Teachers as agents of curriculum change: closing the gap between purpose and practice
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Paper presented at the European Conference for Educational Research, Dublin, 23-26 September 2016

Introduction

Curriculum policy in many countries has been subject to a distinct shift in emphasis in recent years (Priestley & Biesta, 2013). Following two decades of centralised direction of the content (and even the methods) of the curriculum, there has been a shift to curricular models which emphasis local flexibility in curriculum-making, positioning teachers as autonomous developers of the curriculum. Yet, arguably, teachers in many countries have lost much of the craft knowledge necessary for school-based curriculum development, attributable to prescriptive teacher proof curricula (input regulation), and heavy-duty accountability mechanisms (output regulation) (Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013; Kneyber & Evers, 2015). This paper focuses on an initiative in Scotland, which sought to enhance teachers' capacity for curriculum-making through the methodology of Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry. This process explicitly engaged teachers with the big ideas of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, framing subsequent curriculum development in terms of fitness-for-purpose – that is fit-for-purpose knowledge content and fit-for-purpose pedagogy. The teachers were supported by university researchers, who opened a critical communicative space (Eady, Drew & Smith, 2014) betwixt school and university where the teachers could engage in challenging conversations about theories and practices and develop skills of enquiry. The researchers acted as critical colleagues and provided access to pertinent cognitive resources, including research articles to underpin the conceptual frameworks the teachers used to develop innovative pedagogical practices. In the paper, we illustrate, using an ecological understanding of teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015), how teachers' agency in curriculum-making increased as their confidence and professional knowledge grew, as they developed supportive and focused professional networks, and as their contexts for curriculum development were tailored to explicitly encourage sustainable innovation. The paper draws upon qualitative data generated from three cohorts of participating teachers, including artefacts from the programme, programme evaluations and one-to-one interviews.

The changing landscape of the curriculum

The 1990s saw the development of policy framed around the notion of input regulation (Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013), often featuring tightly prescribed content and even prescription of methods for teaching. England's National Curriculum, first introduced in 1989, offers a striking example of this sort of 'teacher-proof curriculum' (Taylor 2013). Early iterations were characterised by extremely detailed prescription of content, set out in hierarchies of levels and framed as learning objectives – a hybrid curriculum planning model combining content- and objectives-led approaches, described by Kelly (2004) as a mastery model of curriculum. In the face of evidence that this highly prescriptive approach did not work, being subject to various forms of teacher mediation from the creative application of curriculum development through to strategic compliance and outright subversion (see for example: Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Osborne et al., 1997; Helsby, 1999), later iterations of the curriculum tended to relax content prescription, while tightening regulation of methodology (for example, the compulsory adoption of formative assessment techniques, and particular lesson structure templates). The imperative lying behind such policy was a desire to ensure fidelity between policy and practice (Cuban, 1998) – to close a perceived 'implementation gap' (Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008) – accompanied by a rhetoric of school failure that has served to 'create a sense of

unease about teaching and justified subsequent government attempts to reconstruct teachers' work' (Helsby, 1999: 24). This fundamentally political drive to centralise policy has been widely viewed as states assuming control over education as one of the few remaining levers of economic and political sovereignty in an increasing global world (for example: Green, 1999; Halsey et al, 1997). Scotland's curriculum policy during the 1990s broadly fits with this general trend. The former 5-14 Curriculum, while less prescriptive than its English cousin, was framed around content expressed as learning outcomes, and came to be associated with highly structured and prescriptive schemes of work in schools.

The period since the turn of the millennium has witnessed a curricular turn in many countries as a 'new curriculum' (Biesta & Priestley, 2013) has emerged, characterised by a number of common trends. These include: a shift from the specification of knowledge content as the basis for curriculum planning towards genericism (Young, 2008); an emphasis on the centrality of the learner, active forms of pedagogy and a view of teachers as facilitators of learning (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013); a notion of education as a product, expressed as modular courses and ladders of qualifications (Young, 2008); an articulation of curriculum as assessable outcomes, accompanied by increasingly pervasive regimes of accountability and cultures of performativity (Young, 2008); and (in apparent contradistinction to the previous point) a [re]construction of teachers as agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). This evolution of curriculum policy appears to recognise that there needs to be more nuanced ways of framing the role of teachers in curriculum making (although as will be made clear in the coming paragraphs of this paper, such understandings have not been necessarily accompanied by nuanced understandings of the contextual conditions necessary to foster this). Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) is a good example of the 'new curriculum'. For example, it strongly emphasises the key role of teachers in shaping curricular practices:

> In the past, national curriculum developments have often been supported by central guidelines, cascade models of staff development and the provision of resources to support the implementation of guidance by teachers. Our approach to change is different. It aims to engage teachers in thinking from first principles about their educational aims and values and their classroom practice. The process is based upon evidence of how change can be brought about successfully – through a climate in which reflective practitioners share and develop ideas. (Scottish Executive 2006, p. 4)

This curricular shift is a manifestation of a wider transnational discourse that 'teachers matter' (OECD 2005), characterised by talk of lifelong professional learning, teaching as a Master's level profession, teacher autonomy and teachers as agents of change. Again, Scotland's broader policy landscape manifests similar trends; the influential report *Teaching Scotland's Future* (TSF) (Donaldson 2010) has set out approaches to educational leadership and teacher professional learning, advocating the development of new forms of 'partnership working' between universities, schools and local authorities to foster the implementation of CfE. The TSF report positions practitioners as 'reflective and enquiring teachers who are engaged in continuous improvement' (p.15) and 'have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change' (p. 19).

This significant shift away from input regulation and teacher-proof curricula is to be welcomed in our view, as it potentially provides the opportunities for teachers to achieve and exercise agency in their professional lives. Nevertheless, currently such aspirations are not achievable for a number of reasons which continue to erode teacher agency. This has become evident in Scotland in the partial (at best) implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, as evidenced by research studies (Priestley &

Minty, 2013; Wallace & Priestley, in press) and the recent OECD review of Scottish education (OECD, 2015). First, the pervasive output regulation of teachers' work (Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013; Leat, Livingston & Priestley, 2013) or outcomes steering (Biesta 2004) arguably inhibits teacher agency more effectively that has been the case with input regulation. Accountability, surveillance, performance indicators and target setting, and governance by data (including attainment data) have been widely viewed as 'a shift from notions of partnership, collegiality, discretion and trust to increasing levels of managerialism, bureaucracy, standardization, assessment and performance review' (Evetts, 2011, p. 407). These clearly run counter to the political rhetoric expressed in policy about autonomy and agency. Such phenomena have been linked to the development of cultures of performativity in professional settings, leading to diminished professional autonomy and instrumental decision-making (Gleeson and Husbands 2001; Perryman 2009; Keddie, Mills & Pendergast 2011). Thus, curricular policy intentions are undermined by the effects of other policies and associated practices.

Second, the development of aspirational policy to promote teachers' professional agency has not been accompanied by a cultural/discursive environment that might foster such aspirations. Part of this lies in the above-mentioned performativity; however, the problem is also situated in professional thinking about education and the professional language used to describe and define educational practice. A recent study on teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015; Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, in press) suggests that many teachers lack an educational language with which to engage critically with policy, and with which to develop their practice. The study suggests that, in Scotland at least, many teachers simply use the language of the latest policy. There is evidence, mirroring previous studies by scholars such as Cuban (1998), Swann and Brown (1997) and Sarason (1990) that curriculum change is often superficial, comprising little more than changing the terminology to re-label existing practices as being constitutive of new policy. Moreover, existing educational discourse remains problematic in its technocratic and often linear nature. We offer here two examples of this. The first is the ubiquitous use of 'uneducational' language to describe educational practices, a phenomenon described by Hood (1995, p.105) as 'new managerial catchwords', which have become so extensive that they constitute a 'new global vocabulary' (ibid). The metaphor delivery is a notable example. An anecdote from the teaching career of one of the authors vividly illustrates the extent to which this metaphor has penetrated educational discourses. In the early 1990s, a Headteacher faced with documentation for new GNVQ courses (replete with the language of delivery), said 'what are we, bloody milkmen or something?'. This was worthy of comment at this time, but the language of delivery is largely unchallenged today. Thus one hears about 'delivery' of content, or worse still, 'delivery' of outcomes, or 'delivery' of literacy. This may seem like a trivial issue but it is in fact significant, in that the language we use frames the way we think about and enact practice. The continued conceptualising of education as delivery thus potentially inhibits the enactment of practices, by framing the development of the curriculum as simply the implementation of the curriculum as defined by someone else. This is, of course redolent of the sort of linear thinking that seeks to close implementation gaps and ensure fidelity between policy and practice. A second example lies in how we conceptualise the implementation gap. As illustrated above, this is invariably seen as being a gap between policy and practice. A more fruitful way of seeing this is as a gap between educational purposes/principles/values and educational practice. To take this view potentially changes the whole problematic of enacting policy; instead of being an implementation issue or, as it so often becomes, an issue framed as changing teachers' practice, it becomes an issue of critical engagement with educational principles (including a critical engagement with policy) and a constructive enactment of practice that is fit-for-purpose.

Such an approach, as we shall show in the remainder of this paper, potentially avoids a situation where curriculum development is reduced to a process of ticking off of outcomes and the implementation of techniques, as teachers lose sight of the big ideas of the curriculum (Drew, Priestley & Michael, 2016). In the next section, we describe a project, *School-based Curriculum Development through Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry,* that sought to break the mould of existing curriculum development practices.

Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry

This project has run with yearly cohorts of around 25 teachers between 2012 and 2015, within a single Scottish Local Authority. Throughout the project, there has been a strong focus on ensuring that values and beliefs pertaining to issues of social justice are surfaced, examined and challenged through 'asking critical questions of policies and practices' (General Teaching Council for Scotland 2012). Each cohort comprised small groups of teachers (typically four to six) from early years, primary and secondary schools in the authority, attending six workshops over an academic session (approximately nine months). From the outset, there was an expectation that each school should send a group of teachers, including at least one member of the senior leadership and management team.

There are many frameworks and/or models for similar methodologies of enquiry or action research (for example see: Coghlan & Brannick 2014; Koshy, 2010). While authors tend to agree that there is no single or correct way of implementing this methodology, a review of 42 studies of collaborative inquiry by DeLuca et al. (2015) identified three principal interrelated structural elements: dialogic processes; taking action; and engaging in reflection. All three elements are embedded in the CCPE model, which comprises a two stage process:

- Stage 1: a conceptual phase which involved engaging with the 'big ideas' of the curriculum[i], considering fitness for purpose of pedagogies and addressing contextual conditions.

- Stage 2: undertaking Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry (CPE), a methodology, derived from action research, comprising three processes: focusing, interrupting and sense making (adapted from Drew et al. 2008).

The aim of the first stage was to engage practitioners with the principles and purposes of current curricular policy in Scotland, addressing the issue, highlighted by research, that many teachers have a poor understanding of these (Priestley & Minty 2013). The emphasis at this stage is not on change *per se*, but on critical engagement, with the aim of developing 'good' educational practices from the conceptual framing provided by the new curriculum. Underpinning this activity is an assumption that existing practices might be fit-for-purpose, but that participants do not necessarily know whether this is the case unless they are critically evaluated against the benchmarks provided by the CfE attributes and capabilities as well as broader educational purposes, principles and values; conversely, such an evaluation might lead to significant change in practices. This involves an exploration of: the principles and purposes or 'big ideas' of the curriculum, fit-for-purpose knowledge/content (something that has been comparatively neglected in CfE; e.g. see: Priestley & Minty, 2013), and the framing of appropriate practices through fit-for-purpose pedagogies. Participants are encouraged to think about barriers and drivers to their planned innovation, stimulating discussion about how, for example, accountability practices and school systems might impede their plans.

The conceptual stage described above ensures that professional enquiry is rooted in consideration of educational purposes, principles and values. The CCPE stage involves three processes or phases:

focusing, interrupting and sense-making. During the first phase, the participants engage in professional dialogue about school-based curriculum development to identify an area of interest or concern in their practice related to pedagogy, content or assessment. Throughout this stage the participants develop the focus of the enquiry through engaging critically with ideas in research and academic readings, as they begin to form the enquiry question that will guide their innovation, and as they attend to principles of social justice and sustainability of practices, underpinned by their codes of professional ethics. By the end of this phase the CCPE group generate and agree a broad 'critical' question for their enquiry and devise a collaborative plan for implementing the critical enquiry through interrupting practice. In Phase Two of CCPE, groups interrupt existing practices through implementing and trialling new approaches. They continue to critique and refine or modify their conceptual framework during this phase, through ongoing critical engagement with reading and professional dialogue, both within the CCPE group and with other members of the educational community including the University researchers and colleagues. The process of engaging in systematic generation and gathering of empirical data (both process and outcomes) takes place throughout all three stages but is perhaps most prevalent during this stage as the practitioners implement the interruption in practices, and begin to notice changes in their knowledge, understanding and practices, as well as the impact on their students' learning experiences. In Phase Three there is a focus on collaborative sense-making through critical analysis of data and interpretation of evidence, as the CCPE group begin to evaluate the impact of the interruption and draft a 'report' for dissemination to their educational community. However, this sense-making process permeates all three phases, as participants invoke professional judgement to make sense of the data generated throughout the enquiry and use this to evidence their claims and assertions about the contribution of the process to: developing pupils' attributes and capabilities; enhancing their professional learning in relation to development of educational practices; and identifying messages for the wider school community.

Research design

The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did the project impact on educators' knowledge, understandings and practices in their settings?
2. In what ways did the project shape the agency achieved by teachers in their professional work?
3. In what ways did the project facilitate school-based curriculum development and affect practices in the participating schools?

A rich variety of qualitative data was generated from the project. These included data generated by activities associated with the project, as well as follow-up research. Data included:

- Formal semi-structured telephone interviews with 6 participants, including school leaders.
- Programme evaluation questionnaires.
- Field notes from participant observation in project workshops
- Artefacts generated by cohorts through various pedagogical activities
- Mid/end of programme feedback from participants
- Artefacts generated for group presentations.

Drawing in this way from multiple data sources allowed the research team to construct a rich picture of the context being researched. Interview data and other written transcripts (for example field notes) were coded following an interpretivist approach (Corbin and Holt 2005), which allowed for

both a process of open coding of data and the subsequent application of theoretical framings (for example the ecological approach to teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015).

The research complied with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association, and ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education at the University of Stirling. While it is not possible to guarantee full anonymity in a publicly-run project of this nature, we have sought to minimise the risk of identification by referring to participants by role only (e.g. EYCT = early years classroom teacher, PHT = primary head teacher, SDHT = secondary deputy head teacher, SCT = secondary classroom teacher, etc.). Schools are only identified by sector (primary/secondary). All participants are referred to as female, in order to further minimise risk of identification.

Teacher agency

The data generated by this project have been analysed using the conceptual framework provided by the ecological approach to understanding teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). It is important provide a brief overview of this approach here, as it differs from traditional sociological accounts of agency in significant ways. Foremost amongst these is the notion of agency as an emergent phenomenon, rather than as a variable in social action, as characterised in the longstanding structure/agency debate.

> [T]his concept of agency highlights that actors always act <u>by means</u> of their environment rather than simply in their environment [so that] the achievement of agency will always result from the <u>interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations.</u> (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137; emph. added).

Agency, in other words, is not something that people <u>have</u>; it is something that people <u>do</u> or, more precisely, something they <u>achieve</u> (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). It denotes a 'quality' of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves.

This ecological understanding of agency draws heavily on the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who have developed a theory of agency that encompasses the dynamic interplay between three temporal dimensions – influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present – and which takes into consideration 'how this interplay varies within different structural contexts of action' (ibid., p.963). They refer to these three dimensions as the <u>iterational</u>, the <u>projective</u> and the <u>practical-evaluative</u>. All three dimensions play a role in social action, but the degree to which they contribute varies. This is why Emirbayer and Mische speak of a '<u>chordal triad</u> of agency within which all three dimensions resonate as separate but not always harmonious tones' (ibid., p.972; emphasis in original). Thus, they define agency as '<u>the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations</u>' (ibid., p.970; emph. in original). Agency thus appears as a 'temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and 'acted out' in the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment)' (ibid., p.963).

For a more detailed account of this conceptualisation of teacher agency, readers should refer to Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015).

CCPE and teacher agency

In this final section of the paper, we examine, through analysis of teachers' voices, the impact that participation in our Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry project has exerted on teacher agency. We broadly frame this analysis in two areas: 1] the effects of CCPE on teachers' individual capacity to engage with curriculum policy (largely the iterational and projective dimensions, but playing out through teacher's judgements about what is possible in the present contexts of schooling); and 2] the ways in which this project has impacted upon the contexts which shape teachers' responses to curriculum policy (in effect the practical-evaluative dimension).

Teacher capacity to engage

As indicated previously, research (e.g. Priestley & Minty, 2013; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015) suggests an erosion in Scottish teachers' capacity to develop the curriculum in school. For example, it is evident that many teachers have lost the craft knowledge required to engage in school-based curriculum development, their practices being limited by strong socialisation associated with previous curriculum policy (e.g. outcomes-based planning with the former 5-14 curriculum), assessment practices (e.g. the influence of subject specifications in examinations syllabi) and accountability practices (e.g. inspections). These influences seem to encourage a risk-averse and often instrumental approach to curriculum development (Priestley & Minty, 2013), and limit teachers' ability to envisage alternative futures and to manoeuvre between repertoires in their practice. In particular, there is evidence that many schools simply recycle old practices and ideas when addressing new curriculum development problematics (ibid).

CCPE appears to address some of these issues, by interrupting habitual ways of thinking, by introducing new ideas in a way which is relevant to practice, and by its emphasis on collaborative sense-making. As such, the process clearly enhanced teachers' professional knowledge. Of particular value is the focus on external impetus, through the conversations with university academics and engagement with academic reading. According to one Secondary Deputy Head:

> I led the group, I had a way I wanted to go, a set of rigid ideas of what I considered it to be… my vision was narrow, by reading and research and working with Val and Mark that expanded our thinking… Read stuff I had never heard of before …it really helped me have a wider perspective - a key driver was research and reading. (SDHT1)

Another teacher spoke in similar terms:

> It has illustrated how much more meaningful it is for this to come from my own reading and discussion with colleagues rather than [it] by being presented by SMT or coming from Education Scotland etc. […] The focus of our enquiry was questioning but I read widely at the start of the enquiry before we had decided what we would be working on, and I was very interested in the ideas about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the role expectation has, and fixed/growth mindsets. Re-engaging with these ideas through professional reading has brought them back to the forefront of my mind when I consider the type of learning environment and classroom ethos I want to achieve. (PCT1)

Several teachers spoke about how the project allowed them to develop alternative ways of looking at the process of curriculum development, explaining how this opened up horizons and made new thinking and new practices possible. One secondary Deputy Head spoke of how the project challenged single-track thinking which had become deeply embedded in her school:

> Going back to the Four Capacities[ii] – refocus, coming back to broader sense of CfE and all the possibilities that are in there, makes you think gosh anything is possible 'it opens it up again, you do get very entrenched with that you do on a daily basis. (SDHT2)

Other teachers articulated similar sentiments:

> Learning teams [were] encouraged to engage in a critical, theoretical enquiry process when looking at alternative methodology/changing practice, as this is more authoritative and empowering process than following somebody else's lead, which might not be appropriate for our staff/learners. (PDHT2)

> It has reminded me not to simply accept 'the ways things are' within my classroom and to engage and reflect more critically upon things which I feel are issues or problems, considering what I can do to improve this by engaging with literature of enquiry within my classroom. (PCT8)

Interestingly, the process seemed to challenge, in some cases at least, the prevailing tradition in Scotland of looking at 'best practice' in other schools, identified within school inspections and often uncritically applied. Instead, the process encouraged a more reflexive approach to developing practice from first principles.

> In terms of matching our interruption…to what we were doing instead of how do we tick all the boxes, based on theory and the connections with critical approaches rather than going with another school and see what they were doing or applying this because it is the latest initiative. (PDHT2)

For many of these teachers, CCPE represented:

> A change in seeing – it gave them time to see the impact of doing research based enquiry and the impact that professional reading can have directly in your classroom… it made them question each others' practice as well. (PHT2)

In turn, this "allowed practitioners to be creative and innovative, which I believe has given my teachers the ability to do that and not be prescriptive and programmed for them" (PHT2).

In summary, the project appears to have developed teachers' professional knowledge by providing them with alternative ways of doing curriculum development. In turn, this has opened up new ways of thinking, and afforded opportunities for alternative practices and changes to often axiomatic and routinized ways of teaching. Crucially, it seems to have made participants more critical in their engagement with policy:

> I found that the programme has helped me to be much more analytical about any changes to pedagogy. I think carefully and examine any comments which claim to evidence improvement in a much more detailed way to ensure that they do provide the evidence which is claimed. In terms of any changes being made in our department, I find myself questioning the rationale more carefully before the process is changed. (SCT1)

In terms of teacher agency, the individual capacity of teachers is clearly important. The project appears to have boosted this, leading to a greater ability in many cases to draw upon a wider repertoire for practice and to envisage alternative futures that had previously been unthinkable. In doing so, these teachers seem to have become less risk averse, more reflexive about their practice and enthused by a new curriculum that had previously often been a source of anxiety. Nevertheless, teacher agency is not just a matter of raising capacity; it is also important to address the structural

and cultural constraints and affordances that help shape agency. In the next section of the paper we examine this issue.

Contextual issues

The practical-evaluative dimension of agency is largely about two things: the practical constraints and affordances that inhibit agency or conversely make it possible; and the judgements by social actors such as teachers that likewise inhibit or afford agency. The achievement of teacher agency, in its orientations to the present, is often about the availability of resources – material, cultural and relational – or the lack thereof, and about judgements of risk made in situ by busy professionals. CCPE, as a structured intervention, subtly altered many of these dynamics, making possible new practices and enhancing teacher agency. The following examples illustrate this change.

First, CCPE seems to encourage the development of more collaborative and collegial cultures in schools. Several teachers spoke about the breakdown of hierarchies and the development of genuinely collegial working.

> We ended up much more as a group 'genuinely working as one of them', going through processing and planning together, good fun as well as work. (SDHT2)

> It has made me more aware that non-promoted staff are able to bring about a change in the curriculum. (PCT6)

This in turn opened up the availability of what might be called relational resources. There are several dimensions to this, the development of a supportive and protective environment where colleagues could experiment, and share the risks and benefits of innovation.

> it's a good way to gather a team together, working together, sharing research , sharing your understanding…planning changes, how you will look at success and how you will measure it and what changes you are going to make… a really good way of working together, working collegiately and joining together. [….] we had a shared goal, we had to work, research, evaluate, plan and present together. It was all a team effort; really positive to develop relationships in the staff between HT, DHT, new and existing teachers. (PDHT2)

One effect of this way of working seems to be increased confidence by classroom teachers

> The process encouraged me to have a more questioning approach to all aspects of my job. This along with the research approach has given me a strong wish to ensure that any changes being asked of me are only implemented with carefully thought through reasoning. This has given me confidence to question carefully any claims which are made. (SCT1)

> I feel more confident in researching and suggesting changes for the whole school. (PCT6)

A related effect was a reported increase in teachers' professional engagement in the development of the curriculum:

> They were seen as expert in their own right; recognition of their professional status, to be involved with tutors. (PHT2)

> It has highlighted that we – as professionals – are able to make a change to our curriculum. It is not always something we are 'made to do' by management. (PCT6)

In Scotland this has not always been the case. Earlier changes to teachers' working conditions (McCrone, 2001) had specified that curriculum development was to be part of a teacher's professional remit, although this has often been slow to develop in a hierarchical system where top-

down practices have been widely prevalent despite the explicit policy intentions to develop teacher professional judgement (see Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015).

CCPE appears to be promising in addressing some of the contextual issues. Because the insistence on senior management involvement in the programme, there appears to have been a substantial buy-in from school leaders to the methods and aims of the project, and increased support for resultant practices. This has provided a layer of protective mediation in relation to external demands relating to accountability. It has aided in the development of collaborative professional cultures and school systems, which in combination have enhanced the availability of relational resources in the schools. All of the above relate to the 'practical' aspect of the practical-evaluative dimension of teacher agency. Moreover participation in the project has helped to change attitudes and boost staff confidence, meaning that many of the teachers have become likely to engage in different decision-making about curriculum development. This relates to the 'evaluative' aspect.

Concluding thoughts

The CCPE project has run in one local authority for three years. The research conducted across the different cohorts suggests that this is a powerful mechanism for engaging teachers with curriculum policy and breaking the mould of existing practices which have arguably inhibited innovation and muted the impact of a aspirational curriculum policy. Our research suggests that this approach has enjoyed some success in enhancing teacher agency – through augmenting professional knowledge, challenging existing preconceptions and ways of working and through mitigating some of the cultural and structural barriers to curriculum development that currently exist in schools. Moreover, the data suggest (as we have reported elsewhere; see Drew, Priestley and Michael, 2016) that this has led in some cases to sustainable changes to practice in the participating schools. As suggested by one Principal Teacher (Primary):

> It has shown me the power in giving teachers time and support to reflect on their practice and think what they would like to change and adapt and permission to trial new ideas. This seems to have more long lasting impact on staff's practice than normal curriculum development time. (PPT1)

Clearly further experimentation, and more research will be needed to test these claims; however, we would argue on the basis of existing evidence that CCPE is a promising approach with the potential to enhance teacher agency and ultimately to lead to more meaningful curriculum development in schools.

Acknowledgements

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[i] In the case of CfE, these are set out in the Four Capacities. These are the top level purposes of the curriculum. They have become a sort of mantra, widely visible as slogans on posters in schools, but often stripped of meaning. In fact, they form a useful starting point for curriculum planning, being broken down into a set of key competences known as attributes and capabilities, which define the skills and knowledge to be acquired by an educated person. See:
http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/index.asp
[ii] The key competencies that form the front-end purposes of CfE