
ESRC Research Project on *Education and Nationalism: The Discourse of Education Policy in Scotland*

Working Paper 1

EDUCATION AND NATIONALISM: EDUCATION POLICY AND THE SNP GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

The paper outlines and examines key developments in education policy under the SNP government. Education policy has a particular salience for the exploration of post-devolution policy-making by a SNP government. Education in Scotland has played a particularly strong role historically in the shaping and support of national identity (McCrone, 1992; Paterson, 1997), as one of the 'holy trinity' (Paterson 2003) of institutions – Law and the Church being the others – that encapsulated Scotland's 'stateless nationhood' from 1707-1999.

The new situation where Labour no longer holds power in Scotland may increase divergence in this key area of policy: or at least generate pressure on the Scottish government to signal more clearly a position that is independent of policy direction in England. A key factor is the place of constructions of the 'nation' and 'nationalism' and their representation by the Scottish government in the development of policy including education policy. The SNP is committed to the concept of an independent nation, and must translate the importance it places on this into a legislative programme for education, and it is also simultaneously attempting to project a new, inclusive nationalism (MacAskill, 2004; Mitchell, 1996; SNP 2007) while positioning 'smarter Scotland' (Salmond 2007) within the wider context of transnational pressures for conformity with global policy agendas. Key themes such as the 'public' nature of schooling, knowledge economy and the skills agenda are critically assessed in order to explore the development of education policy under the SNP government. The wider implications of the SNP government's approach to education policy for post devolution territorial politics and governance are also considered.

Introduction

Education is an increasingly significant arena of social policy, with growing links to policy on health, crime and also to economic policy. In this paper, we offer a preliminary assessment of the place of education policy in the new Scottish government's 'project' of modernised nationalism, by looking at the ways in which education policy may emerge as a mixture of conventional economic and individualising policy (to develop skills and personalise learning, for example) alongside new inflections of nationalism and national identity. Education/learning is required to create 'new' Scots who are 'better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation' and young people are expected to be and to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens' (Hyslop 2008).

In the research project that we are just beginning¹ we explore how these aims reflect transnational pressures created by an emergent global policy field in education (Ozga and Lingard 2007) and consider to what extent they may be aligned with discourses of nationalism and national identity in education policy. The speed and scope of the global agenda can be exaggerated, and attention to the specifics of the interaction of global education policy change and national/local policies and politics (Dale 1999; Ozga and Lingard 2007) suggests that national forces remain highly significant in mediating, translating and interrogating pressures for policy convergence. Our interest is in the capacity of The Scottish government (TSG) to exploit the possibilities of political nationalism understood as 'the crystallisation of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing' (Gellner 2006:42) in a field where policy agendas are increasingly globalised.

First, we provide some background on the new political situation in Scotland following the formation of the first nationalist government.

The Political Context

Following the May 2007 elections to the Scottish Parliament there was significant change to the electoral and political landscape of Scottish politics. Political devolution had delivered the first SNP administration in the Scottish Parliament and at the same time local government changed dramatically due to the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV). Politics in Holyrood and beyond had entered a new phase. For the first time in its 73 year history, the SNP had power at national (Scottish level) and also had significantly enhanced its electoral position at local government level. However, while the election of Alex Salmond as First Minister represents a significant achievement for the SNP it is less clear how the party will respond to the challenges of governing. Initially the party leadership response to the election results was to seek to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. However, negotiations between the two parties did not progress beyond preliminary talks. The SNP's stance on independence proved to be a sticking point. The SNP decided, therefore, to form a minority administration. In its day to day actions arguably the SNP government has not acted as a minority administration. The legislative programme has perhaps been less ambitious but as

¹ This is an ESRC funded project 'Education and Nationalism: The Discourse of Education Policy in Policy' (RES-000-22-2893).

Lynch (2008; 92) argues, 'in many senses, this government has not appeared like a minority and has not staked that much on legislation as opposed to actually governing.'

The issue of independence is-obviously-a defining factor for the SNP and the party's overarching aim of achieving independence for Scotland is the backdrop against which we seek to study education policy in the context of the day to day practicalities of governing, and the degree of support available to the SNP within the parliament, in local government and across the country. Post 2007, questions have been asked about the relationship between support for the SNP on the one hand and on the other support for independence. Research on elections in Scotland before 2007 demonstrates that those who support the party do not necessarily support independence (McCrone and Paterson, 2002). Levels of support for the SNP and the Labour Party in the May 2007 election were very close. The SNP secured one more parliamentary seat than Labour and in percentage terms 1% more in the constituency vote and 2% more in the party list vote (Herbert et al, 2007).

This closeness should not lead to underestimation of the significance of the 2007 vote for the SNP. The party had long sought to make inroads into the central belt of Scotland and more generally to compete with Labour under FTPT. Last year's election to the Scottish Parliament was the most successful for the party since 1999 and even outdid its short lived successes of the mid 1970s. In both constituency and party list support for the SNP rose by almost ten per cent from its performance in 2003 (Denver et al, 2007). It appears that those who supported independence before the May 2007 election were more likely to support the SNP. According to Curtice (2008) three quarters of those who supported independence supported the SNP in 2007 compared to just fifty per cent in 2003.

Public Policy, Party identity and ideology: the conundrum of nationalism

The constitutional issue provides an important backdrop to public policy debates in Scotland today (Scottish Executive, 2007; Commission on Scottish Devolution, 2008) and there are also important analytical questions to be asked about how nationalism can be used as a resource rather than becoming a problem in the development of domestic public policy. For the first time the SNP must translate its vision of nationalism into a political programme for action. How is nationalism understood in this context and what are its historical antecedents? How can we understand the development of territorial interests in policy development? What role do global economic, social and cultural interests play in policy ?

Political nationalism has long been associated with arguments about how Scotland should be governed. The establishment of the Scottish Office in the late nineteenth century was intended both to offer administrative efficiencies and also as a response to nationalist concerns about the handling of Scottish issues in Westminster (Hanham, 1969; Mitchell, 1990). As the twentieth century progressed and as the SNP developed into a political party arguments about self determination become more evident in political debate (Finlay, 1994). The importance of the constitutional question to the SNP led to debates especially from the late 1960s about the party's role in Scottish and also in British politics (Miller, 1981). How did nationalism shape the party and was it a single issue party? Could it be better understood as a pressure group rather than a political party? Today the party finds itself in government in

the devolved Scottish Parliament and facing all the complexity of negotiating an agenda from the position of a minority administration. It is required to develop and sustain a political programme for government in the devolved parliament but at the same time it must demonstrate commitment to advancing its wider constitutional goal of independence for Scotland.

Nationalism, in this context, is a resource, but a volatile one. When we come to consider how nationalism is being, or may be translated into policy action we must not only look to the Scottish Parliament but we must bear in mind that it must articulate nationalism in the context of the (increasingly) asymmetrical UK state. Reliance on often informal arrangements means that devolution in Scotland is very much an on-going process rather than an event. Indeed, the new minority SNP government has argued that more formal mechanisms and relationships need to develop (Dinwoodie, 2008). Interdependencies between the layers of government are becoming increasingly apparent (Arnott, 2008) and this has particular implications for the articulation of nationalism if the SNP is to avoid an impression of lack of realism or nostalgia for less interdependent, fast and risky policy environments (Cerny 1997). Placing policy including the articulation of independence in an international context has become increasingly significant to the SNP. Since the late 1980s the party has sought to highlight Scotland's position in international terms but how does a nationalist administration respond to these interdependencies which extend to the global arena? How does the SNP develop ideology and strategies that meet electoral pressures while also offering constructive responses to the challenges of globalisation and the complexities of multi-level governance?

The party arguably does not start from a coherent base: different and sometimes contradictory ideological positions have marked its development (Lynch, 2002). Now that the SNP are in power it could be that tensions will become sharper as policies have to be translated into action. In the devolved government the SNP wishes to be seen as competent and popular to build upon its electoral support but at the same time it seeks to build stronger support for independence. Therefore how the 'nation' is constructed and translated in political action by the SNP Government is crucial to its future. It could be, for instance, that some 'national' (Scottish) interests have to be articulated and operationalised at UK level (Arnott & Farrell, 2008), while arguments about self determination and independence also require the representation and definition of the nation and national interests at an international level. In the domestic context, and especially within the Scottish Parliament, the SNP has presented itself as fit to govern, as a 'safe pair of hands'. This connects to their narrow electoral margin, and to their strategy of presenting devolution as an incomplete and messy process that requires completion through independence. Their tactics are influenced by the asymmetric nature of devolution in the UK which has produced an unstable policy environment. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament was met with high expectations (Mooney & Poole, 2004) but more recent survey research has indicated more cynicism about its ability to deliver policy change (Bromley et al, 2005; Scottish Government, 2008).

Significantly though how political institutions associated with territorial governance are viewed by the public is distinct from their assessment of the policy capacity of these

institutions. There is considerable trust in the devolved institutions in Scotland. Research by the Scottish Social Survey has revealed a twenty per cent increase (from 51% in 2006 to 71% in 2007) in those trusting the Scottish government to act in Scotland's interests. Only 35% trusted the UK Government to act in Scotland's interests (Scottish Government, 2008). However, the public in Scotland seemed less convinced about the Scottish Parliament's ability to achieve policy change (Bromley et al, 2005; Curtice, 2008). That the high expectations of the Scottish Parliament have not been met has not led the public to question its existence but rather survey evidence over the past three years or so has consistently shown support for additional powers. Support for independence has fluctuated. The task facing the SNP government is to move the political debate on from support for additional powers within the UK to support for full independence.

In considering this task one of the most serious challenges for the SNP post devolution is how nationalism should be projected and encouraged to evolve. Should the party work to build trust in the devolved Scottish Parliament or should it attempt to use national sentiment to challenge the current constitutional arrangements? The former strategy has largely been adopted but this choice is far from straightforward. The Scottish government and Scottish Parliament are required to advance territorial interests. On occasions this will involve co-operating with the Westminster government² but on other occasions it could lead to tension especially when contesting the boundaries between reserved and devolved areas. Moreover these territorial interests will not be confined to the UK. The globalisation of policy requires the Scottish government to translate territorial interests in an international context. The particular challenge for SNP strategy is that it must demonstrate what is possible under the current powers of the Scottish Parliament while also demonstrating what would be possible in an independent sovereign state. Independence in the era of globalisation leads to another set of challenges.

Scotland and the International

The international dimension of the SNP's self-presentation is obviously linked to issues of nationalism and national identity. Here they promote themselves as representing and advancing Scottish interests at UK level and internationally. Europe is an especially important arena for the SNP given its slogan of 'Independence in Europe' and its history of using Europe as a reference point. Since 1988 the SNP had sought to respond to UK and trans-national developments by locating its policies, including Scotland's future relationship to the UK in an international as well as domestic context, and by referencing 'outward' (Lynch, 2002; Murkens et al, 2002). Especially in relation to the EU, Brown, McCrone and Paterson (1998) argue that after a period of Scottish 'Euroscepticism', the growing significance of the EU was an important factor in the politics of self-government between 1979 (the beginning of the Thatcherite rule) and 1997 (the devolution of the Scottish Parliament). They point to four aspects: first, Europe was attractive to the Scottish National Party as an alternative framework of external security and trading opportunities; second, the

² For example prior to the Queen's Speech in November 2007 the SNP government was involved in discussions with relevant Whitehall departments about repercussions of measures included in the speech for devolved areas.

EU favoured subsidiarity, an argument in favour of devolution in the UK; third, instead of England, Europe became the source of modernising and progressive ideas; and lastly, in the years of the tough conservative government, Europe seemed to favour a welfare-state which was very much under attack in Westminster. Hearn suggests that Scottish nationalism was reinforced by Europeanization because 'the steady growth of the European Union has both eaten into the sovereignty of the British state, and made the viability within the EU seem more plausible, and Scottish independence less isolationist' (2000; 5). European reference points for the SNP have included the Nordic countries, especially in relation to connecting modernised nationalism with social democratic policies. In his acceptance speech on re-election as SNP National Convenor in September 2004 Alex Salmond highlighted the relationship between 'nationalism' and a 'new vision of social democracy in Scotland' (SNP, 2004) and under his leadership the party has brought 'social democracy' to the fore of policy development.

Since coming to power, referencing 'outward' has also increased considerably, although foreign policy is, of course, a reserved area, there is a very conscious positioning of Scotland in relation to 'the arc of prosperity' in Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Ireland and Finland. There is an international framework for government policy that stresses its link to economic policy but also 'the need to place Scotland as a responsible nation and partner on the world stage' (Scottish Government 2008b). International activities are designed, among other things, to 'manage Scotland's reputation as a distinctive global identity; an independent-minded and responsible nation at home and abroad and confident of its place in the world' (Scottish Government 2008b).

A key factor here is comparison, and the focus on selected small, strong nation-states as a way of building a particular kind of identity (economically strong and social-democratic). The SNP has since the late 1980s sought to promote a form of nationalism which blends political nationalism (self determination) with social and cultural forms of nationalism (Lynch, 2002; Murkens et al, 2002). The strategy since entering government seems to be more focused on constant comparison and reference outward. The frequent references to selected states serves to create an image of Scotland among them, looking like them, and with the same levels of prosperity and social cohesion. These nations also serve to displace the historical 'other' of England, that has been the reference point for so long-either in terms of 'difference' or as a dominant, inescapable influence. This positioning of Scotland through selective comparison serves to open up questions about national identity without engaging with complex and volatile references to the past (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2006), but rather depict an 'imagined community' of the future.

These comparator countries are often frequently referenced in the specific area of education policy, where the uses of nationalism and its attempted exploitation in relation to education policy (Green, 1997; Hearn, 2006; Phillips and Daugherty, 2001; Schleicher, 1993) is not straightforward.

Education Policy

Let us now turn to the issue of education, and the place of education in the SNP's social policy agenda. We argue that education is especially important as an arena where nationalism is invoked as a resource for policy. However national capacity to determine education policy is very vulnerable to global agendas of policy change. The key 20th Century idea of the relationship between education and nationhood was that 'education is, by definition, the space for the construction of national identity' (Nóvoa, 1996 p 46) That close bond has been loosened in the 21st century, as education is required to serve a globally-ordered knowledge economy and enable the development of a knowledge society, transcending national frontiers (Lingard and Ozga 2007). The consequence is increased homogeneity in policy in education, as Ball (1998) has put it, the emergence of 'big' policies for a 'small world', or of a global education policy field, dominated by transnational agencies (like OECD) and not attentive to national traditions and contexts. Yet the speed and scope of the global agenda can be exaggerated, and attention to the specifics of the interaction of global education policy change and national/local policies and politics (Dale 1998, Lingard and Ozga 2007) suggests that national forces may remain highly significant in mediating, translating and interrogating pressures for policy convergence. Tensions may develop, however, between the social and cultural expression of nationalism in education and the strong economically-driven agendas for 'modernisation' and lifelong learning that are promoted by transnational agencies, including the OECD and the EU, and that have been highly influential in UK policy making.

Education policy has a particular salience for the exploration of post-devolution policy-making by a SNP government, and its attempted mobilisation of nationalism. Education in Scotland has played a particularly strong role historically in the shaping and support of national identity (McCrone, 1992), as one of the 'holy trinity' (Paterson 1994) of institutions- Law and the Church being the others- that encapsulated Scotland's 'stateless nationhood' from 1707-1999. As a policy area education has featured in analysis of policy within the UK both before and since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 (Adams and Schmucker 2006; Arnott and Raab, 2000; Arnott, 2005; Keating, 2002, 2005; Raffe and Spours, 2007). Research on post devolution education policy before the SNP government was formed highlighted pressures for both convergence and divergence (Arnott et al, 2003; Arnott 2005; Humes and Bryce, 2003; Raffe 2005). Convergent pressure followed from the fact that from 1999 until May 2007 the Labour Party was in power in Scotland and at the UK level. From the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 until the second Scottish Parliament elections in May 2007 the Labour Party was the lead partner in a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. As a consequence there were common themes in education policy in both Scotland and England-themes such as choice, privatisation and standards (Arnott, 2005; Croxford and Raffe, 2007). These were sometimes inflected rather differently and as a result policy texts sometimes conveyed an uneasy blending of rather divergent approaches: for example the 'Ambitious Excellent Schools' programme (Scottish Executive, 2004) echoed English based reforms in its support for diversity but within a framework that stressed the centrality of the principle of comprehensive provision.

Education policy thus provides a rich resource of enquiry into social policy development for two important and related analytical reasons; firstly the traditional and historically-grounded symbiotic relationship between education and nationalism which the SNP minority administration seek to both exploit and which they also need to manage and modernise. Secondly the Scottish government's positioning in relation to education/learning policy in Europe and beyond after the Lisbon Treaty (2000), along with the UK government's strong advocacy of policy driven by Knowledge economy discourses. To what extent will policy follow the economy, and will economy-driven education policy risk alienating those who link distinctive education practices with national identity?

That the SNP government is focusing primarily on the economy is clear from its policy priorities and pronouncements since taking office. The Government's policy priorities may be seen in the following statement:

'The central purpose of the Scottish government is to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through sustaining sustainable economic growth. The Government's economic strategy is supported by five strategic objectives-to make Scotland (1) wealthier and fairer (2) smarter (3) healthier (4) safer and stronger (5) greener' (Scottish Government 13/05/08)

Within that framework, education policy seems to be following the global trends of the 'knowledge economy' and skills agenda, as set out by the First Minister in his presentation of the strategic objectives of the new government to the Scottish Parliament (Salmond, 2007). Here the need for an education and skills strategy to support economic development is presented quite clearly. This argument is also present in the Scottish Government's consultation paper on independence (Scottish Executive, 2007), in the Scottish Government's debate on 'Smarter Scotland' and in the first meeting of the new Education, Lifelong Learning Scottish Parliament Committee. Here the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Fiona Hyslop outlined the philosophy underpinning the new administration's education strategy (Hyslop 2007a; 2007b). TSG has 5 key policy themes in education: early intervention; supporting vulnerable children and families; improving learning experience in schools; developing skills and lifelong learning; promoting excellence and innovation. All of these policy themes, says Hyslop, are to be viewed in relation to need to promote sustained economic growth.

Economic growth is seen to be hampered by low attainment rates post-16, as many young people leave school at 16 or 17 with low levels of attainment, and among those who stay on attainment levels remain low. These poor performances are strongly linked to social class, as is unemployment. Scotland has one of the highest proportions in any OECD country of 15-19 year-olds not in education, employment or training (formerly the NEET group, now designated MCMC or 'more choices, more chances'). Among the policy directions taken by TSG to date is the redirection of resources towards early years interventions, in order to more directly address the links between underachievement/low attainment and poverty, and the government appears persuaded by international research on the effectiveness of early intervention (Sinclair, 2007). So the overarching policy agenda for skills in service of the economy is shaped by the 'fairer' part of the wealthier and fairer objective towards improving

opportunities for children and young people whose education/learning opportunities are reduced by their socio-economic circumstances. This policy direction mirrors established policy in the Nordic states that act as the model and reference point.

So far, this shift towards the early years is the most distinctive element in policy in education. Elsewhere, TSG appears to be moving along the same general lines of development as were operating under the previous administration. In particular, the policy directions of the Curriculum Review, as expressed in the Curriculum for Excellence, seem to be accepted and are developing with little sign of change. The CfE was initiated by the previous administration in response to policy concerns that education in Scotland was too focused on academic attainment and did not develop a range of capacities. These were specified as enabling children to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' and the overall design of CfE encourages the need for greater diversity within a unified framework of qualifications that prevents socially divided pathways or tracks from emerging (Raffe *et al.*, 2007). In its embrace of personalised learning and concerns to build learner's confidence, enterprise and range of intelligences CfE can be interpreted as speaking the language of the Lisbon treaty and of the OECD in promoting lifelong learning and attitudinal change.

Yet CfE could be argued to be challenging some traditional aspects of Scottish education, that have been key to its distinctive identity, and hence to national identity. As mentioned earlier, the Scottish education system has been academic in character, but also democratic (Paterson, 2000). The idea of the 'democratic intellect' and the 'lad o'pairs' express the desire to offer academic opportunities to all those capable of benefiting from them, whatever their social circumstances. Thus struggles for greater equality in Scottish education have been for access to the mainstream, traditional academic curriculum, not attempts to develop alternative curricular design or content as in some other countries (Paterson, 2003). CfE, then, carries the modernising agenda of new pedagogies and content designed to foster a range of abilities into a context shaped by very different ideas about how to best use education to challenge inequalities. The economic priorities of TSG are likely to give this agenda further impetus.

Some indication of TSG's strategy for winning over the education establishment in Scotland to the new agenda may be available from its handling of the recent OECD Review of Scottish Education. In 2007 a team appointed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reviewed the *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* (OECD, 2007).³ The review had been requested by the previous Scottish administration which wanted to benchmark Scotland against international standards (Scottish Executive, 2004). This is an international trend in education policy and further underlines the ways in which comparison becomes a form of policy making in itself. (Grek *et al* 2008). The review team was asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Scottish school education, with particular reference to pupils not achieving their full potential. It was also asked to comment on current reforms, in particular CfE, and to offer international insights from which Scotland

³ The team comprised Richard Teese (Australia, rapporteur), Simo Juva (Finland), Frances Kelly (New Zealand) and Dirk Van Damme (Belgium). It was supported by Gregory Wurzburg, Karin Zimmer, Deborah Fernandez and Sabrina Leonarduzzi of the OECD Secretariat.

might draw (Raffe 2008). The team visited Scotland for two weeks in March 2007, shortly before the May election and the formation of a new SNP government; it visited four local authorities and heard from a range of stakeholders. The review was also informed by a briefing document prepared by the Scottish Executive (2007), and by international comparative data including the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), as well as some education research produced in Scotland.

The review team declared themselves 'impressed by the breadth of vision and commitment to both high standards and social inclusiveness in the concept documents of a Curriculum for Excellence' (p.16). The Review report commends CfE's aspiration to diversify and broaden the methods, contexts and outcomes of learning. It did however, appear to differ from CfE in its emphasis on the problems of social inequalities and the role of schooling (especially secondary schooling) in addressing these. The Curriculum Review Group which proposed Curriculum for Excellence saw curricular, pedagogical and organisational changes in schools as 'means to achieve the broader purposes of education, to pursue national goals, to meet global challenges and to exploit new opportunities in the educational process itself' and 'not *primarily* as a means to address social inequalities' (Raffe 2008). The OECD reviewers saw the traditional academic curriculum, not as providing access to high quality education for a majority of the population, but as a barrier to equality. As they put it:

'Scotland presents a paradox. It performs at a very high level on PISA tests-both in overall standard and in equity. But viewed from inside-in terms of national tests and qualifications-it is marked by inequalities' (OECD 2007)

These inequalities, they argued, were to do with the nature of Scottish schooling in general-with such features as organisation, curriculum, culture and pedagogy, which they saw as offering unequal opportunities for learning and engagement for students from different backgrounds. The academic ethos and character of Scottish schools produces inequalities, they suggested, because it is not equally accessible and attractive to learners, and because it offers little incentive to pupils lacking appropriate social and cultural (as well as economic) capitals.

Their remedies strongly support the modernising agenda, and challenge the idea of the democratic tradition, based on the primacy of the academic, in Scotland's schooling. However responses to their recommendations from the TSG have been rather muted. The report seems to be being used to endorse policy developments that the Government claims were already in process-for example the growth of decentralisation through the Concordat with the local authorities. The debate on the review in the Parliament focused largely on its endorsement of the system and the positive verdict that 'Scotland is a well-schooled nation by international standards'. In this way, TSG may avoid a more extended debate on the extent to which the Scottish tradition in education is being displaced by internationally-driven agendas.

Some Concluding Points

Under the new government, education policy in Scotland seems so far to be working with global economic references rather than local, cultural ones. This perhaps reflects the need of

the minority government to display its competence and modernising zeal in an area where there is a good deal of invocation of 'shaping myths' (McPherson and Raab 1988), and a history of interconnections between schooling and the defence of national identity against the larger neighbour. It also, of course, reflects the homogenising force of the neo-liberal agenda for education as promoted through transnational organisations; education policy increasingly 'travels' (Ozga and Jones 2006) and the principles of decentralisation, deregulation, international benchmarking, capacity building and responsabilisation (Gewirtz 2005) are everywhere to be found. Explaining the vision of an independent Scotland also requires that the 'nation' is constructed through positive international comparisons. However although the tensions between shaping principles of education in Scotland and modernising agendas may be suppressed, they are also being managed through a process of international identification with selected countries, whose economic growth is a key factor, but which are often also distinguished by social democratic politics that is reflected in school organisation and culture. It is perhaps by references outwards TSG will maintain its modernising agenda, and avoid the dangers of invoking nationalist sentiment of a more traditional nature. This perhaps illustrates the power of comparison, not only as a vehicle for policy making in education, but as a way of creating an 'imaginary' of Scotland.

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