

Chapter 2

Assessment Policy Enactment in Education Systems: A Few Reasons to Be Optimistic

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Abstract This chapter presents the topic addressed in Part I: *Assessment Policy Enactment in Education Systems*. It starts from the position that while there is a lot to be learned about policy enactment, there are several reasons to be optimistic. It ties together the common policy challenges and directions faced by different education systems around the world before introducing new perspectives on policy implementation. The concept of co-regulation is the explanatory framework used to describe possible variations in models of policy implementation and to account for the challenges met by both policy designers and enactors. Several recommendations resulting from the evidence presented in the chapters in Part I are submitted to move forward in policy implementation. Some of them are already showing promising results.

2.1 Policy Implementation: Still Much to Be Learned

The manner in which policy is enacted is essential to a successful AfL implementation. Trochim (2009) defined evaluation policies as ‘any rule or principle that a group or organization uses to guide its decision and actions when doing evaluation’ (p. 16). These principles or rules are often disseminated as ‘official texts articulating the intentions of central authorities to guide the actions of participants’ (Ben Jaafar and Anderson 2007, p. 208). However, the enactment of such intentions is far from assured.

As is the case for any study on major changes occurring in education, those involving AfL implementation need time to acquire a reliable knowledge base we can count on to develop future policies. Not long ago, regarding AfL, Black and Wiliam (2003) wrote, ‘If we had restricted ourselves to only those policy implications that followed logically and inevitably from the research evidence, we would have been able to say very little’ (p. 628).

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More recently, Christie and Fierro (2012) observed an imbalance between the actual research base on evaluation policies implementation and their relative importance in educational systems:

Despite the central influence that evaluation policies may have in how evaluations are designed and conducted, and despite the fact that these policies exist in large federal programs, little empirical work has been conducted to better understand how they are interpreted and implemented by the evaluators and practitioners whose work they are likely to effect (p. 65).

The importance of monitoring the transition from policy adoption to policy implementation has been stressed by several authors (Christie and Fierro 2012). Considering the variations reported in the conceptualization and the operationalization of AfL, one can expect great variability in policy implementation. Thus, it appears all the more important to be able to monitor AfL implementation to ensure that it follows ‘both the letter and the spirit of AfL’ (Earl and Timperley 2014, p. 325).

2.2 Assessment Policy Enactments: A Regulation Conceptualization

According to Weinbaum and Supovitz (2010), ‘we learned that complex programs go through a process of “mutual adaptation” in which both developers and implementers make adjustments to work more effectively (Berman and McLaughlin 1978)’ (p. 68). Christie and Fierro (2012) found that the intentions of an evaluation policy are susceptible to change depending on how the policy and its underlying values are interpreted by those in charge of implementing it. We submit that such mutual adaptations can be explained and accurately described by a series of co-regulations, in a manner similar to the co-regulations that occur between teachers and students. The concept of co-regulation contributes to raise relevant questions regarding the implementation and enactment of AfL policies such as the following:

- *Policy Goals.* What kind of goals? How are they determined and by whom?
- *Sources and quality of feedback on policy enactment.* Feedback from whom? Students, teachers, school principals, parents? What makes for good feedback? Feedback on what?
- *Actions and agents.* Who are the actors/implementers? Who is accountable? Who makes decision and how? What actions must be taken to achieve the policy goals? What are the enablers and barriers of actions? What are the stakes for the actors/implementers?

In the case of implementing AfL policies, it appears that two layers of co-regulation are involved in a process of mutual adaptation:

- Co-regulation between the developers and the school leadership in charge of implanting policies at the school level.
- Co-regulation between the school leadership and the teachers in charge of implementing and enacting policies at the classroom level.

2.3 Variations in Policy Implementation Models

The educational environment of different jurisdictions will shape the manner in which AfL policies will be enacted depending on the co-regulations at play between policy designers and implementers at the school and at the classroom level. There are numerous ways AfL policies can be enacted, such as the following:

- *Variations in the way policy goals are determined.* The manner in which policy goals are determined, including top-down, bottom-up, and reciprocal interactions, will most likely impact on the intelligibility of goal interpretation and on the nature of engagement towards such goals.
- *Variations regarding the manner in which assessment information is circulated among different levels of the education system.* The kind of information and how much may be centralized or decentralized, or made public to a lesser or greater extent, will have an impact not only on matters of transparency but also regarding the utility of feedback to regulate future actions.
- *Variations regarding the policy accountability orientation.* Accountability is an integral part of performance-based policy development and implementation. Accountability is also an important factor regarding how AfL will be implemented. Spencer (2004 in Ben Jaafar and Anderson 2007) described two accountability orientations proposed by Blackmore (1988):
 - Policy targeted at improving the management of the school system: *Economic-Bureaucratic Accountability* (EBA)
 - Policy targeted at improving students' learning: *Ethical-Professional Accountability* (EPA)

AfL implementation fits in both an EBA or EPA orientation. Within the EBA orientation, the most advocated incentive to implement AfL is to increase students' performance and achievement levels through enhanced efficiency in the use of human and material resources. Teachers are directly held responsible for students' achievement results and therefore, should use AfL to improve them. Hence, in such a context, 'The results are what matters, and the processes are validated only by performance' (Ben Jaafar and Anderson 2007, p. 211). However, within the EPA orientation, the means are emphasized and responsibility is primarily collective. Emphasis is put on teachers working together as a professional learning community and on students' improved learning skills and sustained achievement levels (Ben Jaafar and Anderson 2007).

Policy accountability orientation may be determinant in AfL enactment because it has an impact on the extent teachers are individually or collectively held accountable for students' results, whether the means used to improve students' performance are important or not, and finally, whether teachers will be considered as autonomous professionals or 'semi-professionals' whose work need to be structured and closely supervised (Hodson and Sullivan 2012).

Depending on the educational context and the policy accountability orientation, AfL implementation will be different, more or less challenging and more or less likely to succeed. The successful implementation of AfL will depend on the answer to two questions of major importance:

To help both program designers and school-level implementers avoid the sense of failure, can we predict what parts of a program will 'stick' and what will be changed? Or can we identify the points at which adaptation is likely to take place? (Weinbaum and Supovitz 2010, p. 68)

To help foresee what can eventually work, we need to focus on the regularities across the various implementation contexts that have led to favourable outcomes. Each experience in AfL implementation, regardless of whether it was successful, has the potential to help us understand best practices. Hence, much can be learned from the comparison of various cases of AfL implementation regarding what makes a successful implementation of AfL and what kind of adaptations are necessary.

2.4 Assessment Policy Challenges

'One of the most consistent findings from education research is variability in program implementation' (Weinbaum and Supovitz 2010, p. 68). Such variability originates not only from the large variety of program designs but also from the manner in which they are interpreted and implemented. In their extensive review of the implementation of a California State evaluation policy that required grantees to conduct scientifically based research (SBR), Christie and Fierro (2012) found 'few projects were able to implement SBR projects in a manner consistent with the evaluation policy' (p. 71). Research directors of successful projects 'remained flexible and adjusted study designs as needed to accommodate contextual conditions' (p. 71). Christie and Fierro (2012) remarked that the flexibility shown in implementing the policy generated an unexpected result:

in the process of translating SBR into action, many studies ultimately contributed valuable formative information to local projects—an unintended outcome associated with funding SBR.... Findings from our study indicate that policy makers would be well served by embracing both the learning and accountability functions of evaluation in their evaluation policies (p. 72).

Non-conformity to initial policy design as well as flexibility in policy implementation may not only have important payoffs but may also be the sole means by which policies may be successfully implemented. Policy designers may benefit

from factoring in a degree of ‘discretion’ in policy implementation. Halverson and Clifford (2006) have defined discretion as ‘the actor’s power to use judgment to determine a course of action within the perceived constraints of a situation’ (p. 606). By including an opportunity for a degree of discretion instead of avoiding it, policy development and implementation may move beyond ‘discussion of policy fidelity’:

Policies are designed to constrain practitioners’ behaviour to produce intended practices and outcomes.... However, policies also rely on practitioner discretion to adjust policy demands to local circumstances or to fill in gaps left unspecified by policy design (Halverson and Clifford 2006, p. 606).

Thus, the degree of discretion allowed in policy implementation is a crucial element of policy implementation, whatever the policy targets. Schools have different needs, and implementing AfL may mean that policy targets may need to be adapted to consider the existing conditions of the school environment, such as the capacity of teachers to work together on issues of assessment as well as the school assessment culture that is already in place.

A space for a form of co-regulation must be saved to allow for appropriate accommodations to occur between policy designers and policy implementers. Halverson and Clifford (2006) identify two forms of discretion: *managerial discretion* and *learning discretion*. Managerial discretion is an essential component of the leadership expertise required in policy implementation, whereas cognitive discretion refers to the capacity to learn when opportunities are provided by the policy design.

The co-regulation of policy implementation appears to flow both ways: ‘both designers and practitioners need opportunities to learn from each other about (a) how policies are intended to change practices and (b) how practices need to inform policy development’ (Halverson and Clifford 2006, p. 608). Such co-regulations between designers and practitioners are more likely to occur when certain forms of interactions are built in the process of policy development and implementation, which would disqualify uniquely ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ forms of implementation.

The degree and kinds of discretion allowed in policy enactment are important conditions of successful AfL implementation. The decision to implement AfL has frequently been advocated and motivated by stressing performance enhancements, both on the part of teachers and of students. Such entrenched beliefs in the power of AfL may have blinded policy designers from the dual nature of AfL challenges: implementing AfL not only regards improving students’ and teachers’ *performance*, it also regards improving students’ and teachers’ *learning*. Seifert and Hutchins (1992) in Halverson and Clifford (2006), suggested that ‘it is much more difficult to design for learning than for system performance’ (p. 97).

A basic reflex of policy design is to base policy implementation on highly specific targets. Depending on the nature of the policy targets as well as of the context and the type of governance, it may be more or less worthwhile to achieve high levels of fidelity in AfL implementation. According to Weinbaum and Supovitz (2010), to target greater specificity does not necessarily increase the likelihood of fidelity in

implementation: ‘either finding may be true depending on the classroom, school, or district. However, the focus on increasing specification may distract from more important variables’ (p. 69).

To summarize, it appears that policy designers should use *discretion with discretion* when planning ahead for policy implementation. To meet the challenges of AfL implementation, policy designers need to foresee and consider how variable conditions may affect the enactment of the policy itself. Planning ahead opportunities for the occurrence of co-regulations among different actors of the school system may increase the odds of a successful implementation. Such advance planning requires that variations occurring in the school system be known and based on accurate facts. This planning also requires a certain theoretical and professional knowledge base to work out possible solutions at the local level to ensure successful implementation.

2.5 Common Policy Challenges and Directions: Lessons Derived from OECD Studies

From the large variety of potential situations that occur at the local level, the successful design and implementation of AfL would appear a nearly daunting task if it could not rely on the capacity of the school system to learn and adapt locally. There are reasons to be optimistic, and the implementation process may be made more predictable according to Weinbaum and Supovitz (2006):

Although adjustments are likely to occur at multiple places and repeatedly over time, the implementation process has junctures that can be identified and defined in ways that may increase the predictability of how programs are likely to be used (p. 69).

An OECD study has identified certain of these ‘junctures’ that prevent AFL from fully playing its intended function in a large number of jurisdictions. One important policy challenge is ‘to find suitable strategies that can integrate classroom-based formative assessment within the broader assessment and evaluation framework’ (OECD 2011, p. 5).

One of the major strategies needed to achieve such integration consists in developing a ‘closer interface between formative assessment and summative assessment’ (OECD 2011, p. 5). As previously noted in Chap. 1, there are several means by which this can be accomplished. Central to this strategy is ensuring that the assessment covers ‘the full range of goals set out in standards and curriculum over time and in a variety of contexts’ (OECD 2011, p. 5). To achieve this requires that each source of student assessment information be used optimally and to its full extent. For instance, teachers are in a strong position to follow students’ learning progression and to assess reasoning and problem solving through performance-based assessment on a continuous basis. Complementarily, standardized assessments provide an opportunity to validate teachers’ classroom observations and to help them obtain a better sense of the extent that their students’ achievements are appropriately aligned with the school curriculum at important

transition points. Although large-scale external assessment can barely provide the fine-grained information regarding students' learning difficulties, certain test banks, such as the *asTTle* (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning) and the Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT), which are used in New Zealand (Nusche et al. 2012), may allow teachers to use their discretion in choosing the tests that will target what they need to assess to help them make the best possible decision regarding what should be the next steps in students' learning.

In a major international study that compares the educational assessment frameworks of some of its member states, OECD (2013) emphasized the main policy directions to help develop 'synergies for better learning.' One of the most striking characteristics of these policy directions is their high degree of interconnectedness. Although they are not solely meant to apply to AfL implementation, they help emphasize the fact that AfL implementation simultaneously involves several targets and that synergies with other policy directions are needed. For instance, 'ensuring a good balance between formative and summative assessment' is more likely to be achieved if there are 'safeguards against an overreliance on standardized assessment' and if a 'variety of assessment types' are used (OECD 2013, Table 2, pp. 21–22). The OECD report (2013) warns:

Not all of the policy directions apply equally to all countries. In a number of cases many, or most, of the policy suggestions are already in place, while for other countries they may have less relevance because of different social, economic and educational structures and traditions. This is a challenging agenda, but tackling one area without appropriate policy attention to inter-related aspects will lead to only partial results. Nevertheless, it is difficult to address all areas simultaneously, and resource constraints mean that trade-offs are inevitable (p. 21).

One major policy direction resulting from the OECD report recommends creating an environment that allows policy targets to be optimally achieved regardless of the constraints. At this juncture point, developing synergies to implement AfL is not then about *controlling or regulating the environment*, it is about *allowing co-regulations to occur*. The main policy directions of the OECD report show a high degree of flexibility and allow for the use of managerial as well as cognitive discretion in several cases. For instance, one of the main policy directions insists on promoting national consistency while making space for local diversity. A level of flexibility can also be found in the reassertion of the crucial role of teacher-based assessment and on the importance of promoting teacher professionalism.

One other important remark that can be made from the report (OECD 2013) is that the main policy directions involve improving assessment sources—'ensure consistency of assessment'—as well as assessors' skills through capacity building—'sustain efforts to improve capacity for assessment and evaluation' and 'build students' capacity to engage in their own assessment' (p. 22). The direction also regards aligning sources of information and human resources with educational goals and students' learning objectives.

Hence, main policy directions require that we focus on three large categories of actions:

1. *Improving the sources of information* by helping, for instance, teachers to create an interface between the information generated by classroom assessment and information from externally designed assessments.
2. *Improving the capacity of assessors* (through skills and capacity building and professional development) at all levels of a school system: for instance, professionals and school leaders in charge of designing and implementing policy decisions, local jurisdiction school leaders, and head teachers and teachers.
3. *Alignment*. In most instances, alignment refers to ensuring that important contents of a program of study are attended to by teachers and that students have been provided with sufficient opportunities to learn them. Alignment can easily be extended to teaching and assessment frameworks, as noted in the Glossary of Education Reform (Coherent curriculum 2014): ‘it [alignment] also refers to coherence among all the many elements that are entailed in educating students, including assessments, standardized tests, textbooks, assignments, lessons, and instructional techniques.’

2.6 New Perspectives on AfL Policy Implementation

The OECD study reported above (OECD 2013) stresses the importance of developing synergies among policy directions, and all contributions in Part I of this book are consistent with this view. However, they would all insist, for each contribution, on the need for policies to be adaptable:

- To disruptions introduced by policy changes (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis)
- To the needs of special education students (Chap. 4—Cumming and van der Kleij)
- To where teachers are in terms of assessment literacy and teaching competence (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.)
- To the national and local contexts when policy is a direct import from another international jurisdiction (Chap. 6—Poskitt)
- To time constraints and limitations regarding teachers’ capacity to attend to increased demands in both summative and formative assessment (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward)

These items all share the optimistic view expressed by Adie and Willis regarding policy disruptions and overlaps: all adaptation challenges listed previously may be considered as ‘opportunities for professional conversations and changes to pedagogies and assessment practices’ (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis).

The crucial role of teachers’ professional conversations is latent in nearly all contributions. In the specific case of understanding Australia national standards, having teachers work collaboratively made it possible to have AfL policy work hand in hand with curriculum policy enactment (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis). The teachers helped policy makers integrate different policies and explain how policies, which may initially be considered as unrelated by teachers, may fit together.

Working with colleagues helps teachers become more aware of different ways of interpreting the policy documents and be more self-critical of their own interpretation. Working together also assists teachers in developing their professional judgement because policies are not always clear, and decisions must be made regarding the meaning that will be accentuated and used. In the specific cases of understanding the New Zealand national standards, the knowledge acquired by teachers was necessary to enable them to inform students properly on what was expected in terms of achievements. Teachers' mutual understanding of standards helped to improve teacher–student communication on assessment criteria.

In the case of students with disabilities or special needs, teacher–student communication may require a distinctive application of AfL generic principles. Cumming and van der Kleij stress the importance of closely focussing on the manner in which Australian AfL policy is implemented with those students for whom AfL is most likely to be useful and necessary (Chap. 4—Cumming and van der Kleij). For instance, one of the definitions of AfL in Sect. 1.2 of Chap. 1 made reference to teacher–student *dialogue*. AfL practices make intensive use of spoken language. This overreliance on language communication may not be appropriate with students who, for whatever reasons, have major language disabilities.

AfL needs to be adapted to become an instrument of an equity policy for student learners with disabilities (Chap. 4—Cumming and van der Kleij). The equity dimension of any AfL policy enactment should stress the need to enforce the policy differently to take into account not only regional realities but also the characteristics of students with disabilities. Differentiation in how teachers apply AfL generic principles is necessary in order for AfL to be of service to all students.

While differentiation in AfL is needed for special education children, a form of differentiation is required on the part of teachers who need to learn to use AfL with their students. Griffin et al. emphasize that policy implementation should be based on a rigorous analysis of where the teachers are in terms of professional learning and on what the next steps should be for the majority of them (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.). Teachers' professional learning should be based on an AfL learning progression, some knowledge and skills being prerequisites to others. In their analysis of the Philippine situation, Griffin et al. recommended the following first step: 'Teachers need to be supported in framing questions both for assessment and for teaching purposes.... This change alone would have an important impact on the use of formative assessment and would blend assessment with teaching' (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.). This recommendation regards factoring in the teachers' zone of proximal development in the enactment of an AfL policy. This recommendation suggests that any jurisdiction considering designing and implementing AfL on a large scale should begin with a thorough study of the general degree of teachers' preparedness before planning for change.

Differentiation and adaptation also need to occur at the 'policy adaptation' level. The access to multiple foreign experiences in AfL policy enactment has provided researchers and educational leaders with numerous opportunities to learn best policy designs and implementation practices around the world. Poskitt warns that these practices cannot be transferred as they are. Her contribution focuses our

attention on the need to involve all parties and stakeholders in policy adaptation and policy implementation because the basic thinking behind a policy that may have occurred elsewhere still needs to be performed anew if the same policy is to be *adopted* and *adapted* in another jurisdiction (Chap. 6—Poskitt).

When considering other countries as sources of information on AfL implementation, Scotland is often considered as one of the most experienced national jurisdictions on the matter. Spencer and Hayward discuss the lessons learned from the first *wave* of AfL implementation (Assessment *is* for Learning) and the challenges that have emerged as Scotland undertakes a series of major changes both on curriculum (*Curriculum for Excellence*) and on assessment (*Assessment at Transition*) (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

The challenges met in Scotland went well beyond the issue of implementation. These challenges concerned sustaining the achievements of a first wave of a successful implementation and coordinating existing practices with the requirements of a new curriculum and assessment policy. It simply could not be assumed that a natural integration would occur. To make AfL implementation sustainable required that policy and practice be in close alignment. Research played an important role in providing the evidence base required to realign policy and practice and inform future actions: ‘A major challenge for Curriculum for Excellence was to merge the new ideas about curriculum and learning processes with the preexisting successful assessment for learning practice’ (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

Such important changes and coordination of policies with existing practices need to be planned for. Improvement in teachers guidance as well as allowing space for co-regulation to occur between different levels of the educational system are research-based decisions that were determined by Scotland education authorities:

Using research to explore the interrelationship of policy and practice as an evidence base to inform future action can help to realign policy aspirations and practice in schools and classrooms. Action based on evidence is the only way to build education systems that are truly learning systems (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

Synergies need to be developed between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as a coherent whole (Wyse et al. 2016). One cannot simply expect such synergies will occur by themselves as if they were self-evident. Teachers and actors in the education system must have opportunities to share their understanding of the policy targets and actions (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis). The Scottish experience also reminds us that policies should set targets at a level that is suitable with teachers’ existing assessment literacy and AfL competence (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward). To meet the challenge of implementation, both the Philippines first-time experience in implementing AfL (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.) and the Scottish long-term experience in making AfL sustainable and coherent (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward) indicate that policies must be informed by research evidence and a rigorous analysis of where the teachers are in terms of professional learning.

2.7 Moving Forward

The enactment of AfL policy in education systems is very demanding. This enactment involves a series of important adaptations not only on the part of teachers but also on the part of the policy designers and the school leaders in charge of implementing those policies. Such adaptations require planning for co-regulations to occur and develop synergies. Time for professional learning is a rare resource. Developing synergies extends well beyond having teachers work together; it also regards educators learning to work together *efficiently* in a manner that is profitable, both collectively and individually. The contributions of Part I demonstrate that synergies are desirable and possible.

Poskitt illustrates how time invested in communication and in involving teachers and other stakeholders is thereafter repaid (Chap. 6—Poskitt). She explains how politics and policies have interacted in New Zealand for the best and for the worst. This raises several issues. Are communication and collaboration and participation in policy processes always successful? Are there situations in which urgent matters would justify that such processes be skipped? In policy enactment, as in politics, consensus is rarely obtained, and there will always be resistance to change. This observation raises yet another question: how is resistance to change addressed in collaborative approaches compared to top-down approaches? Is there space for minority opinions, and if so, are they considered?

Resistance to change may occur for certain appropriate and legitimate reasons. There are limitations to the capacity of teachers and of the entire educational system to assimilate new trends and to accommodate existing practices to changing conditions while maintaining a certain degree of coherence. We simply cannot assume that such capacities already exist, that they can be acquired rapidly, or that such changes would not have an undesirable impact on already existing capacities or practices. Spencer and Hayward warn against the danger of considering teachers as professionals while not providing sufficient time for their professional development (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

This statement means that, more than ever before, policy implementation must take advance notice of where teachers are in their professional learning (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.). This statement also raises important questions regarding what skills and capacities need to be developed: What should be a teacher's learning progression in AfL? Are there certain necessary steps or prerequisites that would invariably be the same, which resemble developmental stages or standards of progression?

The enactment of AfL policy must also compete with the enactment of other policies. For instance, while teachers assimilate general principles of AfL, they need to accommodate these principles to consider the different needs of special students (Chap. 4—Cumming and van der Kleij). Adding new tasks to existing ones may also put teachers in a state of cognitive dissonance when they encounter what are apparently competing demands of their time and efforts. For instance, in Scotland, the pressure on teachers and students for more frequent summative assessment

diverted time and efforts from AfL (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward). Although new demands for assessment *of* learning were not intended to compete with the demands for assessment *for* learning, the time needed on the part of teachers to comply with both actually put teachers in an uneasy situation. The Scottish experience raises several important questions: What are realistic assessment demands? Can we really prioritize AfL over the assessment of learning (AoL), and is there a point where AoL requirements may be preventing AfL from truly being implemented and sustained? According to Spencer and Hayward, ‘it is important to prioritise assessment activities, a process that entails stopping doing some things in order to make it possible to do other, more desirable, things well’ (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

While a better coordination of efforts between AoL and AfL is necessary for successful policy enactment, AfL cannot play its important role without a similar coordination of efforts with curriculum development. Because AfL also regards helping teachers make the best possible decision regarding what should be the next step in learning for students—which is a most difficult task for teachers as we will observe in Chap. 8—teaching and assessment need to be properly aligned with the curriculum. As shown in Adie and Willis’ contribution, ‘reconciling standards-referenced curriculum and assessment with improved teaching and learning practices necessitates that policy makers also take up the unifying narrative of AfL and reflect this in policy documents’ (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis).

Confronted with the challenges of AfL implementation, there are reasonable grounds for optimism. Even though all Part I contributions illustrated certain shortcomings of the policies and of their implementation, they all provided certain practical solutions we can use to make recommendations.

The metaphor of ‘expansion joint’ or ‘movement joint’ may help illustrate the important role of a *co-regulation space* to allow periodical adjustments to be made in the implementation and enactment of AfL policy. Expansion joints are used to imbue sufficient flexibility in the structure of a bridge so it can adapt to changing climate conditions. Similarly, *co-regulation juncture points* are necessary to absorb the stress generated by the requirements of an education system for change and adaptation. The more challenging the implementation, the more pressure on the system and the more important co-regulation spaces become.

One immediate recommendation that originates from Part I is that policy should plan for co-regulation spaces in the AfL implementation process. Such co-regulation spaces allow for preventive and early adjustments should something unexpected occur or go wrong. The spaces also provide policy designers and enactors with margins of tolerance and discretion to adjust and adapt. The sooner the trajectory of policy enactment can be corrected, the least effort will be needed to readjust the target or the trajectory and the least frustration that will occur among enactors. Poskitt provides a very suitable illustration of two diametrically opposed policy implementations in New Zealand (Chap. 6—Poskitt).

Successful AfL policy implementation requires that co-regulation spaces be planned early not only to prevent or correct the misalignment of policy enactment but also to afford opportunities to develop the capacity and synergies needed to

improve efficiency and save time and energy on a continuous basis. It is clear from Part I contributions that the time invested in communication and involving teachers and other stakeholders is thereafter repaid. Here is a short list of recommendations that can be deduced from Part I contributions to move forward on meeting the challenges of implementation:

1. Begin with a thorough study of the general degree of teachers' preparedness before planning for change. Consider teachers' zones of proximal development in the enactment of an AfL policy (Chap. 5—Griffin et al.).
2. Provide opportunities for teachers' collaborative work to help teachers become more aware of the different means of interpreting the policy documents and be more self-critical of their own interpretation (Chap. 3—Adie and Willis).
3. Involve all parties and stakeholders in policy adaptation and policy implementation (Chap. 6—Poskitt). Teachers' mutual understanding of standards helps to improve teacher–student communication regarding the assessment criteria.
4. Enforce the policy differently to consider not only regional realities but also the characteristics of students with disabilities (Chap. 4—Cumming and van der Kleij).
5. Use research evidence to realign policy and practice and inform future actions. Plan for the coordination of policies with existing practices (Chap. 7—Spencer and Hayward).

Whatever the policy and its merits, the previous recommendations are not realizable if certain efforts are not directed at developing the required capacity to properly enact policy objectives through the professional development and collaborative learning of teachers and other stakeholders. Professional development and collaborative learning are essential components of policy enactment and will be the topic of Part II, *Building Capacity: Professional Development and Collaborative Learning about Assessment*.

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