for the researcher to show respect for the participants”. (p.34)

In my overall approach to the study, it was important for me to do my best to ensure that my own perspectives on the research issues did not obstruct my exploration of the perspectives of the interviewees. A number of procedures were followed that are important in establishing the validity of a qualitative research study:

- Giving detailed information about purpose and methods so that the transparency of the study is laid open for readers. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.145)
- The use of a number of data collection methods. In this case, the methods used were observation (at in-service ‘cluster sessions’), questionnaire and interviews. While the interviews were the principal research method, the existence of a completed questionnaire for each of the interviewees allows for a measure of cross checking of data and a more holistic representation of the participants’ views.
- Taking steps to ensure that interview data is carefully recorded. In this case, the use of a tape recorder and the full transcription of the interviews by the researcher are relevant indicators.
- Giving detailed information about data coding and interpretation to improve the transparency of the study. (See sections 3.7.4 and 3.7.5.)
- “Building an audit trail” (p.146), as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) propose, so that the stages of the research process are clear. In this case, the audit trail



includes field notes taken at the in-service sessions attended, completed questionnaires, interview transcripts and interim analysis of data.

### 3.6.9 Limitations of interviews

Like all methods of data collection, interviews have their limitations. Teacher interviewees may not wish to share certain details of their classroom practice, which might be more fully understood if the researcher had the opportunity to combine the interview with participant observation. Some may wish to convey particular impressions to the researcher and, therefore, put on a type of 'performance' during the interview. The more prolonged the engagement with interviewees, the better the prospects for deep understanding, if a sense of rapport and trust develops. Woods (1986) notes that, "Quite often one will be presented with a rather bland, seamless account in an early interview". (p.65) When time constraints preclude more than one interview with participants, as in the current study, that presents a barrier to fullness of understanding.

Another limitation is that, as Patton (1990) points out, "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer". (p.279) Where an interviewer has no previous experience of research interviews, as in the present case, one's inexperience may inhibit one's effectiveness.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

#### 3.7.1 Introduction

Since the interviews were the principal research method, the main focus of this section will be on the procedures adopted to analyse the data obtained from the interviews. However, since the design of qualitative research is emergent and analysis an on-going activity over the course of the entire process, it is necessary to give some limited attention to the field study observation and the questionnaire.

#### 3.7.2 The field study observation

As indicated in section 3.4, field notes were taken at the two in-service sessions. Issues raised by participants were noted and helped to inform the preparation of the questionnaire and the interview schedule.

#### 3.7.3 The questionnaire

Quantitative data relating to teacher profiles was collated e.g. number of respondents teaching in different types of school, range of years of experience in teaching Leaving Certificate History, number of teaching periods allocated to teaching 5<sup>th</sup> year History, numbers teaching mixed ability or one level (Higher or Ordinary) only. This data was helpful in identifying the sample for interview.

In the case of the following questions and issues, the questionnaire responses were collated and typed up in summary form: Question 5 (d), dealing with classroom resources and methodologies; Question 6, dealing with respondents' views on specified features of the revised syllabus; Question 7, dealing with respondents' views

on the introduction of a second assessment component; Question 8, dealing with respondents' identification of the main challenges they face in teaching the revised syllabus; and Question 9 on the supports they consider essential to assist them in their teaching of the syllabus. In each case, the main issues arising were identified and these helped to inform the preparation of the interview schedule.

The collated responses provided a useful reference point in interpreting interview data from those respondents who were subsequently interviewed. In some cases, comments were expressed more clearly on the questionnaire or the questionnaire response deepened the understanding of the interview response. The fact that the questionnaire responses were, as Woods (1986) expresses it, "one unit in a package" (p.119), increased their usefulness.

#### 3.7.4 The interviews: developing coding categories

The process of developing coding categories began with the application of some practical advice from Bogdan and Biklen (2003):

You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. (p.161)

This yielded a list of suggestive 'pointers' from 'time' and 'assessment' to 'teacher anxieties' and 'access to computers'. Much of the data related to different aspects of my research questions and that, in itself, suggested certain categories, including such broad categories as teacher perspectives on the revised syllabus and teacher practice in the classroom. The families of codes outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) were also considered: these included setting/context codes, definition of the situation codes

and perspectives held by subjects. Possible categories were suggested or confirmed by this exercise.

Once a preliminary list of coding categories had been generated, these were assigned to units of data. 'Units of data' is used here in the sense defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003): "Units of data are usually paragraphs in ... interview transcripts, but sometimes they can be sentences or a sequence of paragraphs". (p.173) The following excerpt from the interview with Helen is a one-paragraph unit of data provided in response to a question on use of a textbook in the classroom:

Well, first of all ... the one thing I do is ... before maybe I looked at the chapter ... is possibly give them a few questions, pointed questions on the chapter to do ... and then, using those pointed questions, we would kind of re-section the whole chapter ... so they'd have the questions ... which would be why something happened or ... list the reasons why or ... so they'd have kind of basic facts. I mean we'd use the textbook to kind of develop the analysis of ... say, the reasons why, why did this thing happen? ... and then to go on to develop it ... a 2 or 3 line answer.

The following response from Philomena in relation to a probe question posed when discussing approaches to teaching the revised syllabus exemplifies how a single sentence may constitute a significant unit of data:

It's a very unwieldy answer to the fact that my teaching strategy hasn't changed at all ....

The coding categories were modified in the light of their perceived usefulness to the main purposes of the study, and continued to be modified as the work progressed. Modification sometimes involved categories being 'collapsed' or subsumed into

another category. Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) stricture was a useful reminder:

"Decisions to limit codes are imperative". (p.174)

Eventually, I had three broad categories which reflected the major research questions I was pursuing and also the richness of data in the interview transcripts. These were: teacher perspectives, teacher practice and factors facilitating or hindering implementation. Within each broad code, a range of sub-codes facilitated easier handling of the data; some of these broke down further into another level of sub-codes. For example, 'teacher perspectives' included perspectives on the syllabus on the syllabus and the in-service arrangements. Perspectives on the syllabus included perspectives on the promotion of critical thinking and the notion of all students preparing a research study.

Once the coding categories were decided on, each unit of data was marked with the appropriate coding category— in abbreviated and colour-coded form (using pens of different colours). This involved reading through the data and deciding on the code or codes to which the material related. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) acknowledge, "Often units of data will overlap and particular units of data will fit in more than one category". (p.175) Once this had been accomplished, the task of writing up the analysis began.

### 3.7.5 The interviews – writing up the analysis

This heading is included in concurrence with Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) acknowledgement that "writing up one's research is part of the analytic process". (p.145) This reality became evident to me as I wrote up my analysis of interview data.

Such was the range of the coding sub-categories, and such was the richness of the data, that I found my initial analysis extended – both in scope and in terms of word count – beyond the parameters of my central research questions. Thus, a further process of analysis was required where data and interim analysis were reviewed and brought to bear more intently on the central themes of my research. This stage of analysis was very much in line with Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) observation: "Pondering the substance and sequence of the report requires a rethinking of the data, often yielding new insights and understanding". (p.145)

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Despite the limitations of time and of the methods of research used in the study, a rich vein of data resulted. Important insights were gained into how teachers view the revised syllabus and related activities such as the in-service arrangements; teachers' practices in the classroom as they teach courses based on the revised syllabus for the first time ever; and their perceptions of the factors facilitating or obstructing the attempted implementation of curricular change. These insights are discussed in the following chapters.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### TEACHING THE REVISED SYLLABUS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the substantive findings on the three areas for investigation set down in the interview schedule, as outlined in Chapter 3. The three areas on which data are presented are as follows:

Teacher perspectives – This section look at teacher perspectives on the revised syllabus. The main aspects examined are the greater emphasis on ‘doing’ history, the increased emphasis given to social and cultural history – including ‘the experiences of women’ - and the assessment arrangements.

Teacher practices – This section examines the profile of teaching practices that emerges from the data gathered. It looks at changes in practice prompted by the revised syllabus, as well as classroom regularities that appear to indicate continuities in practice. Teachers’ perceptions of the need for changes in their own practice are also examined.

Teacher perception of factors that facilitate and factors that obstruct implementation – This section examines causes of concern and sources of encouragement to teachers as



they attempt for the first time to implement the revised syllabus. It also considers teachers' articulation of their needs in furthering the agenda of implementation.

In presenting the substantive findings, interview data is predominant as the interviews were the principal mode of inquiry. However, questionnaire data is drawn on, as appropriate. An aggregated summary of questionnaire data is provided in Appendix E.

## **4.2 Teacher perspectives**

This section presents an analysis of data relating to teacher perspectives on the revised syllabus and the assessment arrangements to which it has given rise. There are contrasting views on certain aspects of the syllabus and on the ways in which students are responding to some of the new emphases. There is common ground on some of the practical challenges that teachers face as they find themselves in the front line in this particular curriculum initiative.

### 4.2.1 The emphasis on 'doing' history

All respondents to the questionnaire indicate approval of this emphasis, with thirteen of the twenty indicating that they 'strongly approve'.

In principle, therefore, all interviewees welcome the emphasis on 'doing' history.

Fiachra's comment is reasonably typical:

I think, first of all, the idea of 'doing' history is much better, definitely. It's hands on, it requires more skill.

However, when attention is focused on the two features that most prominently encapsulate the emphasis on history as activity – viz. the documents-based study and the research study - responses are more variable, and reservations are expressed in some instances.

In expressing their approval of the emphasis on documents-based study, the following are some of the key points that interviewees mention: that pupils respond better to work on sources than to a litany of ‘facts and figures’ (Cathy); that it “makes it more real to them” (Marie); that students have to think for themselves more (Helen, Rory); that the skills and understanding developed through work on documents appear likely to benefit their work on the research study (Joan).

Helen’s analysis is useful in that it identifies and partially reconciles features that give rise to both positive and negative comments. Helen sees this aspect of the syllabus as more demanding for students insofar as they are now required to think for themselves to a greater extent than previously. She also sees it as more demanding on the teacher from the point of view of sourcing documents and also the time-consuming nature of source-based work. However, she sees the work on documents as enabling students to ‘take ownership’, by allowing them to interpret a source according to their own judgement once that judgement is grounded in the available evidence.

The time-consuming nature of documents-based work is noted by a number of interviewees. Marie sees this as a problem in that

... it takes time to get that sort of response from students in the classroom. And all the time you feel the clock is ticking.

Joan suggests that the problem is partly one of adjusting one's 'rhythm', in the sense of establishing a new regularity or routine. Philomena speaks of her 'pace' being slowed down.

There are mixed views on how students are responding to documents-based work. Cathy, Marie, Joan, Helen and Philomena all report that students are responding well. However, Cathy and Joan indicate that weaker students have not derived the same benefits from the work as other students. Fiachra recalls how he "did the whole area of sources" with his class before Christmas and "it didn't work". The class in question, he says, is the 'weakest' he has ever taught. On the other hand Rory, many of whose students have literacy problems, believes that even his weaker students have benefited from the work on sources, albeit not to the same extent as other students.

Marie considers that all of her students are benefiting from the work on sources and that the benefits will be long-term:

... it's coming for all of them now, really, that they're more inclined to look at, now who wrote that and where would he be coming from sort of thing and they are more conscious of it. I think it is a good skill, it's a life skill which they'll benefit from later on, no matter what they do.

The research study is broadly welcomed by all interviewees. However, some aspects attract a degree of criticism and there is a perception that the workload on teachers will increase as a consequence.

A number of interviewees explicitly welcome the fact that all students in the class will now undertake a research study and that class time can be allocated to it in a manner that was not feasible with the previous course. Joan and Helen acknowledge that Ordinary level students will need to be given a lot of support but emphasise the opportunity to develop student confidence and the extent to which it will lessen the pressure of the terminal examination. The latter perspective is shared by all interviewees.

Other interviewees agree on the benefits associated with the research study but foresee substantial pressure on themselves in meeting the challenge of helping Ordinary level students to undertake a study. There is an expectation that many such students will need help, “every step of the way”, as Cathy expresses it. Rory and Fiachra believe that significant intervention on their part will be required to get the process started and considerable persistence to see it through to a successful conclusion. Rory identifies the absence of a reading culture at home as a barrier to this kind of work. He articulates a dilemma which appears to underlie the concerns of Fiachra and Cathy also:

Now I know the whole idea is to get them to go and find it, but I know that some of mine, I'll just have to say, well OK, here it is, go and do this yourself ... And it'll be chasing them up ....

Given the emphasis in the syllabus – and indeed, throughout the curriculum – on affording opportunities to students to engage in a measure of self-directed learning, these views are helpful in illuminating the nature of the challenge involved.

#### 4.2.2 The greater emphasis on social and cultural history

While a clear majority of the respondents to the questionnaire endorse this emphasis - seven 'strongly approve' and nine 'approve' - the three respondents who say they are 'undecided' remain to be convinced and one respondent unequivocally 'disapproves'. The latter (not one of the interviewees) argues that the new emphasis positions history, "One step away from social studies & Humanities and the end of History as a stand alone subject ...".

With two exceptions, there is an unqualified welcome for the greater emphasis on social and cultural history among the interviewees. In general, there is a perception that it helps to give a more balanced picture of past events and that social history is more accessible to the Ordinary level student than many aspects of political history are. As Rory comments, it shows students that "... it's not all just battles and wars". Helen is critical of the traditional focus on political history which, in her view, many students find "heavy going". She sees the social and cultural elements as a "way in to history" for students whose interest in politics and international relations is minimal.

The strongest objection to the greater emphasis comes from Philomena who is forthright in her view that, "I would be loath to see political history at this level diluted in any way". Her views are a re-statement of views expressed in her questionnaire return, where she observed that, "I cannot help feeling the content of the course is 'patchy' and weakened". Her conviction is that the job of second level history teachers is to give students, "... a really good grasp of 1870 to 1966, or of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". Her convictions are grounded in her experience of teaching the old course; no other rationale is offered.

Another reservation is expressed by Fiachra, based on his experience as an examiner. His concerns relate to the manner in which social history is dealt with in an examination context. His argument is that the principal benefit of studying social history is to develop students' empathy for people of the past, and that empathy is a quality that cannot be properly assessed in an examination. His experience suggests that answers to questions on social history tend to be "woolly" and that students benefit more when answering questions on political history because, "it's much more concrete, it's much more practical". Fiachra's observations raise important issues relating to the need for significant shifts in assessment practice if significant shifts in curriculum are to be successfully negotiated. The correlation between assessment practice and classroom practice is given further consideration in section 5.2.3.

#### 4.2.3 The emphasis on giving attention to the experiences of women

This emphasis in the syllabus generates a range of responses from the respondents to the questionnaire, with a narrow majority giving it a favourable endorsement: five 'strongly approve', six 'approve' and nine are 'undecided'. Of the 'undecided', some are adopting a 'wait and see' approach, while others display varying levels of disinterest or hostility e.g. "Not a feminist, not an area of particular interest"; "What about 'men's experiences', 'working men's experiences'?"

The issue generates a range of responses from interviewees. A majority look at it in the context of the greater emphasis on social history and give it a generally positive response. Michael makes the comment – which echoes what some historians have had to say about the roles of 'invisible women' – that, "it's easy to forget what goes on behind the scenes". Marie expresses a somewhat contrary viewpoint in that she sees

an element of tokenism in highlighting the experiences of certain women who – in her view - are being accorded significance retrospectively. She acknowledges, however, that for the girls she is teaching the highlighting of women was a very positive feature and aroused strong interest.

The strongest reservations are expressed by Philomena and Fiachra. In Philomena's case, she objects to the use of "tags" such as 'women's history', arguing, essentially, that history is one and indivisible and should not be broken into "units". In common with some of the social and cultural history, the focus on women is seen as one of a number of "awkward little appendages" that Philomena sees as diluting the political content that she considers of primary importance. Fiachra's criticisms overlap with Philomena's to the extent that he also decries the breaking up of history into units such as 'women's history'. What emerges here is the extent to which the issue of 'women in history' is a contentious issue for some teachers.

#### 4.2.4 The assessment arrangements

On the introduction of a second assessment component (i.e. the research study report), the respondents to the questionnaire indicate a high level of endorsement: ten 'strongly approve', five 'approve' and four are 'undecided'. Philomena did not tick any of the boxes but, in writing, expresses strong approval of the introduction of the second component while expressing strong reservations on the requirement for candidates to write a review of the process undertaken. One respondent (not an interviewee) writes:

This is the jewel of the new syllabus. It was long overdue. In the past students could spend 5 years at second level reading history and never do any research.

The pre-submission of the report on the research study is broadly welcomed by interviewees and is seen as easing the pressure associated with the terminal examination. There is a welcome also for the reduction in the number of questions to be answered in the examination (at Higher level, a reduction from five to four) and the fact that one of the questions is now documents-based and less reliant on memorisation. Helen, Marie, Rory and Michael anticipate that the new format will be fairer and more attractive to students and Marie believes that it will help to attract more students to the subject, especially at Ordinary level.

Some reservations and concerns are expressed, however, a number of them relating to the documents-based question. Sinéad has reservations about the critical thought that this question is expected to require of pupils:

It's very hard to teach that, isn't it? To be more, you know, critical?

Cathy has concerns that the comprehension section of the question may 'give away' marks too easily. Joan is concerned that the contextualisation section of the question will not adequately reward those students who have a good knowledge and understanding of the general elements of the topic, given that the main thrust of the question will focus on one of the three case studies. This issue is given further consideration in section 4.4.2.

Philomena is critical of the fact that the duration of the examination has been reduced from three hours to two and a half hours. Her view is that students will continue to be under the same kind of time pressures in the examination that have bedevilled History



at this level for many years. She is also critical of the uncertainty surrounding a number of examination issues, such as the type of marking scheme and the length of answer required.

For two of the interviewees, while the assessment arrangements are an improvement on what they replace, more radical change is needed. Michael expresses the view that a substantial element of continuous assessment is required. He argues that current arrangements give too great a premium to regurgitation of memorised data and that more important 'skills of history' are neglected as a consequence. Fiachra's analysis of the current situation is not dissimilar. He suggests 'open book' examinations and interviews as possible alternatives. The role of assessment arrangements in supporting or obstructing the implementation of curricular change comes into focus here and is given further consideration in sections 4.4.2 and 5.2.3.

### **4.3 Teacher practices**

This section examines a range of data relating to the pedagogical practices of teachers in teaching courses based on the revised syllabus. In many cases, there is evidence of an adherence to traditional practices. In some cases, however, more active approaches are described.

Teacher use of a range of resources and strategies is described. The issue of whether teacher practice is affected by collaboration with colleagues is given some consideration. Teachers' perceptions of the need for change in their own practice are also examined.

Due to considerations of space, it is not possible to review all relevant aspects of teacher practice covered by the research. Data on note-taking, use of electronic media and class outings is summarised in Appendix F.

#### 4.3.1 Textbook use

The questionnaire returns suggest a high level of textbook usage: eight respondents say they use a textbook during every class period; nine respondents say they do so 'frequently'; three say they do so 'occasionally'.

The use of a textbook is a prominent factor in the practice of each of the teachers interviewed; in many cases, it is the dominant resource, around which the teaching and learning of history are focused. There are, however, significant differences in the way in which the textbook is used. Whereas in some cases the use does not appear to move beyond a traditional transmission model of teaching, in other cases, a more varied approach is evident with a more active role on the part of the student.

A number of broad (sometimes overlapping) patterns of usage are discernible. In some cases, the textbook appears to dictate the patterns of work in the classroom and teachers use the textbook in the classroom in a manner that is avowedly traditional. In other cases, the focus shifts to a question posed by the teacher and the textbook is used as a resource to pursue one or more lines of enquiry. The syllabus emphasis on history as a process of enquiry is more evident in the latter approach. A third pattern of usage to emerge from the data (although explicitly identified in these terms in only one of the interviews) is the adoption of an overtly critical approach to textbook content, to sensitise students to the fact that what is provided therein is an exercise in

interpretation and that other interpretations or differences in emphasis are available. Finally, a fourth pattern of usage may be identified where there is selective reading from the textbook and that reading is interspersed with other activities, often designed to hold the attention of students with a low reading age and a short attention span.

Three interviewees (Marie, Cathy and Michael) describe a *modus operandi* where the main focus of attention is on the textbook and, specifically, reading from the textbook during class. After some initial teacher introduction, the reading gets underway and this is punctuated by questions or point of discussion on matters referred to in the text. What distinguishes this type of usage from other approaches is that the textbook appears to provide the dynamic that drives the momentum forward and that the main purpose discernible appears to be to 'cover content'. Michael is quite explicit about "... using the textbook as much as possible", and his rationale for this is, "... there's so much content that I don't like to weigh them down with extra stuff". Marie indicates that she feels under pressure all the time to "keep moving along through the text". It is noteworthy that all three teachers cast themselves in a traditionalist mould, with Michael and Marie both characterising their overall approach as 'chalk and talk', while Cathy bemoans her own dependence on the textbook, implicitly seeing herself as a victim of circumstance:

I have to say I do think it's wrong to rely on the book so much, but I do. I wouldn't be able to teach the course without it.

Although neither uses the textbook for reading purposes in the classroom, the use of the textbook as the major reference point by Sinéad and Philomena indicates a similar pattern of reliance. Sinéad thinks the syllabus is so long that she needs to "get through

it very fast” This reliance on the textbook is less evident in the case of three other interviewees, two of whom make regular use of the textbook, but whose approach seems more attuned to important emphases in the syllabus.

For Joan, Helen and Fiachra, the use of the textbook is propelled by a question posed by the teacher which sets out the learning purpose or the enquiry at which the reading is directed. What is evident from the descriptions given is that the approach is more analytical than that described in the previous paragraph and more in tune with the enquiry-focused approach that is intended to characterise the revised syllabus. Fiachra specifically links his practice in this regard to a strategy demonstrated on one of the in-service days, whereby an ‘enquiry question’ is used to direct the teaching of a particular unit of work - in an attempt to arouse the curiosity of students and clarify the goal towards which the classroom exploration is aimed. What seems clear in each case is that the focus is on the question and that the text is being used as a resource to - as Helen expresses it – “develop the analysis”.

How this process of analysis works at the practical level may be exemplified by reference to the approach taken by Joan in classes where the textbook is the main resource being used. In common with Helen and Fiachra, a question written on the blackboard at the beginning of class identifies the focus for the day’s work. This is followed by an overview of the material she plans to explore through a perusal with students of the headings and sub-headings in the relevant sections of text. Her students are encouraged to identify the ‘line of argument’ (the ‘L of A’) in each section of text and to annotate the margins of their textbook accordingly. On completion of each chapter, the student writes up a set of notes using different formats

such as the timeline and the spider diagram. Joan sees this work as a form of active learning:

... where you're annotating, where you're making notes, where you're breaking down the text ... you're not just underlining, you're creating a new text out of a text ... is to me the first step in active learning

Another approach to critical analysis is evident in Rory's testimony. What is striking in Rory's case is his signposting of the notion that all texts are biased to some degree, either deliberately or subconsciously, and that the textbook should never be taken as 'gospel truth'. The objective here is to apprise students of the fact that there are differing interpretations of historical events and to challenge the often uncritical acceptance by students of the classroom textbook as a purveyor of unqualified truth. In order to reinforce this critical approach, Rory describes how he sometimes photocopies pieces from other books where a difference in viewpoint is evident. He also uses analogies from the world of media, such as the differences in viewpoint on major stories that one finds in the *Irish Times* and *Sun* newspapers. This focus on how the same event may be interpreted differently by different writers would appear to be in line with the syllabus aim, "To develop an awareness of different interpretations of particular historical issues". (p.3)

The fourth pattern of usage is where the textbook is used selectively and its usage is interspersed with other activities. Since many of the students in this scenario have lower levels of literacy than their peers, there is substantial teacher mediation of the text by the teacher. In Rory's case this involves much underlining in the textbook, with accompanying annotations and glosses. In Fiachra's case, the reading is a response to an 'enquiry question', as discussed above. Relevant sections of the text

are reviewed by scanning headings, pictures and first and last paragraphs. Reading is often followed by group activities that are playful in format or by forms of note-taking such as spider diagrams and 'mind maps' that help to structure and reinforce student learning. Spider diagrams are also used in Rory's case, and some small-scale project work to encourage greater activity on the part of students. Both link their limited use of the textbook to the issue of student abilities: Fiachra says that the textbook being used this year is "beyond 90% of the students", while Rory reports that, "We find the textbooks, a lot of the textbooks would tend to be fairly 'wordy' and designed for, I suppose you might say, middle class kids or those with better literacy".

#### 4.3.2 Use of primary sources

In order to elicit some basic data on primary source usage, the questionnaire invited respondents to indicate how frequently they used primary sources other than those in the textbook. Seven respondents say they do so 'frequently', nine say they do so 'occasionally'. One respondent indicates that she has not done so to date. That three respondents did not give any indication is not surprising, perhaps, in the light of the data that emerges from the interviews.

It is evident from the testimony of many of the interviewees that there is a reliance on the textbook for most of the source materials used in class. Undoubtedly, time and convenience are factors here, as Michael makes explicit in his interview. Only one of the interviewees (Joan) makes reference to using an online resource specifically designed for teachers of the syllabus by the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in association with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA),

which includes a selection of documents on the topics initially prescribed for documents-based study.

Some of the reasons for reliance on the textbook become clearer when one considers the testimony of Helen. She considers it important that students do not see their textbook as the only source of historical information and has sought to locate suitable source materials herself for use with her students. Here, as elsewhere, the time factor emerges as a significant constraint:

You need time to find the documents, number one, and to also decide what document suits the level of student you have ... so it's more time for the teacher when she's preparing the class, to find documents that are appropriate to the topic and appropriate to the students sitting in front of you. I think that's the main issue there.

Even where source materials are made available on the History In-Service Team (HIST) website, [www.hist.ie](http://www.hist.ie), as Helen mentions, teachers need time to access and download and, in many cases, edit the material for use with their own classes. For teachers who lack the requisite skills to access material online, the impulse to rely on the textbook is all the greater.

Cathy's testimony illustrates one of the problems that may be caused by the reliance on the textbook for source materials i.e. that the reading level or relative complexity of the source may not be appropriate to the full range of the student cohort. She reports that some of the sources in the textbook she is using are too difficult for the class she is currently teaching and that, "I will end up having to explain the source to them first, because of the nature of some of the language used".

On approaches to working with sources in the classroom, the data suggest some interesting variations. In a number of cases (Marie and Cathy), the approach mirrors the format of the documents-based question in the terminal examination. In these cases, as in the case of two other interviewees (Sinéad and Michael), the main thrust of the work seems to be on learning to respond to source-based questions. Other interviewees evince what appears to be a more open approach to working with sources, where the focus is on the student's own response to a document or documents and/or encouraging students to develop skills of critical analysis. Helen and Philomena both describe scenarios where teacher-prepared questions are avoided other than a general, "what are the impressions created by this document?" (Helen) or where the lines of questioning arise from oral discussion with students (Philomena). Helen describes how she sometimes has students work in pairs "to help them along".

An emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills is especially evident in the case of two interviewees, Rory and Joan. Working with students who are academically weak, Rory acknowledges the need to vary the approach and the type of material used if students are to be kept engaged. He describes his practice of presenting students with documents on a particular episode or issue that exemplify opposing points of view, so that students can be assisted in recognising points of view and, in particular, ones that are blatantly biased or propagandistic. He also explains his use of examples from current affairs or recent history to reinforce such messages. (The contrasting coverage of the war in Iraq on Fox News and RTE news reports is one example he cites.)



A methodical approach to the analysis of documents is indicated in the testimony of Joan, who mentions some of the standard questions that students are taught to apply to sources, questions relating to provenance and purpose. Her use of the word 'interrogated' in relation to the questioning of sources may be construed as exemplifying this methodical approach. The approach would appear to resemble the recommended approaches to the analysis of sources given in the Teacher Guidelines. In reflecting on her students' response to this work, she suggests that they are coming to understand that, "... a source only becomes evidence when it's interrogated". The significance of Joan's underlying beliefs for her classroom practice is given further consideration in section 5.2.1.

#### 4.3.3 Use of group work strategies in the classroom

Two of the interviewees describe group work strategies that they have used in their teaching of the revised syllabus. A third (Joan) explains her intention to divide her class into different groups based on their level of ability ("and to do this without making it apparent") as a means of managing work on the research study; she envisages the possibility of some degree of collaboration between individual members of the group. What Joan describes is a practical strategy for dealing with a challenge that the revised syllabus presents i.e. the challenge of providing appropriate levels of support to all students in the class, who for the first time in a Leaving Certificate History course are required to undertake a research study.

A potentially valuable approach to developing students' critical skills is evident in Helen's testimony. As noted in section 4.3.2, Helen sometimes has students work in pairs when source-based work is being conducted. She acknowledges that the 'class

dynamic' needs to be right if this strategy is to work successfully. Therefore, it is not one that she would use immediately at the beginning of fifth year; rather, she would wait until the class has settled in and individuals are sufficiently comfortable to venture answers without fear of ridicule by their peers.

For any new syllabus, one of the perennial challenges is devising strategies to engage those students who appear disaffected or disengaged. In this regard, the experience of Fiachra is of interest. Fiachra has been trying out alternative strategies for some years now as a means of engaging poorly motivated students. The tables in his classroom are arranged in five groups to facilitate group work. He describes two group activities, 'bingo' and 'labelling', that have an element of play and that are often used as an *entrée* into other, more demanding work. As he explains in relation to the 'bingo' activity,

that only takes 10 or 15 minutes, but really gets them going, they love it ... and then, without having to say it, you can set them down to something that's a bit more difficult to do, and there's the goodwill factor rolls over

The activity requires students to match definitions of terms that the teacher has written on the board with definitions drawn from a hat one by one.

The 'labelling' activity involves the placing on the back of each student of a label inscribed with the name of a key event or person connected to the topic currently being studied in class. Students have to work out the names by asking questions of their classmates, with only 'yes' or 'no' answers permitted. The emphasis here on students asking questions of each other to elicit historical information is noteworthy.

#### 4.3.4 Use of the computer room

Just two of the interviewees had brought their fifth year history class to the computer room up to the time the interview took place. In both cases, the visits had been planned as part of the teachers' overall approach to the revised syllabus. In Helen's case, the intention was to allow them to undertake some basic research and, in doing so, to sharpen their awareness of bias and objectivity and to develop their note-taking skills. Students had to re-write what they regarded as significant data in their own words and had to cross-check data as appropriate. This was done at the beginning of the year as a means of introducing students to some of the key emphases in the syllabus. Helen is positive about the value of the experiment:

You see, they were the researchers then, which was good. It moved them away from the idea that the textbook we have is the only important source of information, which I think is very important ... I was kind of glad I did it at the start ....

In Joan's case, the purpose of the visits thus far has been to draw on source materials and related worksheets from the History In-Service Team website and other websites.

A critical approach is fostered:

... I would have given them three or four classes on how to actually access the internet, how to evaluate the URLs ... before you look at a source on a site that you've to test the reliability of the site itself.

The stated purpose is that before students access a website in the computer room, they have a list of questions with which to develop their critique of the website itself and the individual sources that it contains. The need to equip students with the critical tools to evaluate websites and website content is one that receives emphasis in the teacher guidelines and that emphasis is reflected in the approaches of Helen and Joan.

#### 4.3.5 Collaboration with colleagues

For a number of interviewees, informal collaboration with colleagues is part of their standard routine. In other cases, the teacher seems happy to work in isolation within the school context but may seek guidance and advice from outside colleagues. Two interviewees express feelings of isolation: Sinéad who is teaching a large 5<sup>th</sup> year class and – unlike previous years – has no colleague teaching the same course with whom to consult, and Cathy who is teaching Leaving Certificate History for the first time in a school where “everyone’s very much in their own class and they do their own thing”.

For Fiachra and Rory, informal collaboration with colleagues is part of how they go about their work, but is confined mainly to exchange of resources and impromptu advice. A slightly closer level of collaboration is evident in the case of Joan who has a colleague who is also teaching the revised syllabus. Besides sharing of resources, collaboration includes joint organisation of a trip to Poland for 5<sup>th</sup> year History students. In Helen’s case, a close collaborative relationship with a colleague came to an end with that colleague’s retirement at the end of the previous school year.

Elsewhere, different degrees of adherence to isolation are evident. Two interviewees, Michael and Philomena seem content to operate in isolation with their 5<sup>th</sup> year class. Marie occasionally meets with a colleague from another school, “so I don’t feel completely isolated”. She also indicates that she attended a meeting of teachers in the locality, organised by a colleague from another school, to discuss issues relating to the revised syllabus. On the likelihood of this meeting leading to collaboration between the teachers involved, she is doubtful:

Really, I don't know, now ... No, it was just kind of self-help ... It was like a crowd of alcoholics getting together and saying, oh my God, how can we cope with this new course?

#### 4.3.6 Teachers' perceptions of the need for change in their practice

There is an interesting range of perceptions here as individuals ponder the need for change on their own part in light of the new emphases in the revised syllabus. In some cases, there is unequivocal acknowledgement of the need for change and firm indications that some effort has already been made to effect change. In other cases, there is acknowledgement that change is required but little indication of any significant moves to date to realise that change. In a couple of cases, there is a perception that little if any change is required since the teacher's current methodologies are seen to be broadly in line with the requirements of the revised syllabus

In the case of three interviewees, Rory, Joan and Helen, there is an explicit recognition of the need for change. There are also clear indications that each has made a conscious effort to respond positively to the new emphases in the revised syllabus.

In the case of Rory and Joan, the principal change appears to be a greater focus on and integration of documents-based study into their teaching. Both have been following approaches for some years that mirror emphases in the revised syllabus – for example, the critical approaches to the reading of the textbook described in 4.3.1 above. Joan indicates that she has tried to be conscious that she must adapt new methodologies, but adds that developments in her teaching approaches over the years seem to have anticipated emphases in the revised syllabus. In Helen's case, she consciously began

her course with a visit to the Dublin City Archives, and a number of visits to the school's computer room, to convey from the beginning the new emphases on historical evidence and historical research. She also observes that the revised syllabus is forcing her to be less focused on political history and to give "full value" to the other dimensions of history. While she feels challenged to change her approach, she welcomes the challenge and sees it as a positive force.

In a number of cases, there is a more or less explicit recognition that change is required but scant indication that any significant change is yet underway. In Philomena's case, the general desirability of change is acknowledged but also the conservative instinct to maintain stasis:

I think change is good for us actually. Do you know what I mean? I think as teachers we're probably reluctant to change a little bit.

She candidly acknowledges at one point, "... my teaching strategy hasn't changed at all". Marie admits that she needs to be better prepared; specifically, she identifies greater use of documents in the classroom and coming to terms with computers as two areas that she needs to address. In her first year teaching Leaving Certificate History, Cathy suggests that she is "more open" to the new arrangements than colleagues who have long-established routines and are reluctant to change them. She feels constrained by a lack of resources and a reliance on the textbook and, self-critically, looks forward to "getting to grips with this course". Sinéad is more circumspect about her own need to change, but acknowledges that she has "a lot to learn" and, somewhat tentatively, identifies the teaching of critical skills to students as the main challenge that she faces.

Neither Fiachra nor Michael sees a need for significant change in his approach due to the introduction of the revised syllabus. Fiachra suggests that the change has come at a good time for him in that he was already making changes in his teaching, consciously varying his teaching approaches so as to accommodate the needs of students with different learning styles. There is no suggestion, however, that he is so satisfied with his current practice as to envisage no further change. Indeed, one of his concluding comments is,

I'm still not happy with where I'm going, but there's big room there for improvement.

In Michael's case, he is forthright in suggesting that little or no change in his approach is required as he is "doing pretty much everything that the course wants me to do". His prioritising of debate and discussion implicitly links these activities with the development of skills of critical thinking that are central to the concerns of the syllabus.

#### **4.4 Teacher perceptions of factors facilitating or obstructing implementation**

This section examines a range of data relating to what teachers see as the factors that are hindering their attempts to implement the syllabus and the factors that are facilitating that process. Some consideration is also given to the issues that teachers believe need to be addressed if the prospects of successful implementation are to be enhanced.

#### 4.4.1 School organisation issues and the implementation agenda

A number of issues relating to school organisation arise. These include the 'busyness' of school life and the way it absorbs teacher time, the issue of access to resources – including library facilities – and the issue of access to the computer room.

The 'busyness' of life in school and the ways in which this can constrain attempts to be innovative in one's teaching is a theme that emerges in a number of interviews.

Philomena identifies this factor as one that restricts her opportunities to take her students on school outings. Among the elements of that 'busyness' that she identifies is the crowded nature of the curriculum. Helen describes how she has been greatly enthused by in-service presentations and exchanges only to come back and be caught up in the throes of a busy timetable, with innovative ideas and intentions slipping easily from the forefront of her mind. In the absence of the more regular in-service that she considers necessary she argues that,

... you tend to drift back to your old ways, I think, very easily ... especially when you're teaching 6<sup>th</sup> years and you're kind of thinking ... you just rush from one class to the next.

She comments that colleagues do not even have the opportunity to discuss matters arising at in-service on the following day, they are so busy trying to catch up on the work set for the classes they missed while at in-service.

The loss of class time due to school closure or absence of students is another theme that features in a number of interviews. In Helen's case, the fact that she has two double periods tends to exacerbate the loss. Sinéad sees the loss of class time in secondary schools as an on-going problem. She explains that on the morning of the



interview half her class were missing because they were attending a school tour meeting, and that a similar number were absent the previous day due to another such meeting. Her frustration is evident in the following comments:

I asked some, was your teacher bringing you to Mars that it has to extend out? You know, an awful lot of this happens, this sort of stuff. Sure that's life in school.

On the availability of resources, it is clear from the data that some interviewees are more satisfied than others with the resources available to them within the context of the school. In particular, Rory, Philomena and Helen seem comfortable with the range of resources available and, also, the degree of student access to these resources. In all three cases, there is a well-stocked school library with good access and good access for individual students to computer facilities. In Rory's case there is a 'fly in the ointment' in that there are restrictions on his access to photocopying facilities. For others, the issue of resources looms large as they strive to grapple with the new demands being made on their professional expertise.

The perception of being constrained by a lack of resources is most pronounced in the case of Cathy who comments that, "... at the moment I feel I have nothing". With no school library and no television set, video player or DVD player of her own, she has built up a small class library of her own but feels she has to keep arguing her case for resources that should be available to teachers as a matter of right. Like others, she is critical of the level of funding available for the building up of resources in schools. Marie sees her students as being disadvantaged by the lack of a school library, and is sceptical of the prospects for major change in the teaching of History without a major

injection of resources into smaller schools such as her own where “money is always tight”.

Besides Marie and Cathy, Fiachra is another with no school library. While Sinéad and Michael report good library facilities, they suggest that student use is minimal. In Michael’s case, this is partly due to school policy which confines usage to class groups. Fiachra and Joan have built up modest personal or departmental libraries of relevant books that are lent to students, a strategy that Cathy has also adopted.

While the school in which each of the interviewees work has a computer room, access difficulties and other factors have limited the extent to which these facilities have been used. Only Joan and Helen had brought their 5<sup>th</sup> year History class to the computer room up to the time of the interview. In two other cases (Philomena, Rory), interviewees indicate that their students have access to computer facilities within the school during ‘free’ periods or after school hours. In many cases, access to the computer room is reported to be problematic due to the extent to which the room or rooms are used on a regular basis for purposes which take precedence over Leaving Certificate History. These purposes include IT modules that are part of the Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes. Joan is one of those who report such problems; however, her own usage of the computer room is highest of all the interviewees. The issue of how individual teachers deal with school organisational constraints comes into focus here and is discussed further in Chapter 5. The picture is complicated in some cases by issues that relate to staff professional development. Three interviewees, Marie, Philomena and Cathy,

admit that their own feelings of inadequacy in the use of computers are barriers that remain to be overcome. As Marie colourfully expresses it:

This computer business is like an elephant in the corner of the classroom. I have to deal with it sooner or later!

#### 4.4.2 Assessment issues and the implementation agenda

With regard to supports they consider essential in their teaching of the revised syllabus, nine of the twenty questionnaire respondents make reference to sample papers or other briefing material from the State Examinations Commission (SEC). One respondent (subsequently, an interviewee) lays heavy emphasis on the point, expressing herself thus:

**WE HAVE TO HAVE SPECIMEN EXAM PAPERS!!! PLEASE!!**

The interview data suggest that concern about aspects of the terminal examination is having an unsettling effect on some of the interviewees as they strive to come to terms with the requirements of the revised syllabus. Six of the nine interviewees express a level of anxiety on the issue. In all cases, the anxiety is either caused or exacerbated by the fact that the State Examinations Commission (SEC) has not issued sample papers to date. (Sample papers are to be issued in September 2005.) Cathy articulates a view, implicit in the comments of others, that teachers are less confident in offering guidance to students when they have neither past papers nor official sample papers from the SEC. Cathy is troubled by the possibility that approaches and emphases being applied in the classroom may not be reflected on the examination paper. As a more experienced teacher of History at his level, Sinéad's comments capture well the loss of confidence provoked by changes in the examination:

I probably ... after teaching History for years, you know, the old course ... I had a feel for what's coming up and what's important, where to put the emphasis ... Whereas, with this course, I'm more at sea.

Michael expresses concern that he could mislead students because of inadequate information from official sources, and that students could end up having to repeat the examination as a consequence. In Philomena's case, the issue of examination requirements arises on a number of occasions, and epithets such as "fear" and "worried" and "concern" and "annoyed" are employed to emphasise the unease caused by uncertainty and fear of change.

While much of the concern expressed is of a generalised nature, specific aspects of the terminal examination are identified in some instances. Most of these relate to the documents-based question, a type of question that has not featured previously in the Leaving Certificate examination. The lack of familiarity prompts Michael to admit to being worried about "what kind of answers they're looking for". While Joan is concerned that the contextualisation section of the question will not adequately reward those students who have a good knowledge of the context, Philomena's concern is that the contextualisation section will demand a broader knowledge of context than she has been able to cover with her students. This is the matter of greatest concern to her:

My absolute, absolute fear is a contextualisation question is going to appear that will require quite a bit of information after the case study, because I just had no time to do that.

For a number of interviewees, their concerns are fuelled by their experience of the Junior Certificate History examination. Rory's recollection is that there was an

appreciable difference between the questions that appeared on the sample papers and the ones that featured on the first examination paper in 1992. Joan and Philomena identify a conflict between the examination questions and the syllabus definition (Joan) or guidelines interpretation (Philomena) of syllabus topics. Joan captures well the type of uncertainty that developed when she refers to

two experiences we had at Junior Cert. level where a lack of confidence grew out of that lack of clarity, of where the exam and the syllabus didn't always coincide.

The level of circumspection displayed by interviewees in relation to the terminal examination may, perhaps, be better understood in the light of such past experience.

#### 4.4.3 In-service provision and the implementation agenda

The scale of in-service provision is criticised by a number of interviewees. Some difficulties in getting access to in-service courses are also raised. Appraisal of in-service courses attended is mostly positive, but some caveats are entered. Future training and support needs are identified.

Fiachra, Joan and Helen argue that more in-service is needed, that teachers need on-going support as they struggle to come to terms with the requirements of the revised syllabus. Helen and Sinéad are critical of the fact that there was only one in-service session prior to the introduction of the syllabus in September 2004. These observations bring the issue of professional development into focus. Fiachra makes the point that he did the Higher Diploma in Education twenty-one years previously and that, except for the occasions on which the history syllabus changed at Junior Certificate level (1989) and, now, at Leaving Certificate level (2004), the only other

occasion on which he was actively challenged to develop his professional skills was when he became involved in the Schools for Active Learning initiative. His contention is that syllabus change may be merely superficial if underlying deficiencies in teachers' skills are neglected:

You could be teaching the same way for twenty years – even when a new syllabus comes – and not have to change. And, to be fair, teachers are not being 'skilled up'.

The attachment to established regularities and the deficiencies in professional development for teachers are nicely captured here.

Provision of in-service support is one matter: teacher access to such support is a matter for attention also. Three of the nine interviewees have missed one of the three in-service sessions that have been held to date. In Cathy's case, this is due to the fact that she took up a new teaching appointment in September 2004 and had not previously taught Leaving Certificate History. She, therefore, did not attend the in-service session held in Spring 2004. Rory also missed the first in-service session, partly because of administrative oversight, partly because of internal school difficulties. Substitution problems arising from teachers attending in-service courses during school hours have been highlighted by managerial bodies in recent times and are also a factor in Michael's enforced absence from the third round of in-service in Spring 2005. Michael explains that his school is under pressure because of the amount of in-service going on, with large numbers of classes to be covered on certain days. His preferred solutions would be to hold in-service courses during holiday periods and to make greater use of web-based support through the use of e-mail and 'chat rooms'.

With regard to in-service sessions attended, the general tenor of comments is positive. A number of interviewees praise the practical orientation of the in-service sessions, particularly the third session in Spring 2005. Rory welcomes the element of consultation in relation to sample questions that took place at the second round of in-service in Autumn 2004. Cathy welcomes the extent to which the sessions she attended covered “all the angles”, and she indicates that her confidence in teaching the syllabus has grown as a consequence. The theme of confidence is also taken up by Marie, who comments as follows:

And certainly if the in-service was designed to give you confidence about teaching the syllabus, well then, every time we’ve had in-service I’ve felt more happy at what they were doing and more confident.

Another benefit of the in-service for Marie, as for other interviewees, is the opportunity to meet with colleagues and discuss experiences. The potential benefits to be derived from more sustained interaction with colleagues prompt Helen to express the wish that greater networking of history teachers take place for mutual support and assistance.

Criticism of the in-service courses is muted. [Awareness of the researcher’s role as a member of the History In-Service Team (HIST) may have been an inhibiting factor here.] Philomena, while complimentary on all other aspects, notes that the presenter did not have some key information i.e. information relating to some of the examination details. She exonerates the presenter of responsibility for this, but is critical of official delays in making key information available. The role of the State Examinations Commission in supporting syllabus implementation comes into focus here.

Insofar as future in-service and support needs are identified, two areas tend to dominate: the need for training in adapting new technologies to classroom use and the need for greater collaboration and sharing between teachers. While there is no specific requirement in the revised syllabus for teachers to use computer technology in their teaching, it is clear that the issue is one that is a cause of concern to some interviewees, who feel under pressure to acquire the skills that will better enable them to respond to the needs of their students. The feelings of inadequacy felt by Marie, Philomena and Cathy have already been referred to in Section 4.4.1. Philomena speaks of being dragged “screaming into the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. It is clear that the issue is not simply one of technical proficiency. Philomena has sufficient skill to download material from the internet yet is clearly not ready, in her own estimation, to integrate computer technology into her classroom teaching. Cathy reveals that she did a computer course four or five years ago which was specifically for teachers but that she learnt very little from it, as it was “too rushed” and tried to cover too much. She admits that she does not yet have the confidence to bring a class into the computer room. Although she has brought students to the computer room, Helen expresses a lack of confidence in dealing with computers and, indeed, other equipment such as projectors, and believes that her teaching would be enhanced if she could overcome what she sees as her deficiencies in this regard. In suggesting the need for courses on teaching history through Information Technology (IT), she comments:

I certainly would kind of find it beneficial ... I do think bringing modern technology into the History classroom would be one way of making History possibly more attractive to students who would normally think it's not as attractive as other subjects



Underlying the concerns expressed by interviewees in relation to IT is a belief that computers have a significant role in their implementation of the revised syllabus. The main factors that contribute to this belief are discussed in Chapter 5. Joan emphasises the importance of on-going support if opportunities are to be grasped:

But teachers will have to have a support for this .... It won't come overnight to teachers.

The need for greater collaboration and sharing between teachers is expressed in a number of interviews. Helen identifies the sharing of ideas and experience as a beneficial aspect of the in-service sessions and adds, "I'd love more of that, if you had a network of teachers". Marie identifies a factor that needs to be confronted if the development of collaborative networks is to proceed viz. the hostility of teachers who equate support with resource allocation and see the situation in terms of official responsibilities. She describes how a participant at an in-service session tentatively suggested the need for teachers themselves to establish 'support groups' and how this generated the following response:

Immediately, somebody else at the in-service said, "Oh, that's ridiculous! ... What other professional group of people would be expected to support themselves? Why doesn't the Department come up with more money?"

Speaking in the context of in-service sessions, Sinéad and Cathy both stress the importance of dialogue with colleagues. As Sinéad explains, "... because we're all at the coalface, and we can exchange views and help one another, that's what I would like". Both she and Helen identify the History Teachers' Association (HTAI) as an agency that has a role to play in promoting such contacts. Fiachra identifies the education centres as obvious fora for teacher exchanges with colleagues.

The need for more sharing and mutual support is also raised by four of the questionnaire respondents. (Two of the four – Helen, Fiachra - were also interviewees.) Fiachra notes, “We reinvent the wheel in school classrooms across the country”. The isolation that underlies this blindness to our colleagues’ professional practice is made explicit by one respondent, who writes that she, “Feels v. isolated”, and identifies the need for a “support group”. Another respondent identifies the need for peer support, expressing a preference for: “Informal meetings with other more experienced history teachers”. The issue of teacher collaboration and its potential contribution to facilitating change is given further consideration in section 5.4.

#### **4.5 Summary**

We have seen that teachers’ perspectives on certain aspects of the revised syllabus are not always sustained when one raises questions about the detail. Thus, while there is overwhelming support for the emphasis on ‘doing’ history, reservations are expressed on the demands of documents-based study and the practical pressures that the preparation of a research study report is expected to exert. We have also seen that a rhetoric of support for syllabus objectives is not always matched by the classroom realisation of those objectives: despite the support for ‘doing’ history, adherence to the use of a textbook in a manner antithetical to the objectives of the syllabus remains strong.

The teachers consulted for this study identify a range of factors that are facilitating or obstructing progress towards successful implementation of the syllabus. Factors seen as obstructing progress include aspects of school organisation such as difficulties of

access to resources, uncertainty regarding the assessment arrangements and the limited scale of in-service support. Future needs and desirable developments are also identified – greater collaboration between teachers, more sustained and focused training in the use of IT. The issues raised are not unique and find many echoes in the literature on curriculum and school change. Chapter 5 considers the research findings in the light of the insights from the literature and the lessons of past national and international experience.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE REVISED LEAVING CERTIFICATE HISTORY SYLLABUS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presents a mixed picture on the prospects for successful implementation of the revised syllabus. On the one hand, there is evidence of conscious changes in practice that incorporate key emphases in the syllabus. On the other hand, there is evidence that long-established classroom regularities persist that may be inimical to these emphases. While the beliefs of some teachers have been engaged and persuaded by the rationale for change, others remain to be convinced. Many challenges and potential obstacles to the planned changes are identified, and these will need to be addressed if the prospects for success are to be enhanced. This chapter considers some of the key issues and themes that emerge from the analysis of data presented in Chapter 4 and, in the light of insights gleaned from the review of literature in Chapter 2 and the survey of the national and international context in Chapter 1, offers some further analysis of issues of central concern. Critical issues that are deserving of further attention are identified, and some tentative recommendations are offered that may assist the implementation of the syllabus in the medium term.

## **5.2 Teacher ownership of change**

As discussed in section 2.1, the underlying beliefs of teachers are a vital factor in all attempts to accomplish educational change, and changes in beliefs are more difficult to accomplish than changes in the use of teaching materials. Underlying beliefs that inhibit the ownership of change are evident in the data and their significance will be further explored here.

The interplay between beliefs and teaching approaches is also discussed in section 2.1. Teachers may not be ready to change their beliefs until they have had some opportunity to try out new practices and start moving away from established regularities. The extent to which new practices are being attempted is a useful indicator of the extent to which change is being embraced and the data will be revisited with this perspective in mind.

It is an accepted truism of senior cycle education in Ireland that educational practice is heavily influenced by the Leaving Certificate examination. The extent to which uncertainty over examination requirements and concern over aspects of the assessment arrangements are inhibiting teacher engagement with and ownership of the syllabus is another issue that will now be considered.

### 5.2.1 The underlying beliefs of teachers

Curriculum is inevitably an arena of contestation. The political complexion of curriculum is especially evident in the case of history. In the present case, it is noteworthy that certain features of the revised syllabus arouse a degree of hostility.

For example, two of the questionnaire respondents – one of whom, Philomena, is also an interviewee – regret what they see as the ‘dilution’ of the political emphasis and the downgrading of history through a greater focus on social and cultural elements. Both respondents teach in fee-paying schools. While one is wary of making generalised assumptions on the basis of the data, one is reminded here of the significance of context – and its impact on teachers’ underlying beliefs - in all aspects of curriculum change. It is, perhaps, not without significance that Rory, who teaches in a school located in an area of high social deprivation holds the opposite view, strongly welcoming the increased emphasis on social history.

The emphasis on giving attention to the experiences of women is another focus for contested views. That nine of the twenty respondents to the questionnaire indicate that they are ‘undecided’ on its merits suggests that the case for the increased emphasis needs to be argued through with teachers. (The task of ‘unfreezing’ described by Evans (2001) and discussed in section 2.3 is relevant here.) As noted in section 4.2.3, while some are adopting a ‘wait and see’ approach others are more hostile on what may be deemed political or socio-political grounds e.g. that ‘men’s experiences’ are equally deserving of emphasis, that the emphasis smacks of ‘tokenism’, that the emphasis is there to justify the existence of such groups as the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science. These responses highlight the need for engagement with teachers on the issue if underlying beliefs are to be challenged and personal sympathies engaged. While teachers’ adoption of new emphases should not be taken for granted and their reservations need to be given consideration, teachers’ receptivity should not be underestimated either. Philomena shows an awareness of how changes in practice may lead on to changes in underlying beliefs when, having

expressed her reservations on the issue of the emphasis on women's experiences, she adds, "My attitude towards it might change after I've taught it". This echoes Darling-Hammond's (1990) observation, cited in section 2.1, that small changes in practice may lead on to changes in underlying beliefs and more significant transformations in classroom practice.

Thus far, the two examples advanced are relatively clear and unambiguous. Views are explicitly expressed that appear to inhibit the wholehearted adoption of emphases in the revised syllabus. More fundamental, however, and more crucial to the successful implementation of the syllabus are beliefs on the nature of history and the nature of history teaching. Such beliefs are less sharply delineated and may be more evident in classroom approaches than stated views and declared positions. Reference was made in section 2.1 to how O'Boyle's (2004) interviewees saw history as 'a body of facts' and their classroom role as one of 'covering content'. Such a view is inherent in the approach of a number of interviewees in the present study, while other interviewees express views that appear to be much more in line with the underlying principle of the revised syllabus. Some analysis of these contrary positions may help to elucidate how underlying beliefs have a critical role to play in teacher ownership of curriculum change.

One questionnaire respondent (not an interviewee) nicely captures some aspects of the conceptual shift demanded by the revised syllabus when, in response to a question as to what she see as the main challenges, she writes:

Changing from a narrative based approach to a research based approach ...  
Almost as if the old course was a straight line – This course is like concentric circles ....

For some interviewees, the 'straight line' approach remains dominant. This is especially evident in the case of those who are most constrained by adherence to a textbook, as discussed in section 4.3.1, whether it be Marie's feelings of pressure to "keep moving along through the text" or Michael's perception that "... there's so much content that I don't like to weigh them down with extra stuff". While both are positive in their estimation of various aspects of the syllabus, occasional comments are made that hint at a shortfall in the sense of ownership of change and a lack of conviction that a significant shift can take place in their own teaching of history. For example, Marie opines towards the end of her interview that the revised syllabus will not revolutionise the teaching of history and that, "... if you're going to revolutionise the teaching of history, what you'd need to do is get rid of people like myself and a whole load of other old teachers, right!" Michael's admission that, "I've gone through all this active learning methods and stuff; at the end of the day it's still chalk and talk to a large extent", suggests a less than wholehearted commitment to the process of change and to the blueprint for a more active and critical approach to the teaching and learning of history.

By contrast, Joan and Helen evince a difference in how they perceive the revised syllabus. In her questionnaire response to a question on the main challenges posed by the syllabus, Joan identifies, "The challenge of moving from a more teacher-centred syllabus to a mode of enquiry-based learning". In discussing her trip to the city archives and on-line work with students at the beginning of the school year, Helen in her interview concludes that, "It kept me away from the substance, I suppose, of what



happened and focused me in on the student as a researcher of history”. In the case of both Helen and Joan, the engagement with change seems more conviction-led and the ownership of change more assured. Joan, in her questionnaire responses, describes the task of developing students’ critical skills as “... perhaps the single most important aspect of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Helen at the conclusion of her interview enthuses about the syllabus in the following terms: “It’s a great change, I’m very positive about it”. Both Joan and Helen would be likely to score highly on the Innovation Responsiveness Kontinuum, or IRK scale, described by Evans (2001) which “... measures two dimensions of responsiveness to innovation: commitment (whether people are invested in the change) and fulfilment (whether they are actually implementing it).” (p.273) One can see here how an underlying sense of identification with key emphases in the syllabus accompanies a sense of engagement with and ownership of the change that is underway, an engagement that is less convinced in the case of Marie and Michael.

For the change agent, what emerges here is the importance of conveying the overall vision that drives the process of change and the need to engage with teachers at the individual level to make the case for altering beliefs if innovations are to be adopted and sustained. First, however, for many teachers – as discussed in section 2.1 – there is a need to try out new practices before underlying beliefs can be altered. The data relating to shifts in practice will now be considered and its significance assessed.

#### 5.2.2 The extent to which new practices are being attempted

As discussed in section 4.3.6, three interviewees – Rory, Joan and Helen – explicitly recognise the need for change in their teaching practices as a result of the syllabus

change. Also, in each case, there is evidence that conscious efforts have been made to address new emphases in the syllabus, in particular, the emphasis on working with documents and developing critical skills. Joan and Helen – and, also, Fiachra - make use of a teaching strategy that reflects the syllabus emphasis on enquiry, a strategy that – as Fiachra notes – was demonstrated on one of the in-service days. What is interesting here is that, in the case of Rory, Joan and Fiachra, there are indications that certain of their practices may be said to have anticipated emphases in the revised syllabus and/or that their on-going development as teachers makes them more receptive to curriculum change.

For example, the critical approach to the use of a textbook demonstrated by Rory and Joan precedes the introduction of the revised syllabus. The approach is seen as gaining extra force from the context in which it is now being applied. As Joan explains in her interview, “We would always set up now the new course ... that it’s based on sources ... it’s an investigation of history showing how history is tentative and how history has to be revised etc. ... and it’s the known evidence”. As discussed in section 4.3.6, Joan is of the view that developments in her practice anticipated emphases in the revised syllabus, while Fiachra suggests his experimentation with different teaching approaches equips him well to deal with the syllabus change. Although he purports to see no need for significant change in his practice, on the basis that his practice has been changing anyway, for other reasons, his adoption of the enquiry-focused approach indicates a willingness to try out new strategies that are closely in line with the spirit and letter of the syllabus. Despite his expressed reservations about aspects of the syllabus, Fiachra repeatedly applauds the increased

emphasis on skills and of the syllabus change overall his verdict is that, "... it's a big step in the right direction".

In cases where more traditional, teacher-focused methods remain dominant, there are frequently indications of a greater degree of disengagement from the curricular change. Philomena's candid admission that her teaching strategies have not changed is accompanied by a series of criticisms of the syllabus and the associated assessment arrangements e.g. that the content of the course has been weakened by the 'dilution' of political history, that tags such as 'women's history' are unhelpful, that the duration of the examination has been shortened. Sinéad – the only interviewee to indicate that she has started work on a second textbook – speaks of there being "... a horrendous amount of stuff to cover" and that the "... syllabus is so long".

In the case of both Sinéad and Philomena, one aspect of their teaching practice where some element of change is apparent is the attempt to integrate more documents-based work. In both cases, a lack of confidence in relation to this work is evident: Sinéad speaks of being "a bit daunted" in undertaking this work while Philomena who has always incorporated some element of documents use into her teaching admits that, in her teaching of the documents-based study, "I'm not sure myself I've a total handle on how to do it yet ... in all honesty". In these remarks as in others, one sees living exemplification of one of Evans' (2001) 'tasks of change', "Moving from old competence to new competence" (p.56). It may be that if the confidence of such teachers in undertaking work with documents can be built up through in-service and other supports, a possible consequence may be the development of a greater sense of ownership of the syllabus change. Evans (2001) summarises the lessons from the

extensive research on school reform: “The findings are straightforward: to help teachers develop new competence, training must be coherent, personal, and continuous”. (p.63) These findings help to put into perspective the expressed concerns of a number of interviewees regarding the scope of current in-service provision that are discussed in section 5.4.1. Another key issue for teachers is assessment, since it is clear that the shortfall in confidence displayed by Philomena and Sinéad is due in part to uncertainty and concerns relating to the assessment arrangements.

### 5.2.3 Concerns regarding the assessment arrangements and their impact

The most widely expressed concern relates to the non-availability of sample papers from the State Examinations Commission (SEC). As discussed in section 4.4.2, the issue is one that arises frequently in both the questionnaire and interview data. There is a clear desire on the part of the teachers concerned to – in McLaughlin’s (1987) phrase, quoted in section 2.3, “... learn the rules of the game”. (p.174) The concerns are voiced both by those who appear most happy with the changes in syllabus and those who express a significant level of disaffection with the changes. Nevertheless, when an experienced teacher such as Sinéad admits to being “... all at sea” due to uncertainty over the types of examination questions that will feature, it seems clear that the uncertainty is one factor inhibiting fuller engagement with the syllabus change. McLaughlin’s (1987) stress on the need to address compliance concerns – as discussed in section 2.3 – before a focus on the quality of implementation can be productive is a reminder of the importance of offering teachers clarity if the task of leading them through the challenges of change is to be accomplished. Clarity, as Evans (2001) reminds us, fosters trust “and ... also fosters commitment ...”. (p.213)

From a policy perspective, one would venture to suggest that it would enhance the prospects for successful implementation if sample papers were provided by the SEC contemporaneously with the introduction of new or revised syllabi into schools. It is clear from the data that many teachers have been questioned by their students on the detail of the assessment arrangements and have not always felt confident in responding to such queries. That kind of uncertainty can undermine a teacher's credibility and sap confidence. Michael admits:

... what I'll be most worried about is ruining it for them, screwing it up for them. You don't want to waste a year of someone's life, you know.

Clarity as to assessment approaches and what McLaughlin (1987) refers to as "... the legal requirements" (p.174) is, arguably, in the interests of all concerned parties. From the perspective of many of the teachers consulted for this study, it is indisputably in the interests of teachers and their students.

Given the institutional nature of curriculum discussed in section 2.2 and what Reid (1999) describes as "the need for congruence between the activities of the school and the demands of outside forces" (p.128), it is hardly surprising that concern over aspects of the assessment arrangements has an impact on teachers' approach to the syllabus. Much of this concern centres on the documents-based question, since this type of question has not been a feature of Leaving Certificate History examination papers to date. While such concerns are likely to persist until teachers develop a greater familiarity with the format over the course of a number of examinations, it may be that some of this concern can be allayed through the provision of sample questions and the exploration of the parameters and requirements of these questions at

in-service sessions. The latter strategy is due to be deployed at the in-service sessions of Autumn 2005.

It is significant that three of the nine interviewees, as discussed in section 4.4.2, refer to a mismatch between questions set in the early years of the Junior Certificate History examination and the expectations of history teachers. The criticism of Collins (1993) cited in section 1.11 is a reminder of the importance of matching examination formats with the types of practice that one is seeking to promote in the classroom. The Scottish experience recounted by McKellar (1998) and cited in section 1.7 is another reminder of the role played by examination changes in confirming and consolidating changes that teachers are undertaking in schools. All of this underlines the importance of 'getting the examination right' if teacher ownership of change is to endure. Eisner (1998a) makes the familiar case that, "How outcomes are evaluated is a major agent influencing what teachers and school administrators pay attention to". (p.173) Reid (1975) makes the crucial point that, "... when the evolution of the curriculum is studied over a long time span, it is seen that the initiation of successful change is, to a very large extent, dependent on the creation or enlistment of enduring supportive structures". (p.251) While the SEC is the body charged with the setting of examination papers, its role in the promulgation of best practice requires a close degree of collaboration with other agencies that share responsibility for that role of promulgation e.g. the History inspectorate in the Department of Education and Science and the History In-Service Team (HIST). As in other aspects of the reform of curriculum, the collaborative function may be seen as one of the keys to significant and lasting improvement in the practice of assessment.

### 5.3 Personal responsibility and organisational constraints in responding to change

We know from the literature on curriculum change that the organisation and culture of the school are key factors to be addressed in any attempt to bring about significant change. Some of the data on these aspects of the current change initiative will be considered in the light of the insights we have from the literature.

Notwithstanding such constraints, however, it is clear that individual actors respond differently to the constraining factors in their environment. Faced with the same or similar constraints, individual teachers vary in how they respond to change initiatives. Individual teachers cannot be absolved of responsibility for adapting to change. Indeed, as Fullan (2001) expresses it, "... if there is any changing to be done, *everyone is implicated*". (p.136) [Author's emphasis] The word 'adapting' is used advisedly. One would hope that we have moved on from what Fullan (2001) characterises as the 'adoption era' of the 1960s when the *introduction* of curricular innovations was expected to bring about change in the classroom and the enormous challenges of *adaptation* were blithely ignored – or, at best, seriously underestimated – by the proponents of change. What are the attributes, then, that enable certain teachers to respond more positively and more creatively to change than their fellows? This question will provide a focus as we consider conclusions from the research data that appear to corroborate findings reported in the literature.

### 5.3.1 Organisational constraints on the pursuit of curricular change

As Schlechty (1990) notes, schools are “time bound and time-conscious”. (p.72) As discussed in section 4.4.1, many of the interviewees see the ‘busyness’ of school life and the intrusions on classroom time as constraining factors in their attempts to meet the challenges of innovation and the demands of new syllabi. The constraining effect of organisational regularities is evident in Helen’s testimony where she recounts her experience of returning to school after in-service, full of new ideas and good intentions, only for the momentum to be dissipated by the demands of a busy timetable and the needs of students who demand one’s total attention. Fullan (2001) writes that, “... for most teachers, daily demands crowd out serious sustained improvements”. (p.116) These demands may be better understood if we return to Reid’s (1999) analysis of the technology, social system and theory of schools, as discussed in section 2.2.

‘Technology’ in Reid’s (1999) usage refers to, “... the means that an organization employs to get its work done” (p.126). In this sense,

... curriculum change is centrally a question about change in the technology of the school .... That is, it is mainly a process question. (p.134)

However, as Reid (1999) points out, “... technology is inseparable from social system and theory”. (p.134) Therefore, the way things are done in school depends on the way or ways in which staff (and students) get along and the ways in which they see their tasks. Reid identifies “... the propensity towards the establishment of internal equilibrium between technology, social system and theory ...”. (p.127) This propensity places practical limitations on the choices available to schools: change in



the technology may be only temporary unless this is accompanied by adjustments in the social system and theory. That these adjustments all too frequently do not take place is one of the main causes of what Sarason (1990) characterises in one of his seminal works as the “The predictable failure of educational reform”.

One of the “means that an organization employs to get its work done” is, resources. In outlining his conceptualisation of the change process, Sarason (1996) proposes, “One principle is that achieving goals is integrally related to the quantity and quality of resources that you can muster”. (p.284) In this regard, it is evident that some interviewees are in a school situation where resource allocation leaves a lot to be desired, with three reporting that there is no school library in their school. In a scenario where every student of Leaving Certificate History is now required to prepare a research study, the absence of a school library puts extra pressure on the teacher to assist students in locating appropriate materials. While other sources such as oral sources and artefacts may be available to students, the importance of the written word in historical research cannot be discounted. The student with more direct access to library books and other written materials is in a position of advantage compared to her/his peers in schools that are poorly resourced. Even where such facilities are available, access may be unequal: in Michael’s school usage is confined to class groups, whereas in Helen’s school students have greater access with the library generally available to individual students at lunchtime.

Another area where access problems occur, as discussed in section 4.4.1, is in relation to computer rooms. In a message to teachers in the first issue of the History In-Service

Team's (HIST) magazine, "Teaching History" (2005), the History inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES) have the following to say:

Modern technology has to be introduced and used in a practical, exciting and responsible way to utilise the opportunities of the new syllabus to the full. Teachers (as a recent 2004 DES survey suggests) are now comfortable with ICT and like to use it for or in the classroom. (p.3)

Unfortunately, none of the nine teachers interviewed for this study yet has usable computer facilities in their own classroom, although a number look forward to this eventuality with relish. All the interviewees appear to view the internet as a valuable resource for the research study; Fiachra, Joan and Helen emphasise its potential as a medium for the development of skills. As discussed in section 4.4.1, however, only two had brought their students to the computer room up to the time the interviews took place and there are many reports of difficulties in accessing the computer room, where programmes with a more ostensible vocational dimension tend to be given precedence. One can see quite readily here how the theory of the school has not been adjusted to accommodate the history teachers' increased appreciation of the significance of internet access for their teaching. The role of the social system is also in evidence when Rory, in describing difficulties of access, says, "... you'll find that sometimes things are block-booked, and you'll think that it's supposed to be free but they're actually down there doing stuff or whatever".

A number of other organisational constraints mentioned by interviewees recall Schlechty's (1990) emphasis on the 'time bound' nature of school life. Helen highlights the time factor involved in locating and – where necessary - editing appropriate primary sources for use in class. She also identifies other organisational

constraints on attempts at innovation e.g. occasional loss of valuable double class periods due to school closure on public holidays, the lack of timetabled time for dialogue and interaction with her colleague who also teaches Leaving Certificate History. However, her experience also brings to the fore the issue of personal responsibility in responding to initiatives for change.

### 5.3.2 Personal responsibility and the pursuit of curricular change

While there is much common ground in the organisational constraints on their endeavours, what is clear from the data is that individual teachers respond differently to their experience of these constraints. Joan is one of a number of interviewees who raises the issue of difficulties in accessing the computer room. In her case, the room is a substantial physical distance from her own classroom and is sometimes commandeered for other purposes, seen as more 'urgent', while her class is in transit to the computer room. Despite these difficulties, her usage of the computer room is greatest of all the interviewees. What is significant here is her professed interest in technology, specifically computer technology, and her conviction that the provision of computers in the classroom has the potential to positively transform the work of the history teacher in the classroom. It is clear that her use of computers in teaching is well-established and extensive: she teaches an Information Technology (IT) module to Transition Year students. What appears to make the difference here, then, are underlying beliefs, her voluntary involvement in professional development and the particular skills she has acquired as a consequence.

The constraining effects of organisational regularities in Helen's case have been cited in section 5.3.1 above. Despite such constraints, however, Helen displays a high level

of adherence to the principles and objectives of the syllabus, not least in the way she began her year's teaching with trips to the Dublin City Archives and to the school computer room to reinforce the syllabus emphases on evidence and research. Again, the strength of her underlying belief in the value of the syllabus changes is evident: "It's a much richer syllabus from the student and the teacher point of view, and I think it allows for a broader kind of view of history which I really like, so I'm very positive towards it". Another relevant trait displayed by Helen is a positive disposition towards collaboration: she had collaborated productively for years with a recently retired colleague and expresses her support for the development of a 'networking' system among history teachers. She is also clear on her professional development needs, including more contact with in-service personnel, smaller 'clusters' where individual needs can be more easily addressed, and training workshops on teaching History through IT.

A number of other interviewees show evidence of rising above organisational constraints in their efforts to pursue activities encouraged by the syllabus. For example, Rory sees the imposition of a photocopying allowance, mentioned in section 4.4.1, as problematic but adds that, "It's a process of negotiation". His use of photocopied excerpts to give students a different perspective or range of perspectives on particular historical episodes is very much in line with syllabus objectives. Fiachra and Cathy have built up modest class 'libraries', in the absence of a school library, so that students may have resources to draw on for the research study. Fiachra's comments capture the note of wearisome struggle implicit in a context where resource issues are less favourable than elsewhere:

We'll move on ... if we're given the encouragement ... more people will if they're given the encouragement, and the structures and the back-up.

Fullan (2001) reports, "At the individual level, Huberman (1988) and others have found that the psychological state of a teacher can be more or less predisposed towards considering and acting on improvements". (pp.83/84) Nias *et al.* (1992) emphasise the importance of the teachers' own role in their own learning and adaptation to change, and report four attitudes that seemed to characterise those teachers best primed for change:

They accepted that it was possible to improve, were ready to be self critical, and to recognize better practice than their own within the school and elsewhere, and they were willing to learn what had to be learned in order to be able to do what needed or had to be done. (p.73)

Joan and Helen undoubtedly evince some, if not all, of these attitudes in the course of their interviews, as do other interviewees in varying measures. For example, Fiachra, while suggesting that he does not see a great need for change in his own approach to teaching, acknowledges that, "I'm still not happy with where I'm going but there's big room there for improvement". His 'bingo' and 'labelling' activities have been adopted as a means of engaging poorly motivated students. His use of the 'enquiry-focused' approach exemplified at in-service shows a willingness to apply strategies that reflect emphases in the syllabus and are capable of engaging his students. In her first year teaching Leaving Certificate History, Cathy does not dwell unduly on her lack of experience and organisational constraints; rather, she is repeatedly self-critical and her attendance at workshops organised by the History Teachers' Association of Ireland (HTAI) shows a willingness – indeed, eagerness – to learn from colleagues.

What needs to be emphasised here is that the state of readiness of individual teachers is not necessarily fixed: Fullan notes that such a state may be permanent or changeable, and that the culture of the school in which a teacher is employed can shape an individual's psychological state for better or worse. The interplay between individual and organisation is therefore of critical importance and is given further attention in section 5.4.3. For both individual and organisation, change is a fact of school life whether we will it so or no; as Fullan (2001) puts it, "Of course, change has already entered, and the question is, How can we deal with it and turn it to our and others' advantage?" (p.123) In addressing these issues, we must turn inevitably to the professional development of teachers and the environments in which they operate.

#### **5.4 Teacher professional development and curricular change**

It is axiomatic in the literature on school change that teachers must be learners too. The data cited in the previous section suggests that those teachers are coping best with the revised syllabus who have responded positively to the changes in the revised syllabus, are already in learning mode, eager to further their own professional development, and are critically engaged with the change process. As discussed in section 2.4, Sarason (1996) emphasises the importance of teachers taking responsibility for their own learning. For this to happen on a wider scale than at present, teachers need to be provided with what Sarason (1996) describes as "contexts for productive learning". (p.367) That 's' in 'contexts' is important since we are talking about the school culture in which teachers operate but also about the wider professional community of which individual teachers are constituent parts. If these contexts are to be created and/or developed and sustained, then the twin areas of

teacher professional development and school development need to be addressed in a planned and interactive way.

#### 5.4.1 Teacher professional development as a systemic need

As discussed in section 4.4.3, Fiachra's comments on the dearth of challenges to him and his colleagues to develop his professional skills point up a systemic hiatus in the professional development of history teachers. As Fiachra identifies, such challenges only arise when there is significant syllabus change – two such occasions in his twenty-one years as a teacher – or when individuals such as himself become involved in projects such as the Schools for Active Learning initiative. The limited nature of the professional development opportunities attending the introduction of the revised syllabus is evident from the data: occasional 'cluster' meetings with up to thirty teachers in attendance (three thus far, in Spring 2004, Autumn 2004, Spring 2005, with a fourth round of meetings set for Autumn 2005, and further in-service in Spring 2006). It is hardly surprising that a number of interviewees criticise the scale of in-service provision and argue that more in-service is needed. That three of the nine interviewees missed one of the three sessions held to date is a reminder of the gap that can exist between provision and uptake.

The type of piecemeal approach to assisting teachers to cope with change delineated in the previous paragraph increasingly assumes a threadbare look. It is apposite to repeat Eisner's (1998a) stricture quoted in section 2.4: "we have greatly underestimated what it will take to improve what teachers actually do in their schools". (p.162) Stoll and Fink note "an increased orientation towards viewing professional development as a continuum". (p.155) In an Irish context, this view was

endorsed by the 1995 White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*. As a 1998 OECD report noted, “Professional development is not simply an ‘add-on’ or ‘quick fix’ to be applied when a particular problem arises. (p.58) Stoll and Fink (1996) report:

... there is considerable international evidence of an emerging professional model or paradigm of teacher learning. The one-off in-service sessions designed to impart the ‘right way’ of doing something are being replaced by more sustained, *coherent, inquiry-based programmes*. (p.155) [My emphasis]

An important way in which coherence is improved is by bringing together the development needs of teachers and their schools. This brings into focus the potential role of school-based professional development in meeting teachers’ needs. That potential has been repeatedly acknowledged in official papers and reports including the Report on the National Education Convention (1994) and the 1995 White Paper. The White Paper was forthright in stating that, “... the strong message emerging consistently from all quarters is that the approach to professional and personal development should be decentralised, school-focused and conducive to high levels of teacher participation in all aspects of the process”. In reviewing European trends in teacher in-service, Coolahan (2001) notes that, “... it is regarded as desirable that INSET should incorporate both on and off-site school dimensions”. The linkage between teacher and school development is discussed in section 5.4.3.

The emphasis on “inquiry-based programmes” points up another factor that must be borne in mind in all professional development programmes for teachers i.e. teachers are *adult* learners. Stoll and Fink (1996) report the conclusions of researchers that adult learners “are problem-centred – and want to apply what they learn to solve



specific problems”. (p.154) Fullan (2001) argues that, “It is through local problem-solving with expanded horizons that new solutions can get identified and implemented”. (p.260) One advantage of such an approach is that it provides greater opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice and to discuss that practice with colleagues. That such opportunities are welcomed by many teachers is evident in the data, where a number of interviewees refer to the opportunity to share experiences with colleagues as one of the benefits of attendance at in-service sessions. However, while at present such exchanges are necessarily ephemeral and may not extend beyond the discussion of ‘coping’ strategies, a problem-focused and ‘continuum’ model of professional development is likely to provide greater opportunities for sustained and creative sharing and deliberative resolution of the practical problems that curriculum change presents to the individual and to the school. The vital role of curriculum deliberation is discussed further in section 5.4.3.

#### 5.4.2 Teacher professional development as an expressed need

As discussed in section 4.4.3, the need for greater collaboration and sharing between teachers is one that finds expression in a number of the interviews and questionnaire returns. The potential role of the subject association – the History Teachers’ Association of Ireland (HTAI) – and the education centres in meeting these needs is also aired. The critical context in which these needs arise is brought into sharp relief by Helen’s references to the only other teacher of history at Leaving Certificate level whom she hardly sees because their ‘free’ periods do not coincide: Helen remarks that, “The only time I had a conversation with her about history was when we went to the history in-service”.

The achievement of “collaborative cultures” as discussed in section 2.4 that are voluntary (an important proviso), development-oriented and pervasive across time and space represents a mammoth task. However, it is difficult to see how this curricular initiative or any other can be sustained without movement towards that end, without – to refer again to Reid’s (1999) diagnosis of the issues – some adjustment to the social system of the school. Hargreaves (1994) cautions that genuinely collaborative cultures are neither administratively regulated nor compulsory. If professional development initiatives are to successfully promote such cultures, it is important that teachers be consulted and their articulation of their needs be heard. Tuohy (1997) argues that a comprehensive approach to teacher in-service is required, “... in which a dialogue is opened with the teachers where their real needs are heard and responded to, and the needs of the system are shared with them”. (p.17) It is hoped that studies such as the present one may lead to a greater awareness of the importance of listening carefully to teachers’ concerns.

Besides the professed need for more sharing and collaboration with colleagues, the other major need expressed in the data analysed – as discussed in section 4.4.3 – is the need for training in adapting new technologies to classroom use. Underlying the concerns expressed by interviewees in relation to Information Technology (IT) is a belief that computers have a significant role in their implementation of the revised syllabus, as mentioned in section 5.3.1. It may be that – to borrow a phrase from singer-songwriter, Bob Dylan – teachers realise that their “old road is rapidly agin’”. The limitations in the traditional role of the history teacher as transmitter of received knowledge become increasingly evident in a postmodern context, as discussed in section 1.9. The postmodern emphasis on processes of inquiry and analysis as primary

educational goals and methods provide tremendous opportunities for history teachers to define a new – or, at least, enhanced – and significant role, a role, however, for which they are not necessarily currently equipped. Tardif (1999) writes that

In relinquishing the encyclopaedic role, or rather by delegating it “under supervision” to the information and communication technologies, history teachers have to take on four different roles (as creator of learning situations, guide, mediator and model) if they wish to take an active part in constructing viable and functional knowledge on the part of their pupils. (p.47)

If teachers are to take on new roles, however, they need the kind of opportunities for professional development discussed in section 5.4.1. There is another issue, however, that also needs to be addressed. One of the dominant themes in Sarason (1996) is that, “*characteristics of individuals are always, to some extent, a reflection of the setting in which these characteristics are manifested*”. (p.211) [Author’s emphasis] Professional development of teachers, therefore, must take place in tandem with development of the institutions through which they engage in delivery of curriculum.

#### 5.4.3 Linking teacher professional development and school development

It is clear from the data that the school context in which many teachers are teaching is not necessarily conducive to curricular change. In a more general sense, of course, as Evans (2001) notes, “... all organizations have a bias towards maintaining the status quo”. (p.119) Teachers like Helen return to school after attendance at an in-service session, full of new ideas and good intentions, only to be swamped by the quotidian regularities and pressure of school life. In Helen’s case there are certain features of the school context that do appear to facilitate her attempts at innovation, such as the ease of access that students have to library and computer facilities. For other interviewees, there are constraining features, such as Cathy’s poor access to resources,

Rory's concerns about photocopying quotas and Michael's students having access to the school library only as a class unit. For all, there is the enormous difficulty of effecting change in organizations where the nature of the change process itself is, frequently, poorly understood; where attempts to change the curriculum tend to focus on the technology of the school and the practices of individual teachers; where the social system and theory are slow to change and organisational stasis results.

If this is the current nature of many schools as organisations, what is required to enhance the prospects for meaningful curricular change in schools? It is increasingly clear that there are limits to what can be achieved through a focus on professional development of teachers alone; that the school itself as the site where curriculum is practised must become a focus for development if the institutionalised curriculum is to be developed. Fullan (2001) quotes the conclusion in recent studies by Newmann *et al.* (2000) – and supported by earlier studies – that it is helpful but not sufficient to focus on the knowledge, skills and dispositions of individual staff members and that,

... there must be *organization* development because social or relationship resources are key to school improvement. Thus, schools must combine individual development with the development of *schoolwide professional communities*. (p.146) [Author's emphases]

This echoes a widespread consensus in the literature on school change that to be effective in dealing with change, a school must become a learning organisation.

Fullan (2001) argues the need for the 'reculturing' of schools to achieve this end and highlights the role of "local problem-solving" (p.260) in that process of 'reculturing'.

The emphasis on local problem solving brings into sharp focus the nature of curriculum and the means whereby curriculum can be renewed and improved.

Curriculum, as Reid (1999) proposes, "... is the possession of a community"; questions of what to teach and in what ways "are definitive of an identity that a community wants to claim for itself". (p.203) This understanding of curriculum has many implications for the ways in which we seek to bring about curricular change. Insofar as curriculum renewal seeks to bring about changes in practice, there is a need to acknowledge, as Callan (1995) argues, that

... practical problems must take cognisance of existing situations: traditions, expectations, the nature and level of resources and skills. Accordingly resolutions must be sensitive to uniqueness of context. (p.110)

If the challenges of curriculum renewal are to be "sensitive to uniqueness of context", it is difficult to see how this can be achieved without the "local problem-solving" element to which Fullan (2001) refers. Reid (1999) argues that "... curriculum making ... has to judge what gaps in interpretation it is best to leave, so that general intentions can be adapted to the circumstances of particular districts, schools and classrooms". (p.46) In an Irish context, this is an approach that has proven productive in the case of the Transition Year programme, where individual schools work out their own curriculum within a broad framework. In the process of adaptation that such work involves, the practice of curriculum deliberation – the 'method of the practical', in Reid's phrase – has an important role to play.

Reid (1999) explains the nature and purpose of deliberation as follows: "By deliberation, I mean face-to-face, problem-focused discussion involving, ideally, all those who would be affected by a decision to act, or who constitute important sources of knowledge relating to the problematic situation". (p.58) Such 'problem-focused discussion' aims to achieve an articulation and application of curriculum proposals

that has meaning and a sense of empowerment at the level of the individual school. In an Irish context, initiatives such as the Schools for Active Learning (SAL) and School and Curriculum Development (SCD) initiative have been informed by the principles of deliberation. Writing of the SCD initiative, Callan (2001) argues that, “*national proposals for curriculum and school development need local implementation supports that are sensitive to school contexts and that enable frequent personal contacts with school personnel*”. (p.10) [Author’s emphasis] The experience of the SCD initiative would suggest that promoting collaborative cultures within schools can be stimulated through the practice of teacher collaboration *across* schools in clusters that are closely located geographically. Callan (2001) notes that, “The vision of the initiative has been *the development of a system of interactive professionalism in and across the schools whose purpose is the promotion of the school as a learning community*”. (p.15) What emerges here – and the experience of the Transition Year programme may be seen as bolstering the case - is how school development, teacher development and curriculum development are inextricably linked. As Callan (2001) argues, “In a sense, curriculum development without teacher development is an empty exercise and neither can meaningfully occur in the absence of school development.” (p.10) The communicative thread that enables all three to interact in a creative and dynamic manner is the method of deliberation.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The successful implementation of the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus is neither a foregone conclusion nor a forlorn hope. Nevertheless, the scale of the challenge is considerable. Not all history teachers have yet ‘bought into’ the vision

that informs the change. Many teaching practices remain unchanged and teachers need considerable support in developing 'new competence'. New strategies need to be validated by assessment arrangements that inspire teacher confidence. Teachers need to assume personal responsibility for their role in responding to the inevitability of change. Support structures need to recognise the organisational constraints that inhibit innovation and address the social system and theory of schools as well as their 'technology'.

Ultimately, there is a need for all concerned to recognise that curriculum development cannot be addressed in isolation. Teacher development is necessary if new curriculum practices are to be embraced. Teacher development cannot be addressed in isolation since teachers operate in an environment that may either hinder or facilitate improvements in practice. Teacher development, therefore, is interlinked with school development. A system of in-service support that focuses on teacher development in isolation from the local contexts in which teachers operate can only achieve so much. Support initiatives at local level have much to contribute to improved adaptation of curricular initiatives, to boosting teacher confidence in tackling innovation and developing capacity to deal with future change. Deliberation is the method that allows all affected parties to be heard and problems to be resolved in a way that pays due deference to the needs of particular people in particular schools. While final answers or perfect solutions may not be arrived at, the "better conversations" of which Eisner (1998b, p.7) writes may better enable us to understand the 'human side of school change' and the many insights that flow from that improved understanding.

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## APPENDIX A

### **How the case studies are intended to assist students to “look at a contentious or controversial issue from more than one point of view”**

In the example that follows (Figure 1), the thematic title is ‘Ireland and the Union, 1815-1870’ and the three case studies are: ‘Private responses to Famine, 1845-1849’; ‘The campaign for Catholic Emancipation, 1823-1829’; ‘The Synod of Thurles, 1850, and the Romanisation of the Catholic Church’. Through the use of a selection of primary sources, students are expected to engage more directly with the issues and personalities of the case studies, to develop greater awareness of the raw materials on which historical interpretation is based and to develop critical skills in the analysis of different versions of past events. Each case study raises issues on which a range of contemporary viewpoints may be canvassed e.g. whether allegations of ‘souperism’ can be sustained in respect of certain private attempts to relieve famine distress; whether O’Connell’s characterisation as ‘The Liberator’ was deserved; whether the Romanising tendencies of Paul Cullen and the Synod of Thurles were the best way forward for the Catholic Church in Ireland at the time

**Figure 1**

**Topic 1: Ireland and the Union, 1815-1870**

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Case Studies</b>
<i>Society and economy</i>	The Irish countryside, 1815; economic crisis, 1815-1850; the Famine; the post-Famine economy; emigration; education; impact of the railways; industrial development in Belfast.	Private responses to Famine, 1845-1849
<i>Politics and administration</i>	Administrative and political structures under the Act of Union; O’Connell – the campaigns for Emancipation and Repeal, achievements; the Tithe War; the Poor Law; Young Ireland; government responses to Famine; electoral reform; sectarianism in politics; Fenianism; Liberal reforms.	The campaign for Catholic Emancipation, 1823-1829
<i>Culture, religion and science</i>	Developments in the creation of cultural and religious identities; the creative arts; developments in science and technology.	The Synod of Thurles, 1850, and the Romanisation of the Catholic Church

*In their study of the topic, students should become aware of the role of certain key personalities.*

*Another “key” to developing understanding will be learning to identify the main issues through a familiarity with certain key concepts.*

<b>Key Personalities</b>
Students should be aware of the contribution of the following to the developments listed under the elements above:  <i>Daniel O’Connell; Thomas Davis; Charles Trevelyan; Charles Kickham; James Stephens; Asenath Nicholson; Mother Mary Aikenhead; Cardinal Paul Cullen; William Carleton; William Dargan.</i>
<b>Key Concepts</b>
<i>The Union, sectarianism, Catholic Emancipation, physical force republicanism, laissez-faire, economic depression, dowry, landlordism, famine, nation, ultramontanism, evangelicalism.</i>

## APPENDIX B

### Questionnaire and accompanying cover note(s)

#### 1. Cover note: version 1

*30 Celbridge Abbey,  
Celbridge,  
Co. Kildare.*

Ph. 01 6271914

Mobile: 087 7744144

E-mail: [jdredge@hist.ie](mailto:jdredge@hist.ie)

30 November, 2004

Dear colleague,

You may recall that I met you at a recent in-service session presented by my colleague, Gerard O'Sullivan, and that you kindly agreed to assist me in my research by completing a questionnaire. I would be grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire at your earliest convenience and return it to me in the stamped, addressed envelope provided.

With every best wish,

Yours faithfully,

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John Dredge,  
M.Ed. class, NUI, Maynooth.

2. Cover note: version 2

*30 Celbridge Abbey,  
Celbridge,  
Co. Kildare.*

Ph. 01 6271914

Mobile: 087 7744144

E-mail: [jdredge@hist.ie](mailto:jdredge@hist.ie)

17 December, 2004

Dear colleague,

I am currently carrying out a research assignment into teachers' responses to the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus. My colleague, Gerard O'Sullivan, informs me that you have kindly agreed to assist me in my research by completing a questionnaire. I would be grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire at your earliest convenience and return it to me in the stamped, addressed envelope provided.

With every best wish,

Yours faithfully,

---

John Dredge,  
M.Ed. class, NUI, Maynooth.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire has been prepared to assist in the conduct of research into teacher reactions to the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus. Information provided will not be used for any purpose other than this research. The research is being carried out in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.Ed. degree in NUI, Maynooth. Your co-operation in filling out the questionnaire will be greatly appreciated.

**NAME OF RESPONDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Please indicate the kind of school in which you are currently teaching:**

**(a)**

- Community/comprehensive
- Voluntary secondary
- Vocational
- Fee-paying

**(b)**

- Boys only
- Girls only
- Boys and girls

**(c)**

- Less than 200 pupils
- 201-500 pupils
- 501-1000 pupils
- More than 1000 pupils

**2. Please indicate the number of teachers in your school who teach Leaving**

**Certificate History:**

I am the only teacher of Leaving Certificate History

Total number of teachers in my school who teach Leaving  
Certificate History

**3. Please indicate the level to which you have studied History as an academic subject:**

- I have studied History at 3<sup>rd</sup> level but do not have a degree in History
- I have studied History to B.A. degree level
- I have studied History to M.A. degree level
- I have studied History to Ph.D. degree level

**4. Please indicate the number of years' experience you have in teaching History at Leaving Certificate level:**

- None
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

**5. As a teacher of the revised syllabus to a 5<sup>th</sup> year class, please give an outline of the class arrangements by ticking the appropriate boxes in (a), (b), (c) and (d):**

- (a) Is the class **mixed ability?**
- higher level only?**
- ordinary level only?**

**(b) Please indicate the number of students in the class group to whom you are teaching the revised syllabus:**

- Less than 10 students
- 11-15 students
- 16-20 students
- 21-25 students
- 26-30 students



**(c) Please indicate the number of periods allocated to you to teach the revised syllabus:**

Total number of periods allocated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of minutes per period	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of double periods	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of single periods	<input type="checkbox"/>

**(d) Please indicate the frequency with which you are using the following types of resources in your teaching of the revised syllabus:**

	Every period	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Textbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-prepared notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary sources not in textbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TV, Video, DVD	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tape recorder, audiotape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet-sourced materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PowerPoint Presentations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worksheets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please specify:

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6. Some of the new features of the revised syllabus are listed below. Please indicate your views on each feature by ticking the appropriate box and giving a reason/reasons for doing so:

(a) The greater emphasis on 'doing history' e.g. working with sources, carrying out research

Strongly approve       Approve       Undecided       Disapprove

Reason(s):

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(b) The greater emphasis on social and cultural history

Strongly approve       Approve       Undecided       Disapprove

Reason(s):

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(c) The emphasis on giving attention to 'women's experiences'

Strongly approve       Approve       Undecided       Disapprove

Reason(s):

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**(d) The emphasis on developing students' critical thinking skills e.g. making judgements based on an evaluation of evidence**

Strongly approve       Approve       Undecided       Disapprove

Reason(s):

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**7. What are your views on the introduction of a second assessment component (i.e. the Research Study report) in the assessment arrangements for the revised syllabus?**

**Please tick the appropriate box and give a reason/reasons doing so.**

Strongly approve       Approve       Undecided       Disapprove

Reason(s):

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**8. What are the main challenges you are facing - and think you will face in the future - in teaching the revised syllabus?**

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**9. Please identify the supports you consider essential to assist you in your teaching of the revised syllabus:**

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**10. I plan to meet with a small number of teachers who have completed this questionnaire for the purpose of discussing the revised syllabus in a little more detail. If you would be willing to take part in this exercise, please enter your name, address and contact number below. Your co-operation will be greatly appreciated.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

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Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION**

John Dredge,  
30 Celbridge Abbey,  
Celbridge,  
Co. Kildare.

E-mail: [jdredge@hist.ie](mailto:jdredge@hist.ie)

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### Areas of focus for interviews with teachers

- School context e.g. class size, whether teaching mixed ability, timetabling arrangements, whether only teacher in school teaching Leaving Certificate History, resources available to you
- Resources and approaches being used in the teaching of the revised syllabus
- Interviewee's views on the main challenges faced in teaching the revised syllabus
- Interviewee's views on selected features of the revised syllabus
  - the greater emphasis on 'doing' history
  - the wider focus on a range of human activity in the past
- Interviewee's views on the available supports for teachers of the syllabus and identification of other supports needed

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- School context e.g. class size, whether teaching mixed ability, timetabling arrangements, whether only teacher in school teaching Leaving Certificate History
  - What proportion of students in the year group are studying the revised syllabus?
  - What do you think of the timetabling arrangements for Leaving Certificate History in your school?
  - What degree of collaboration is there between yourself and your colleagues, specifically in relation to Leaving Certificate History?
  - How well resourced do you think the school is to support you in your work as a LC History teacher?
  
- Approaches being used in the teaching of the revised syllabus
  - What textbook(s) are you using in teaching the revised syllabus?
  - Could you describe how you use the textbook in class?
  - Could you describe for me any approaches you are using – inside or outside of the classroom – that do not involve the use of the textbook?
  - Could you describe for me some of the ways in which you use primary sources in teaching the revised syllabus?
  
- Interviewee's views on the impact of selected features of the revised syllabus:
  1. the greater emphasis on 'doing' history
  2. the wider focus on a range of human activity in the past
  - What do you think are the implications for students of the greater emphasis on the use of documents?
  - What do you think are the implications for teachers?
  - What are your views on the likely impact of the Research Study as an integral part of the course for all students?
  - What practical challenges does it create for you as a teacher?
  - What impact is the wider focus on a range of human activity in the past having in the classroom?
  
- Interviewee's views on the main challenges faced in teaching the revised syllabus
  - What changes in your approach to teaching seem to be required by the revised syllabus?
  - In what ways is this syllabus more challenging to teach than the previous one?
  - What aspects of the revised syllabus make you feel most under pressure or cause most anxiety?
  - What do you think of the assessment arrangements for the revised syllabus?

- Interviewee's views on the available supports for teachers of the syllabus e.g. in-service sessions, History In-Service Team (HIST) website
  - What are your views on the in-service arrangements for teachers of the revised syllabus?
  - What did you find most beneficial about these in-service days?
  - What are your views on the use of a website as a means of offering support to teachers of the revised syllabus?
  - What kind of supports do you think are most important to teachers when a new syllabus is being introduced into schools?
  
- Conclusion
  - Before finishing, could I ask you whether you want to say anything else about your response to and experience of the revised syllabus which has not been covered in our conversation so far?
  - If I felt the need to seek further clarification or elaboration of any of the points we've covered today, would you be agreeable to meeting with me again?

## APPENDIX D

### Letter sent to interviewees prior to interview (sample)

*30 Celbridge Abbey,  
Celbridge,  
Co. Kildare.*

Ph. 01 6271914

M: 087 7744144

E-mail: [jdredge@hist.ie](mailto:jdredge@hist.ie)

[Date indicated] March, 2005

Dear [Interviewee's Christian name],

Further to our telephone conversation last evening, the following are the areas on which I hope to focus at our meeting in your school on [Date indicated]:

- School context e.g. class size, whether teaching mixed ability, timetabling arrangements, whether only teacher in school teaching Leaving Certificate History, resources available to you
- Approaches being used in the teaching of the revised syllabus
- Your views on the main challenges faced in teaching the revised syllabus
- Your views on selected features of the revised syllabus
  - the greater emphasis on 'doing' history
  - the wider focus on a range of human activity in the past
- Your views on the available supports for teachers of the syllabus and identification of other supports needed

I look forward to meeting with you at 9.30 a.m. on [Date indicated].

Yours sincerely,

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John Dredge,  
M. Ed. Class, 2003-2005,  
NUI, Maynooth.



## APPENDIX E

### Summary of questionnaire returns

**1. Please indicate the kind of school in which you are currently teaching:**

Community/comprehensive	7	Boys only	5	> 200	2
Voluntary secondary	9	Girls only	5	201-500	8
Vocational	1	Boys & girls	10	501-1000	10
Fee-paying	3			1000 +	0

**2. Please indicate the number of teachers in your school who teach Leaving Certificate History:**

Number of teachers in school	Number of respondents
1	3
2	10
3	3
4	1
5	2
7	1

**3. Please indicate the level to which you have studied History as an academic subject:**

Do not have a degree in History	0
B.A.	15
M.A.	4
Ph.D.	1

**4. Please indicate the number of years' experience you have in teaching History at Leaving Certificate level:**

None	2
1-5 years	3
6-10 years	2
11-15 years	3
More than 15 years	10

**5. As a teacher of the revised syllabus to a 5<sup>th</sup> year class, please give an outline of the class arrangements by ticking the appropriate boxes in (a), (b), (c) and (d):**

**(a) Is the class mixed ability / higher level only / ordinary level only?**

Mixed ability	15
Higher level only	2
Ordinary level only	2

**(b) Please indicate the number of students in the class group to whom you are teaching the revised syllabus:**

Less than 10	6
11-15	5
16-20	4
21-25	3
26-30	3

Note: One respondent is teaching two class groups.

**(c) Please indicate the number of period allocated to you to teach the revised syllabus:**

		Number of respondents
Total number of periods	5	17
	4	2
	3	1
Number of minutes per period	45	1
(Left blank by 2 respondents)	40	14
	35/40	3
Number of double periods	2	9
(Left blank by 1 respondent)	1	7
	0	3
Number of single periods	5	3
	4	2
	3	4
	2	1
	1	10

**(d) Please indicate the frequency with which you are using the following types of resources in your teaching of the revised syllabus:**

Resource	Every period	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Textbook	8	9	3	0
Self-prepared notes	5	8	5	0
Primary sources not in textbook	0	7	9	1
TV, Video, DVD	0	2	12	2
Tape recorder, audiotape	0	0	6	8
Internet-sourced materials	0	2	13	2
Internet in the classroom	0	2	3	10
PowerPoint Presentation	0	2	1	12
Worksheets	0	8	8	3

**6. Some of the new features of the revised syllabus are listed below. Please indicate your views on each feature by ticking the appropriate box and giving a reason/reasons for doing so:**

New feature	Strongly approve	Approve	Undecided	Disapprove
Greater emphasis on 'doing history'	13	7	0	0
Greater emphasis on social & cultural history	7	9	3	1
Emphasis on experiences of women	5	6	9	0
Emphasis on developing students' critical thinking skills	15	5	0	0

**7. What are your views on the introduction of a second assessment component (i.e. the Research Study report) in the assessment arrangements for the revised syllabus. Please tick the appropriate box and give a reason/reasons for doing so.**

Strongly approve	Approve	Undecided	Disapprove
10	5	4	0

**8. What are the main challenges you are facing - and think you will face in the future - in teaching the revised syllabus?**

Challenges identified include:

Adjusting one's teaching to reflect the increased emphases on research, evidence and critical skills (mentioned by 4 respondents); getting improved access to resources (mentioned by 4 respondents); mixed-ability teaching (mentioned by 3 respondents); teaching students with low levels of literacy (mentioned by 3 respondents); helping a classful of students with their research study (mentioned by 3 respondents); coping with the uncertainty created by the non-availability of sample papers (mentioned by 3 respondents); need to develop IT skills (mentioned by 2 respondents); learning to 'pace' oneself, in accommodating the new emphases (mentioned by 2 respondents).

**9. Please identify the supports you consider essential to assist you in your teaching of the revised syllabus:**

Supports considered essential include:

On-going in-service (mentioned by 8 respondents); greater clarity regarding examination through issuing of sample papers (mentioned by 8 respondents); continuing access to online resources for revised syllabus (mentioned by 6 respondents) access to the internet in the classroom (mentioned by 5 respondents); improved resource allocation to schools (mentioned by 4 respondents); training in classroom use of IT (mentioned by 2 respondents).

**10. I plan to meet with a small number of teachers who have completed this questionnaire for the purpose of discussing the revised syllabus in a little more detail. If you would be willing to take part in this exercise, please enter your name, address and contact number below. Your co-operation will be greatly appreciated.**

Name: 17 respondents indicated a willingness to meet with me for the stated purpose.

## APPENDIX F

### Summary of interview data on note-taking, electronic media and school outings

#### Note-taking

Six of the nine interviewees identify note taking by students as an integral part of their current regime in teaching the revised syllabus. In two of these cases (Michael, Sinéad), the teacher prepares notes for the students' guidance and the notes are dictated to students in class. In the other four cases, there is a greater element of discretion on the students' part and much of the note taking is in the form of annotations to textbooks.

In two cases (Fiachra, Joan) it is evident that the training of students to take notes in different formats is part of the normal classroom routine. The formats mentioned include 'spider' diagrams, timelines and 'mind maps' (as popularised by Tony Buzan). Joan refers to a 'concept mapping' computer package that she plans to use with her class. She argues that clear thinking is necessary in order to develop critical thinking, and that note taking is a skill that enhances clarity of written expression and, thereby, clarity of thought.

#### Use of electronic media in the classroom

The only electronic media currently available to interviewees are television sets with accompanying video or DVD player. Only three interviewees had used such equipment up to the time of the interviewee. A fourth had plans to do so in the near future.

Reference is made to two television series that have been found useful. Marie mentions *The Nazis: A Warning from History*; Joan mentions *Seven Ages*, which deals with twentieth century Irish history. Marie describes using film clips to explore the concept of 'propaganda'; Joan outlines a critical approach which is akin to her work on written documents, as described in section 4.3.2.

#### Class outings

Up to the time of the interviews, two interviewees had brought their class on an outing or outings related to their history course. Sinéad had taken her class to the GAA museum in Croke Park and to Kilmainham Jail on a one-day outing. On another occasion, she had taken them to see a film, *A Very Long Engagement*, which is set during World War I. Helen had taken her class to the Dublin City Archives as part of a conscious strategy to start off the year on a different footing and one that would highlight the emphasis on historical evidence.

Of the other interviewees, only one, Joan, had an outing planned; along with a colleague, she was planning a trip to Poland which would focus on the concentration camp at Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto. Philomena makes reference to the difficulty of arranging outings in an increasingly busy school schedule.

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