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Physical Education teachers' perceptions of factors that inhibit and facilitate the enactment of curriculum change in a high stakes exam climate

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Abstract

Policy enactment is a dynamic process, which invites agents to uniquely create and recreate policy as an ongoing process. Few policies arrive in school fully formed and the process of policy enactment involves teachers navigating policy frameworks in a way that provides success for each individual pupil. This research examines the complexities involved in teacher enactment of new policy in schools with the added caveat of investigating the impact that high stakes exams place on teachers to act as agents of change. The primary objective was to ascertain whether inhibitors and facilitators identified in literature were recurring during the period of change in physical education (PE). The secondary objective was to investigate how PE teachers enact curriculum change utilising a flexible curriculum framework to achieve success at examination level. The research reflects a journey from the broad realms of curriculum studies towards a more in-depth analysis of the realist theory of analytical dualism. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with five full time PE teachers working within one secondary school in Scotland. The results indicated that revolutionary change was somewhat stagnated by potent inhibitors such as a lack of collaboration with policymakers and vague course documentation. These were compounded by an inherent desire for pupils to succeed that induced feelings of wariness and indecision amongst teachers. The flexible curriculum and guidance offered by policymakers was insufficient for teachers to confidently pose as curriculum decision-makers, resulting in a call for a more explicitly structured course. It became clear that teachers acting as agents of change who help devise and develop policy require support, collaboration and direction to empower and buttress their decision-making, particularly when faced with the high-stakes nature of the examination climate. (283 words)

KEY WORDS : *Physical Education Policy enactment Teacher agency Agents of change Flexible Curriculum Framework*

Introduction

Over the last few decades, industrialised countries have been subject to what Levin (1998) describes as an ‘epidemic’ of education reform. However, amongst other factors, it has been argued that the concurrent demise of curriculum theory has resulted in the production of ‘mix and match’ curricula (Priestley & Humes 2010) which have proven problematic at implementation level. In Scotland, such criticism has undoubtedly been directed at the recently established Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (e.g. Priestley 2010), although this is a policy which has the potential to be a catalyst for transformational change in Scottish education. CfE has necessitated a revised examination structure at the senior level of schooling (ages 14-18), which has resulted in the creation of a range of National Qualifications which ‘reflect Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles’ (Scottish Qualifications Authority 2012, p3). This research is concerned with the transition from the old examination system within the *Higher Still framework* (SQA 1999) to *National 4 and 5 physical education (PE)*, the most recent¹ of the National Qualifications (SQA 2012). Research surrounding the embracement of previous policies and more relevantly CfE itself provide a literature context which is conducive to identifying the potential facilitators and inhibitors of curriculum change. The area of research is particularly relevant of late, as the recent worldwide increase in status of certificated PE presents a more pressurised, ‘high-stakes’ transition to new policy for teachers.

The theoretical and empirical literature reported in this research provides the context for the study, and is underpinned by two key aims. The primary objective is to identify PE

¹ Introduced in the 2013/14 academic year; the first year of compulsory implementation across Scotland was 2014/15 (Education Scotland 2013).

teachers' perceptions of the inhibitors and facilitators of curriculum change. The secondary objective is to explore how PE teachers enact curriculum change at a certificated level. It is assumed that if light is shed upon those factors which may contribute to the success and fluidity of the change to National 4/5 PE, conclusions can subsequently be formed regarding teacher receptivity to enact new policy both in Scotland and- to a certain extent- globally. Furthermore, an understanding of these tenets will ascertain whether CfE has succeeded in its aim to create a revolutionary curriculum.

Background

CfE has been referred to as a 'new breed of national curriculum' (Priestley 2010, p23), where top-down, government-led policy is mediated by teachers initiating bottom-up curricular development as agents of change. In other words, teachers interpret a flexible curricular framework and exercise agency in order to enact policy appropriately within their unique contextual setting:

'The framework is less detailed and prescriptive than previous curriculum advice. It provides professional space for teachers and other staff to use in order to meet the varied needs of all children and young people'
Scottish Executive (2004, p1)

In addition, the national certificated courses offer 'flexibility to provide more time for learning, more focus on skills and applying learning, and scope for personalisation and choice' (SQA, 2012, page 3). These aims reflect the needs of a rapidly changing society, and are not dissimilar from those introduced to Finnish education following the 1994 curricular reform (Vulliamy, Kimonen, Nevalainen & Webb 1997). Likewise, the Australian curriculum is typical of this worldwide trend, and was explicitly designed with inbuilt openness to enable

authorities and schools to engage in reflective, individualised practice (ACARA 2015). However, whilst ‘ambitious’ (Scottish Government 2008) in nature, the literature identifies that such attempts to introduce radical curricular changes are often met with resistance (e.g. Curtner-Smith 1999; Bekalo and Welford 2000; MacPhail 2007). The complexity of assessing the enactment of curriculum change has been widely noted (e.g. Fullan 2001; Eisner 2005), and a further understanding of inhibitors and facilitators² of change is crucial in providing rationale for deeper, more meaningful ‘enabler’ studies, such as that of MacLean, Mulholland, Gray and Horrell (2015).

This research initially reflects a journey from the broad realms of curriculum studies towards a more in-depth analysis of the realist theory of analytical dualism. Specific attention is paid to the formation of teacher agency,³ and how an understanding of this concept helps critique the issues which arise from the analysis of curriculum change. Subsequently, a brief insight into the work of Adams (2011) on ‘policy as discourse’ provides further opportunity to consider the interplay between policy creation and response. A linear view of policy focuses on the generation and the implementation phase, seeking to measure the authenticity of policy implementation. However an alternative view would be to conceptualise policy as process. This stance illuminates the complex and contextualised policy processes that involve debate, conflict and struggle for power identified by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992), in the context of influence, policy text production and practice. This permits an evaluation and exploration into how teachers *enact* policy rather than *implement* policy work in schools (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012). Due to the flexible framework associated with this breed of policy, it is key to illuminate the underlying factors which serve to inhibit or facilitate the engenderment of teacher agency. In this vein, the research will discuss literature of a critical

² Sometimes referred to as ‘barriers’ and ‘catalysts’ (e.g. Priestley 2005).

³ In other words, agency which is theorised specifically in respect of the activities of teachers in schools (Priestley et al. 2012)

realist shade, specifically drawing upon Margaret Archer's (1988, 1995, 1996) analytical dualism and contributions to Buckley's (1967) concepts of 'morphogenesis' and 'morphostasis.'. Such theories have not been used extensively in educational research, though Priestley (2011a) advocates that they provide a relevant conceptual framework for analysis.

Revolutionary Curriculum

Recent years provide evidence of an 'epidemic' (Levin 1998) of curriculum change worldwide; and in Scotland. Priestley (2011a) identifies a dichotomy trending in contemporary educational policy. One stance poses teachers as inhibitors of the change for various reasons, constructing curriculum change 'as a matter of the simple implementation of teacher proof curricula' (Priestly, 2011a p2). In contrast, the 'new breed of national curriculum' (Priestley 2010, p23) represents top-down, government-led policy which provides opportunity for bottom-up curricular development, thus offering teachers the role of 'agents of change' (e.g. Goodson, 2003; Nieveen, 2011) enacting policy in schools. CfE- along with the New Zealand Curriculum, Australian Curriculum and more recently England's National Curriculum- displays typical features of this new type of policy trajectory. However, there have been criticisms regarding the lack of theory used to reinforce these new policies. Priestley and Humes (2010) outline the recurring pitfalls of this 'atheoretical' approach to curriculum design, showing evidence of the resultant incoherence and tendencies to favour a 'mix-and-match' approach with regards to curricular model. This lack of theoretical foundation is reinforced by Priestley (2010, p24) who claims:

Developments such as CfE, through their renewed emphasis on teachers as agents of change, have exposed the current paucity of curriculum theory...and this in turn has led to a lack of

capacity to deal with the issues that such curricula throw up as they are translated from policy to practice.

This translation of policy to practice is often discussed in educational change literature, with policy usually framed as something which mutates between contextual settings rather than a fixed entity. This is a process which is well established in educational change literature (e.g. Eisner 1992; Cuban 1998), though more recently has been termed 'iterative refraction' (Supovitz 2008). Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008) identify that iterative refraction can be potentially positive, as teachers can attempt to creatively apply policy within their individualised school context - a process clearly recognised and encouraged in the new National 5 course literature in Scotland. However Ball et al. (2012) criticise iterative refraction, suggesting an overemphasis on the linear process of carrying out policy *implementation*; rather than emphasising the translation and recontextualisation of the policy process.

Teachers involved in designing this course at school level are encouraged to use methods which are 'fit for purpose and will promote best practice' (Scottish Qualifications Authority 2012, p3), within an assessment regime which gives 'more autonomy and professional responsibility to teachers' (Scottish Government 2010, p4). However, Priestley (2010) is one commentator who does not view CfE as a policy which has capitalised on this knowledge, contrarily arguing that it 'fails to take account of these insights, framed as it is in terms of outcomes and products' (p25). Indeed, such a faux pas has been said to have contributed to teachers failing to embrace the values and ideologies of CfE (Priestley & Minty 2013). An underlying concern here is the lack of collaboration between teachers and policymakers in the policy construction process (MacLean et al. 2015). This is an inhibitor echoed in the study composed by Dyson, Wright, Amis, Ferry and Vardaman (2011) investigating PE policy in the USA, where a lack of coordination

between key actors, teachers, principals, and students resulted in ‘implementation failure’ (p376) in schools.

The extent of teacher involvement in the curriculum development process has been the concern of many authors (e.g. Fullan 1991; Penney & Evans 1999; Kirk and MacDonald, 2001, MacPhail 2007; MacLean et al. 2015). Penney and Evans (1999) found that the lack of teacher involvement in the creation of National Curriculum PE in England resulted in decreased enthusiasm amongst teachers. MacPhail (2007) highlights that if teachers are not involved in the curriculum process, it can only be expected that they subsequently require specific knowledge in order to understand and deliver it. Yet this reinforces a rather linear view of implementation where teachers are seen as recipients and deliverers of a prescribed curriculum. Kirk and Macdonald (2001) envisage policy more as a process that requires to be coproduced, with teachers involved as partners with other stakeholders in the creation of national policy. For example in most Australian states, teachers are considered key stakeholders in the production of new curricula and adopt roles such as policy advisors and participants in school-based trials (Leahy, Burrows, McCuaig, Wright & Penney 2016). Priestley (2010, p34) outlines that ‘the key point here is that there needs to be a clearly articulated process for engaging with innovation brought about by externally initiated policy’.

One such ‘innovation’ often considered pivotal in assisting those teachers acting under new flexible policy frameworks, is collaborative engagement in continuing professional development (CPD). Studies conducted by Dunscombe and Armour (2004) and Armour and Yelling (2007) have indicated that most often, schools do not readily adopt collaborative approaches to CPD. However, following a large-scale study of PE curriculum change in Hong Kong, it was identified that collaborative CPD amongst university scholars, school teachers and educational curriculum officers engendered

greater security and confidence in the face of significant change (Ha, Lee, Chan & Sum 2004). This approach to teacher training seems to be a key concern of the new National Qualifications in Scotland and is strongly encouraged in the 'Building the Curriculum' CfE documents (Scottish Government 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). It is thought that appropriate CPD can support the development of 'robust reflective, discursive, collaborative and inclusive teacher identities in practitioners' (Kelly 2006, p515). In posing teachers as agents of change, these qualities are indeed of paramount importance, though such a claim warrants deeper analysis of the processes that impinge upon the formation of teacher agency.

Teachers as Agents of Change

There is an emerging tendency in global curriculum policy to oppose traditional reform and explicitly construct teachers as agents of change (e.g. Goodson 2003; Nieveen 2011). However, such a tendency has not coincided proportionately with educational research, and there have been few attempts to explicitly investigate or develop the concept of teacher agency. In contrast, agency itself has been extensively theorised and has at times been crudely applied to educational change models, arguably resulting in the underestimation of the role teacher agency holds in curriculum reform (Leander & Osborne 2008). Biesta and Tedder (2006) describe agency as the ability of an individual to critically shape their responses to problematic situations. However, this smacks of Fuch's (2001) description of an individualised understanding of agency, and one which does not provide such fertile theoretical ground for discussion. Perhaps analysis would benefit from the consideration that agency is not a capacity which teachers do or do not possess, but 'as something that is achieved in and through concrete contexts for action' (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson 2012,

p7). This assumption that agency is an ongoing process which can be nurtured in certain contexts is reinforced by the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who present agency as a configuration of influences from the past, engagement with the present and orientations towards the future. This tenet is one which is compatible with- and indeed elaborated through- a critical realist understanding of the concept of agency.

Critical realism is a paradigm which is gaining substantial support and is being increasingly preferred to both positivism and postmodernism in explaining human behaviour and social reality (Kahn 2009). This is perhaps because it combines a depth ontology with epistemological relativism (Elder-Vass 2008), that is, that knowledge is a social product and comes about through human interaction. However, much social theorising (e.g. Foucault 1970; Bourdieu 1998) exclusively prizes the latter, and attempts to explain human behaviour exclusively in terms of social structure. This angle rarely considers the interplay between individuals and imposing cultural and structural systems, a premise upon which Margaret Archer's (1988, 1996) analytical dualism is conceived. This separation of the various aspects of social reality⁴ allows for judgements to be made regarding the relative causative weight of culture, structure and agency (Priestley 2011b), a process which can prove useful in the identification of inhibitors and facilitators of change. For example, in claiming that the department is the main locus for the development of teaching (e.g. Knight 2002), a repercussion of this is the downplaying of the influence of various other cultural and structural systems on agency.

It is noted that Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'habitus' and Giddens' (1979, 1984) theory of structuration also attempt to further unpick the intricacies of agency. However, Bourdieu's work is often critiqued for its 'fuzziness', or lack of empirical specificity (e.g. Bernstein 1996) and the latter draws criticism for insisting on the inseparability of agency

⁴ For purely analytic purposes.

and structure, a tenet which according to Archer (1988) consequently obscures the interactive processes which occur between individuals and their cultural and structural settings.

Analytical dualism dictates that structural⁵ and cultural⁶ systems provide the *context* for human activity, though crucially these do not necessarily determine such activity, given that humans are creative and reflexive beings (Kahn 2009; Priestley 2011b). Kahn (2009) considers the role of reflexive deliberation in the ‘agentive’ process, where the individual evaluates imposing structural and cultural systems through inner conversation, in order to shape the decision-making process. For example, Priestley (2010) supplies evidence⁷ that the ‘vagueness of specification’ (p27) associated with CfE has led teachers to make dangerous assumptions and self-informed decisions which go against the proposed values of the curriculum. The lack of imposing structure in this instance has resulted in the over-use of teacher deliberation and consequent ‘ad hocery’ at the expense of desired curricular outcomes - an issue similarly reported by Dyson et al. (2011) in their study of educational reform in America.

It is also crucial to note that teacher decision making is likely to be affected by existing systems within the school such as the timetable and the attainment agenda, which have the potential to limit the promotion of active learning. However, not all teachers will experience the same degree of structural and cultural influence. Newly-qualified professionals are often teaching for the first time in an unfamiliar cultural setting (Musselin 2004) and therefore the context for teacher agency is perhaps affected even more so by imposing cultural and structural systems and less reflexive deliberation (Kahn 2009). These

⁵ Used loosely, for example in line with Porpora’s (1998) definition: emergent properties of systems of human relationships.

⁶ Pertaining to values, beliefs or ideas (Archer 1988).

⁷ Largely based on anecdotal recounts.

are factors which should be considered when attempting to explain teacher behaviour and decision-making, and when analysing the extent of the change in question.

Transformational Change

Viewing policy as discourse⁸ provides an opportunity to consider the interplay between policy creation and response. Adams (2011) succinctly poses that:

‘Actions become legitimised through the policy form, created within wider discourses through the moment-by-moment conversations that provide recognisable social, cultural, historical, economic and political possibilities. What we see therefore is not the mediation of policy into the local space but rather the formation of policy at the local level.’ (p66)

In essence, this excerpt concludes that rather than mediate a foreign text provided by policymakers, teachers are actively involved in the policy formation process through engaging in formal and informal collaboration in their unique contextual settings. However, Bacchi (2000, p55) warns of a tendency amongst policy-as-discourse theorists to view certain groups as ‘having power, as the makers and users of discourse’. She dismisses the use of the theory in this manner, arguing that this overemphasis acts in detriment to the analytical value of viewing policy as discourse. This would suggest that all parties involved in enacting change have power to form the policy through ‘the discursive moments that take place within the professional arena’ (Adams 2011, p66). Such a theory, therefore, applies to educators and policymakers alike.

When curriculum change is considered as discourse, teacher engagement with new policy is a social process where cycles of change may or may not come about. In this vein,

⁸ Referring to an evolutionary process as opposed to a fixed moment, text or event (MacLean et al. 2015).

Archer (1995) discusses a concept known as morphogenesis/morphostasis⁹– the terms denoting change and continuity. These allude to the processes which affect the extent of the transformation of dynamics within a context, or restructuring of the previous system (Buckley 1967; Archer 1995). For example in a school, new courses would replace previous policy and practice, although the extent of its success would perhaps depend upon the interplay of structure, culture and agency.¹⁰ Through analysis of these relationships, it is possible to pinpoint prevalent inhibitors and facilitators of the change process, or in other words the key morphostatic and morphogenetic forces (Buckley 1967; Rees & Gatenby 2014).

Morphostatic forces serve to reproduce the dynamics of the context, and retain the social structure of the current system (Buckley 1967). Various literature identifies prominent inhibitors as tensions between teachers and policymakers (MacPhail 2007; MacLean et al. 2015); diminishing local and national authority assistance/support (Thorburn 2010); a lack of effective collaborative practice (Ha, Wong, Sum & Chan 2008; Thorburn, Carse, Jess, and Atencio 2011) and constraints due to prevalent attainment agendas (Biesta 2004). Whilst not exhaustive, this list provides a plethora of factors which may inhibit the success of policy reform. Contrarily, a knowledge of one's own responsibilities, a strong, supportive head of department and both formal and informal departmental communication were identified as some key morphogenetic forces in a study conducted by Rees and Gatenby (2014). Further to this, commentators have noted that for the brave vision of CfE to be realised, research must form a collaborative link with policy and practice to achieve sustainable success (Hayward 2007; MacLean et al. 2015). A study composed by MacLean et al. (2015) found this to be one of several key 'enablers' of curriculum change, alongside the creation of a social structure in schools which provides guidance, support and feedback on teacher efforts to

⁹ Sometimes referred to as the morphogenetic sequence (Archer 1995).

¹⁰ As previously discussed. See also, MacLean et al. (2015).

enact new curriculum initiatives. Without these influences, it has proven very difficult to sustain real, lasting change.

It has been considered that most often curriculum change manifests as a *form* of morphostasis (Archer 1995), with the resultant outcome an amalgamation of previous practice and new policy. Priestley (2010, 2011a) and Priestley and Humes (2010) suggest that in-keeping with global trends, a lack of content knowledge and the tools required may render teachers powerless to fully enact the changes associated with CfE. Conversely, Thorburn, Jess and Atencio (2009, 2011) suggest there are encouraging signs in Scottish education, and that the current policy context is one which offers PE the opportunity to address ‘political, institutional and epistemological barriers’ (2009, p210).

Purpose

This case study is located in one secondary school in Scotland and whilst limitations of generalising findings are acknowledged, this is an approach which has proven conducive to prior educational research (Davies 2007). Through qualitative analysis of individual interviews, the research hopes to shine a modest light upon the most influential inhibitors and facilitators as perceived by PE teachers, in an ever-evolving climate of PE policy. In doing so, it is hoped it will make a substantial contribution to curriculum change literature, as well as proposing areas for future research and consideration that are outside the scope of this study.

The following research aims to ascertain whether inhibitors and facilitators identified by the literature are recurring in this school during the period of transition to the new National 5 PE course within Scotland’s CfE. The study is based upon the two aforementioned research objectives. In this, the first compulsory year of National 5 in schools, it is a valuable

time to identify inhibitors and facilitators to the change, in order to gauge whether teachers will engage with the course effectively.¹¹ Teachers are on the front line of education and are often identified as the most important agents of policy reform (Hall & Hord 2001), therefore their perceptions are of the utmost relevance. The range of experience and personalities within the department provided for interesting results as to the agency of the teachers throughout the change. It is thought that through identifying the important inhibitors and facilitators of the change to National 5 PE, future change - both in and outwith education- will benefit from an improved understanding of prominent influences on policy reform.

Working within interpretative boundaries, the research is a qualitative case study of a PE department in a secondary school in Scotland. A common critique of case study is the limitations for generalising (Sarantakos 2005; Siedman 2006). However, this study is based upon the premise highlighted by Yin (2003), which posits the single case study as a means to achieve ‘analytical generalisation’ rather than to produce representative data or truly generalisable results¹². A common misconception noted by Kvale (1996, p103) is that ‘the more interviews, the more scientific’ the research. However, it is hoped that a smaller sample size will result in a greater depth of response; it is noted that the very nature of a qualitative study of this magnitude is conducive to educational research (Davies 2007). Clearly, the aim of the study is not to reinvent the wheel, but as Robson (2011, p333) aptly claims: ‘Researchers often seem more interested in paddling their own canoes rather than doing their bit by adding another brick to the grand collective scientific enterprise.’ The current stage of enactment dictates the lack of research surrounding the change to National Qualifications, and therefore the study addresses a substantial dearth in the literature. The main focus was to

¹¹ Thus, addressing the dearth of related research at this early stage.

¹² In other words, a study for its own sake, and therefore referred to as an intrinsic case study (Stake 1995, 2003).

discern whether teachers in this school were engaging with this curriculum change similarly to- or differently from- those in previous research.

Methods and Procedures

Participants

The Institute Ethical Committee granted ethical approval and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of the study. Information was gathered from one local authority to identify those schools which fulfilled two main criteria. Firstly, it was crucial that the school was in its second year of implementation of the National 5 course, in order for participants to provide a comprehensive understanding of the change process as a whole. Secondly, for breadth and depth of response it was imperative to the study that each member of the chosen department had some experience teaching the course. From the cohort of schools which met the criteria, a school for the case study was randomly selected. The result was a non-denominational school in East Lothian with a roll of around 1000 pupils, the vast majority of whom were from a white, middle-class background. Respondents included 2 males and 3 females with 2-40 years teaching experience, ranging from ‘newly qualified teacher’ to ‘principal teacher’ of PE.

Interviews

Prior to conducting interviews, a pilot study was an essential consideration in the research methods (see e.g. Sampson, 2004). As a result of this process, some amendments were made to the wording and order of the questions. Subsequently, focused interview schedules

(Gordon 1999; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000) were followed in a semi-structured format which included six open-ended questions and probes (Gilham 2000). Questions were developed using the ‘Goldilocks’ test (Clough & Nutbrown 2007) and encompassed themes of participant background and experience, perceptions of curriculum change, perceptions of specific facilitators and inhibitors, and emotive perceptions regarding personal thoughts throughout the early stages of change.

Data Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the aim was to proliferate many properties of the category of change and therefore attempt to yield property theory through the use of the constant comparative method (CCM) of analysis (Glaser 1965). Firstly, transcripts were read and reread, to become familiar with responses (Dye 2000) and initial analysis took the form of memos (Miles & Huberman 1984) throughout the data. Thus, the first stages of CCM were initiated. The CCM method is not linear, but flits to and fro’ throughout the analytical process in order to constantly review and evaluate the data. In this vein, each memo or theme which arose from the data was compared to previous themes from similar sections. Once themes were deemed exhaustive (Robson 2011), a coding framework was established and applied to the data. This verified Glaser’s (1965) proposal of codified procedures as significant catalysts in the transition from data to theory.

Validity and Reliability

Referring to Maxwell’s (1996) tri-fold typology, it was noted that *description*, *interpretation* and *theory* could all pose potent threats to the validity and reliability of the study.

Description

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to avoid inaccuracy or ‘incompleteness’ of data - a validity concern of the utmost importance (Robson 2011). Participants also checked transcripts to ensure accuracy (Silverman 2000). Furthermore, it was noted that the case study environment built positive, trusting researcher-respondent relationships which served to reduce reactivity and respondent bias (Robson 2011). Both information gathered from the pilot study, and the use of the ‘Goldilocks’ test to form questions, reduce the likelihood of instances where data does not arrive naturally but rather is forced to the surface through the interviewer’s relationship with colleagues (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990).

Interpretation

Sadler (1981) sheds light on the various deficiencies of the human as analyst listing inconsistency, data overload and uneven reliability as pertinent examples. Mason (1996) claims that for validity of interpretation, there must be a clear traceable path from data to ‘end product’ which highlights the importance of charting and justifying the aforementioned steps.

Theory

The theories arising from the data were constantly evaluated and critiqued through negative case analysis (Robson 2011). This helped counter the inevitability of researcher bias, as Fetterman (1998) identifies that the analysis process is as much a test of the researcher as it is a test of the data.

In addition, a study such as this may draw reliability criticism for its lack of method or researcher triangulation. However, Bloor (1997) argues that whilst these are relevant to reliability and validity, they can prove problematic both logically and practically. For example, findings collected by different methods or by different researchers will diverge to

an extent which makes their direct comparison less reliable. Furthermore, Denzin (1975) refers to ‘triangulation protocols’ as in the steps which the investigator takes to check alternate meanings and interpretations of the data. This was indeed considered, and the use of CCM and negative case analysis of the interview data was deemed sufficient triangulation for this study.

Outcomes and Results

The interview data gave rise to a wide range of perceived inhibitors and facilitators of the enactment of CfE’s new National 5 course.¹³ Emergent themes gathered from the interview data were sorted into four main umbrella categories: *policy framework*, *teacher agency*, *collaboration* and *school structure*. A brief definition of each category and description of the themes included will prefix an evaluation of the key findings within the section, each time comparing analysis with that of the reviewed literature.

Policy Framework

This theme encapsulates the structure of the new course, and the extent to which it differed from its predecessor.¹⁴ Course documentation, assessment procedures and the change context itself formed responses sorted under the ‘policy’ umbrella, in order to discern whether the flexible policy framework itself was an inhibitor or facilitator to the change. It was comprehensively adjudged to align with the former, as teachers raised concerns regarding the course structure, the speed of the change and the ambiguous nature of the course documentation.

¹³ These will be displayed as morphostatic and morphogenetic forces (Buckley 1967), as previously discussed.

¹⁴ Intermediate 1 and 2.

One inhibitor widely identified by respondents was the structure of the course and the extent of the change from previous policy. Indeed it was recognised that it was necessary to engage with the examinations and practices associated with the new course, but difficulties arose when attempting to infuse this engagement with previous experience and approaches used in past courses: ‘We tried to give them as many different practical experiences as we had done previously and we couldn’t fit that in’ (Teacher 2, Male). Almost immediately it was suggested that a *form* of morphostasis (Archer 1995) was evident in the change process, through attempts to make links with the previous policy where there perhaps was minimal opportunity to do so. The main reason consistently given for this lack of compatibility with previous course experience was the vast quantity of written assessment in the new National 5 course. However, it was noted by the interviewees that the new course actually held a very similar body of knowledge to the previous one, something which was said to have eased the change for the subject. In addition, it was highlighted by the participants that this was an exciting opportunity for policy to channel through a positive iterative refraction (Supovitz 2008) process into the contextual settings of the individual school.

Although elements of the flexible nature of the new policy were indeed praised in principle, the speed at which such a change was introduced was regarded as a key inhibitor to the change process. One teacher displayed concern regarding the effects of a rushed process, and the fine line between opportunities for teacher agency and engendering insecurity:

I’ve no doubt there will have been creativity produced because of it, but I’ve also no doubt that there’ll be teachers insecure - feeling they’re a couple of lessons ahead of the pupils- and we know for a fact that’s transmitted across to the children in the last couple of years. That’s not healthy. (Teacher 1, Male)

These concerns were perhaps not expressed in dissatisfaction with the lack of time for course planning or preparation, but rather it was conveyed that confusion and insecurities

were exacerbated by the lack of coinciding, explicit documentation. Teachers were aware that new course documents were to be treated as blueprints to adapt to their individual school, but were concerned about the vagueness of crucial exemplars and assessment criteria:

Reading the documents, they were so open and vague, which I know is probably the way they should be, but it meant it was open to interpretation from every single teacher who's read it.

(Teacher 3, Male)

This finding echoes those of previous research (Priestley 2010; MacLean et al. 2015) which proved that the possibility for numerous interpretations of the 'vague' policy text, meant teachers struggled to be sure of their course. Indeed, within a flexible policy framework, it is assumed that teachers will pose as curriculum decision-makers, though in this instance they felt they lacked the necessary tools to do so. Ironically, it was stressed that it would perhaps be easier for teachers to exercise agency within a more explicitly-structured course:

I mean, to me if we had 'this is how it should be done here, here and here,' you can then adapt it. If you're creative and you're a forward thinker, and forward planning and a go-getter, you'll change it. (Teacher 2, female)

It was evident that this teacher - and indeed several others- required greater course structure as a security, but it was assumed that this would not reduce the possibility for agency. What evidently did reduce opportunity for teacher agency was the insecurity brought about by their perceptions of being 'kept in the dark' by policymakers. Furthermore, this insecurity towards mediating the flexible curriculum was compounded by the high-stakes examination climate and prevalent issues of teacher accountability.

Teacher Agency

The second theme emerging from the data relates to the impact of various cultural systems upon the teacher's sense of agency in mediating the flexible policy framework. Teaching experience, desire to enact change, and values and beliefs associated with both the subject area and the profession were some of the key themes that emerged. In contrast to issues regarding the *flexible policy framework*, findings purporting to this theme were largely positive, as teacher values, knowledge and experience were deemed key facilitators to the change.

One facilitator which proved refreshingly ubiquitous throughout responses, was the values and beliefs which underpinned teachers' understanding of their job - in other words their professionalism, dedication and desire to work hard for the benefit of their pupils. Each teacher clearly had their pupils' best interests at heart, and consistently portrayed their key concerns as relating to the experiences of the pupils on the new course. Several teachers commented on their efforts to 'protect' pupils from a negative experience of PE:

I spent my life learning the document- reading it, understanding it and I spent every night after school last year for four months working with pupils after school and working on my own after school, but most of it was done at home. (Teacher 2, Female)

A key factor which evidently assisted these efforts, was the teachers' knowledge of their own clientele. The teachers took pride in knowing their pupils' needs and abilities, a factor which enhanced their ability to tailor the course to suit - a fundamental of the new policy.

Interestingly, one teacher raised a valid point regarding the importance of teacher age and experience in the curriculum change process:

It comes down to being - I think - young enough, but just experienced enough that I can come into it with an open mind, that I'm not going to look at any changes... as a negative because the

people making these changes know what they're talking about and they're trying to do the best for the pupils. (Teacher 3, Male)

Through emphasising the importance of his relative youth and experience, the teacher shows how curriculum decision-making can often be dependent on past experience, or future orientations (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). However, it therefore follows that the effect of experience and identity on the enactment of policy is not always a positive one. It was apparent that the two older members of the department favoured a traditional approach to PE. These teachers talked of feeling constrained in their ability to provide pupils with the practical, experiential learning and also fulfil the written assessment demands of the new course. Despite this, these concerns did not manifest as an inhibitor to change, due to an inherent desire to provide collegial support and guidance, in order to aid the reformation of the policy in school.

Collaboration

Within 'collaboration', themes were split between departmental collaboration, collaborating with policy-makers and collaborating with other teachers. Timing, quality and volume of collaboration were all key concerns. Findings unearthed a dichotomy of collaborative practice, as collaboration with policymakers was identified as a significant inhibitor; whilst intra-departmental collaboration was considered an important facilitator.

Further to the aforementioned lack of explicit documentation surrounding the new National 5 course, all respondents noted the distinct lack of opportunity for quality collaboration with policymakers throughout the change process. One teacher outlined that to improve the seemingly universal feelings of frustration and uncertainty, assistance had to come from above:

What we needed, what we were crying out for was for some information to come from the SQA, Education Scotland or someone to say, to get a large group of teachers together and say ‘this is the national standard- this is what our expectation is’ or ‘these are our expectations for the year.’ (Teacher 3, Male)

In reality, teachers *again* felt separate from policymakers in the context of text production reinforcing findings from countless previous research studies (e.g. Thorburn 2010; Dyson et al. 2011; MacLean et al. 2015). It was claimed that the few attempts made to bridge this gap were unhelpful and somewhat false, as policymakers seemed to have decided upon concrete agendas prior to collaboration. Teachers clearly still feel policy change comes ‘from a narrow belt of opinion and then it’s thrown at the profession’ (Teacher 1, Male).

It was perceived by one teacher as ‘obvious’ that there should be collaborative practice between policymakers and teachers:

I certainly feel that there should be a relationship, I mean I don’t know why there shouldn’t be, because really we’re the people that are teaching it and giving the kids the information so if we don’t have proper clarification on what we need to do, how are we meant to do it correctly?
(Teacher 4, Female)

MacLean et al. (2015) identified that teachers require facilitative leadership and guidance to buttress their decision-making, a concept which seems to be reinforced by these findings. However, in the absence of opportunities for quality collaboration with policymakers, problems seem to have again risen from teachers mediating the flexible framework and acting as agents of change. Moreover, these problems were exacerbated by the current high-stakes examination climate and a fear of falling short of the national standards. Among other factors, these have manifested as mismanagements of the timing of the course and resultant negative experiences for pupils. Teachers bemoaned the need for long periods in the classroom towards the end of the year due to an underestimation of the volume of written

work associated with the course. It was initially unclear what form of 'relationship' or collaboration with policymakers was desired by the teachers. This became clearer once the collaboration of internal staff was discussed, and the importance of informal discussion highlighted.

On the other side of the aforementioned dichotomy was intra-departmental collaboration. Collaboration between teachers in the PE department was viewed unanimously as one of the most influential facilitators of the change. One teacher commented:

In each school the fact that we had flexibility to do the course the way that we wanted - within certain parameters - then the most important was the internal staff. (Teacher 1, Male)

This insight highlights the importance of collaborative approaches when working under a flexible policy framework, proposing discussion and collegiality as key factors in refining the course to suit the individual context. Such collaboration was also said to provide a resource for those less experienced teachers in the department who have been said to rely more on colleague support and the structures of the department than their own reflexive deliberation (Kahn 2009). The frequency of this formal and informal discussion amongst the teachers was appreciated by several respondents, one of whom claimed:

It's all the time. It's during DM's, it's during lunchtime conversations, it's during an episode of team-teaching, it's after school discussions, it's - you know - in our own time if we're out socialising with one another we can still discuss small bits of the curriculum... there's constantly educational debate going on and ways of making things better. (Teacher 3, Male)

Such a statement, whilst entirely refreshing, is also a crucial tenet of morphogenesis (Archer 1995), as research continually shows the importance of collaborative approaches to the professional development of teachers (Dunscombe & Armour 2004; Ha et al. 2004; Armour & Yelling 2007). Such claims also hint at possible stipulations for the aforementioned

‘relationship’ desired to bridge the teacher-policymaker gap. Viewing policy as discourse, the day-to-day contextual conversations highlighted here are viewed as crucial to the formation of new policy (Adams 2011). The value placed on such interaction by the teachers suggests a similar ‘relationship’ was necessary to collaboratively interpret the change with policymakers at an early stage.

School Structure

Finally, ‘school structure’ refers to the incidents in the data where issues regarding whole-school and departmental structures were considered. These include school traditions, departmental environment and departmental practices. All of these key themes were found to facilitate the process of curriculum change in various ways.

It was found that the supportive department environment was a facilitator which was highly valued amongst the teachers, as almost all respondents viewed the department as the main locus for teacher learning and curriculum decision-making (Knight 2002). One teacher spoke of the individual agency which each member of staff experienced, thanks to the facilitating management of the head of department:

Because each of us are individuals, we all have different teaching styles, we all have different ways of delivering a classroom lesson, a practical lesson here and there and that’s where our principal teacher is brilliant for allowing us that freedom. (Teacher 3, Male)

A strong, supportive head of department has been identified in previous studies as a crucial morphogenetic force (Rees & Gatenby 2014), and it seems similar findings have arisen here.

Through the department head placing value on agency and facilitating a supportive departmental environment, teachers were provided with a concrete context for action (Priestley et al. 2012) and offered guidance, support and feedback on their efforts to enact the new policy and develop the curriculum to suit their pupils (MacLean et al. 2015). In addition to this, the head of department stressed the importance of keeping up tradition:

I have a great department, they work hard, they want to do the best job. In a high achieving school, we are a high achieving department- we have that tradition and we don't want to let that drop. (Teacher 1, Male)

Through working in a setting which was traditionally hard-working and high-achieving, the cultural systems (Priestley 2010) of the school evidently served to reinforce good practice and impact positively on teacher decision-making.

A further facilitator which was primarily referenced by the three younger teachers in the department, was that of the department's team teaching schedule. It was noted that their comparative lack of teaching experience meant such a structure developed confidence in their course delivery, and eased the pressures of accountability:

I preferred not having the responsibility of having a class myself, so that if I was struggling, the ownership wasn't on me, and say if I felt my lesson didn't cover as much as it should have, I knew that there were two other lessons with different teachers which might reiterate that or explain it differently. (Teacher 5, Female)

Such a process was deemed both educationally valuable for pupils, and provided greater security and structure to those less experienced, and less able to exercise reflexive deliberation (Kahn 2009).

Indeed, morphogenesis requires not only personal agency but structural support (MacLean et al. 2015), both of which were arguably present in this department. However,

due to the aforementioned inhibitors, complete morphogenesis could not be realised, and at best the change can be described as a *form* of morphostasis (Archer 1995). Teachers expressed interest and engagement with the agentive role they were offered, though such optimism was somewhat quelched- primarily by vague documentation and a dissatisfaction with the opportunities for collaboration with policymakers. Teachers and policymakers would have benefitted from coming together to collectively view the policy as discourse (Adams 2011) prior to the introduction of the new course. The informal, unstructured collaboration so highly valued at a local (department) level was perhaps necessary at an early stage with policymakers, rather than structured CPD with seemingly concrete agendas.

Conclusion

This research sought to examine the complexities involved in teacher enactment of new policy in schools with the added caveat of investigating the impact that ‘high stakes’ exams place on teachers to act as agents of change. Some of the key inhibitors to change found were noticeably similar to findings from the recent ‘*enablers*’ study composed by MacLean et al. (2015). In both studies, teachers were wary of the autonomy granted to them by the flexible policy framework. However in this instance teachers seemed to appreciate more fully the rationale for such a curriculum, and the new course was largely viewed as a way of channelling a positive iterative refraction (Supovitz 2008) process into the unique contextual setting of the school. In addition, the teachers took pride in knowing their pupils’ needs and abilities to an extent where this process was facilitated by an ability to tailor the course to suit - a fundamental of the new policy. Despite this, an inherent desire for pupils to succeed caused alarming levels of wariness and indecision - especially due to the high-stakes nature of the examination climate. These concerns were perhaps not expressed in dissatisfaction

with the lack of time for course planning or preparation, but rather it was conveyed that insecurities were exacerbated by the lack of coinciding, explicit documentation. Teachers were aware that new course documents were to be treated as blueprints to adapt to their individual school, but were concerned about the vagueness and paucity of crucial exemplars and assessment criteria.

Echoing previous research, it would seem that there remains friction between teachers and policymakers, as teachers identified policy as conceived of a narrow belt of opinion and subsequently ‘thrown at the profession’. It was claimed that attempts made by policymakers to bridge this gap seemed false and were neither helpful towards the understanding of the documentation, nor the enactment of the new course. A factor which proved more helpful was the everyday departmental conversation which helped ‘form’ the policy within the school context. Teachers highlighted the importance of collaborative approaches when working under a flexible policy framework, proposing internal discussion and collegiality as key factors in refining the course to suit the individual context. Such collaboration was also said to provide a structural resource for those less experienced teachers in the department who have been said to rely more on colleague support and the structures of the department than their own reflexive deliberation (Kahn 2009). This informal, unstructured collaboration so highly valued at local (department) level was preferred to the rigid agendas associated with teacher CPD. It was concluded that to *collectively* adopt a policy-as-discourse approach from an early stage would allow both teachers and policymakers to form new policy collaboratively, in a discursive manner.

Transformational change may be the aim of the creators of educational policy such as CfE, but as PE teachers’ act as agents of change, translating and adapting curricula uniquely to fit within the unique contextual settings of the school, they require leadership and guidance to buttress their decision-making (Maclean et al. 2015). Guidance offered by policymakers

was insufficient for teachers to confidently pose as curriculum decision-makers, and ironically, results suggested it would perhaps be easier for teachers to exercise agency within a more explicitly-structured course. The results of the introduction of the new policy manifested as a form of morphostasis (Archer 1995), where revolutionary change was somewhat stagnated by several potent inhibitors. Despite this however, conveying a lack of teacher engagement would be somewhat inaccurate due to the work ethic and desire to succeed demonstrated by each teacher. It was reassuring to find that the three younger PE teachers charged with leading the course in subsequent years were excited, driven and accepting of their roles of ‘agents of change’. It was thought their youthfulness and enthusiasm provided them with an open mind conducive to engaging with the new form of policy, which is testament to the notion that curriculum decision-making can be dependent on past experience or future orientations (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). Furthermore, whilst the more experienced teachers held reservations about the direction of the course, they engaged fully in the interpretation and conversation involved at a curricular level and provided constant support and guidance to aid the reformation of the policy in school.

The aim of this research was to add ‘another brick to the grand collective scientific enterprise’ (Robson 2011, p333), through the analysis of curriculum change in relation to new educational policy. It is acknowledged that there are limitations in using a single case study, however these findings provide a modest platform for further, more meaningful research in this area. This study contributes to the progressive analysis of the stages of curriculum change, and begins to identify patterns in perceived inhibitors and facilitators of various educational change processes. Analysis of inhibitors highlighted the considerable concern shown towards the validity and fairness of the new assessment methods associated with National 5 PE, warranting further investigation into teachers’ perceptions of such, and the resultant implications for practice. The findings of this research have implications, not

only for the enactment of national curricula, but for any policy reform which poses individuals as agents of change who help devise and develop the policy. As the education policy model shifts to one which draws on the professional to act as agents of change translating, creating and adapting curricula, it is crucial that supporting documentation is explicit and teachers feel supported throughout the period of change. The challenge for future policy reform research is to consider the circumstances that are required at the appropriate time to allow radical change to be optimised.

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