

Fostering and Managing Curriculum Change in Physical Education

A Scottish Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004), a new national policy initiative in Scottish Schools, provides a unified curricular framework for children aged 3-18. Physical Education (PE) now forms part of a collective alongside physical activity and sport, subsumed by the newly created curriculum area of 'Health and Wellbeing' (Scottish Government, 2009). This research set out to examine the new curriculum in Scottish schools at the micro-implementation stage of the policy process within the context of practice in Physical Education (PE).

Purpose: The primary objective was to understand the factors that *enable* teachers to enact government led curricular policy. The secondary objective was to compare policy constructors' vision of Physical Education to the interpretation of PE teachers who were currently immersed in initiating curricular development.

Methods and Procedures: The research adopted a mixed method survey approach. In the first instance Eighty-eight secondary school physical education teachers responded to a questionnaire that explored teachers' perceptions of curriculum change. Respondents were full time physical education teachers working in secondary schools across Scotland and represented sixteen local authorities. In addition, seventeen physical education teachers within one local authority took part in semi-structured individual interviews. A constant comparative analysis of interview data corroborated the questionnaire findings and provided an interesting insight into how PE teachers' are currently making sense of curriculum changes within the Scottish context. To achieve the secondary objective, one to one interviews were conducted with policy constructors who were responsible for the initial, interim and final stages of developing and designing the experiences and outcomes for Physical Education.

Main outcomes and results: The results from the questionnaire indicated that 66 per cent of teachers believed there was a need for change within the Scottish curriculum, however only 54 per cent anticipated that they would change the PE curriculum. Crucial in enabling teachers to enact and sustain change was the important role of *agency, culture* and *social and material structures* along with the schools *capacity* to manage new policy development. Central to the teachers desire to change was their belief in the primary objective of physical education. When comparing the data with the policy constructors the findings revealed a discrepancy between the policy constructors' understanding of the vision of physical education and teacher's interpretation. The alignment of PE within health and well being was seen as an opportunity to build on the strengths of the subject; however concerns were raised that this shift may result in physical education becoming part of a fitness discourse distorting policy intentions.

Conclusions : As PE teachers act as agents of change translating policy uniquely to fit with the opportunities and constraints of the school there is a fear that policy intentions may mutate as they percolate into practice. The research concludes by suggesting that there should be a greater involvement of teachers in the reform process so that future curricular innovations are more closely aligned with the knowledge and practice of teachers. This may enable them to understand policy more clearly and implement policy more effectively

Key Words Scottish Curriculum Policy • Curriculum Change • Teacher Enactment • Physical Education