Teachers’ views on the construction, management and delivery of an externally prescribed physical education curriculum: Higher Grade Physical Education

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Abstract

There is strong agreement that teachers are central to curriculum planning and development as it is teachers who ultimately decide whether or not, or to what extent, to implement innovations. By applying Basil Bernstein’s (1990) theoretical framework on the social construction of pedagogic discourse, this paper examines teachers’ views towards the process of a particular curriculum innovation in physical education in Scotland, Higher Grade Physical Education (HGPE). Also examined are teachers’ views on the consequent subject content and the management of the subject in schools, in an attempt to identify factors that aided or hindered teachers from supporting and delivering HGPE. It is suggested that as a consequence of teachers being expected to deliver an externally prescribed curriculum, de-professionalisation and de-skilling are probable teacher experiences.
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Introduction
The influences of government policy and assessment requirements over the past twenty years, i.e., the rise of formally assessed and certificated courses, has significantly influenced teaching and learning in schools throughout the United Kingdom. Perhaps within physical education the emergence of formal assessment and certification has been more of a key development than other ‘traditional’ subjects such as English, Maths and Science which have a much longer history of being formally assessed for certification (Paechter, 2000). In discussing Scottish secondary school physical education Brewer and Sharp (1999) noted a move towards 'curricula more closely prescribed by an assessment agenda outwith the formal control of the school physical education department' (p.541). As a consequence, they were aware of possible teacher de-professionalisation through the need to implement schemes devised and approved external to the school.

Bernstein’s (1990) model of the social construction of pedagogic discourse allows examination of the development, mediation and reproduction of curricula using three fields of knowledge production that he terms 'primary', 'recontextualising' and 'secondary'. This paper focuses on the relationship between the recontextualising and secondary level, highlighting the tensions that emerge when teachers (secondary level) are expected to deliver a curriculum constructed by agents and agencies outwith the school context (recontextualising level). Bernstein’s theory is similar to that of Young (1971) and Goodson (1985) in the belief that the social construction of knowledge and more specifically, school subjects, are politically driven and consequently demonstrate particular political interests of the dominating social order.

Teachers’ role in curriculum development and teacher ownership
The level of influence teachers have over changing developments in curricula to suit their individual schools is not matched by the influence they possess in the development of
such curricula outside of the school context (Penney & Evans, 1999). Even though this appears to be the case there has been strong agreement that teachers are central to curriculum planning and development as it is teachers who ultimately decide whether or not, or to what extent, to implement innovations (Gatherer, 1999). Teachers are more likely to accept innovations if they are deemed to be practical and do not challenge teachers’ already established ways of teaching, although physical education teachers are known to be especially resistant to change (Sparkes, 1990).

The extent of teachers’ formal involvement in curriculum development has been a concern of a number of authors (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994; Fullan, 1982). Hargreaves & Evans (1997) suggested that 'It is time for teachers to be the included vanguard of reform, and not be made its marginalised victims' (p.13). Fullan (1982) calls for teachers to be genuinely involved in curriculum reform rather than the assumption that by involving some teachers on curriculum committees an implementation would be more likely to be accepted by other teachers. As Fullan explained, the majority of teachers are on the ‘receiving’ end of new policy and programmes many more times than they are on the initiating end. Hargreaves (1994) was aware of the lack of admittance from reformers that the involvement of teachers in educational change was likely to increase the success of a proposed change. Without such involvement from teachers, those involved in the construction and production of a curriculum reform are unaware of teachers' desires for change or for the conservation of their current practice.

It is widely agreed that teachers are expected by those agents and agencies involved in the construction of a specific discourse to implement such a discourse (Bernstein 1990; Apple, 1982). The perceived degree of control that teachers believe they have encountered in the evolution of a change in the curriculum is an issue which can influence teachers in making a particular decision in relation to undertaking curriculum change. This issue is commonly referred to as 'teacher ownership'. The importance of teacher ownership of curriculum change is stressed by a number of researchers (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001; Gavin, 1999 & Gatherer, 1989). Kirk & Macdonald (2001) argue that the opportunity for teachers to have some degree of control over curriculum matters, in
what they call the ‘local context of implementation’, affects the extent of teacher ownership. That is, the extent to which the contexts in which teachers work are taken into account when making decisions, with teachers judging changes by their practicality to the contexts in which they are teaching. Gavin (1999) makes the same argument, 'The involvement of practitioners in the whole process of planning, developing, monitoring and reviewing is essential in reflecting ownership, in maintaining confidence and in influencing the direction of change' (p.444).

Although teachers’ role in curriculum development is very much restricted to the school context, they are allowed more autonomy and decision-making in such a context. Writing from an English perspective, Penney & Evans (1999) agree that the construction of a school subject such as physical education has (in fact) excluded the involvement of teachers and consequently, what is to be thought of as physical education is decided for teachers. The major contribution made by teachers in educational reform is by adapting the physical education curriculum mandates to their individual school contexts. The modification of curricula by teachers is the rule, not the exception (Kirk, 1990). However, this does not dismiss the possibility that many individual teachers ask for more direction and clarity from external agencies as to what and how they should be teaching (Fullan, 1982).

Physical education teachers may be less successful or interested in the implementation of a curriculum development as they would be had they felt they had been involved in an official role (Kirk, 1992; Sparkes, 1991a & b) and there are current examples of this occurring. A particular example was when teachers’ lack of involvement in the development of the National Curriculum for Physical Education in England and Wales resulted in their enthusiasm for the innovative implementation being weak (Penney & Evans, 1999). MacLeod (1992), in discussing the process of curriculum development in relation to Standard Grade Physical Education (a two-year course primarily undertaken in Scotland by students aged 15 and 16 years old), reported how one particular Principal Teacher of physical education did not identify herself as an owner of such a development 'since she had been only implementing a received product' (p. 170).
Bernstein's construction of pedagogic discourse

Bernstein introduces the fields for the production (primary), recontextualising and reproduction (secondary) of pedagogic discourse and consequently discusses the relationships between the three fields (how they can be linked to each other) and the rules of the pedagogic device. The 'primary context' tends to be where the 'intellectual field' of the education system originates. New ideas are selectively created, modified and changed to result in developing specialised discourses. As Bernstein emphasises, this field is concerned with the production of non-pedagogical knowledge rather than the reproduction of educational discourse and its practice. The 'secondary context' entails the selective reproduction of educational discourse involving various levels, such as tertiary and secondary. The non-pedagogical contexts of the primary field undertake a pedagogical form in the secondary field. In this paper schools and teachers occupy the secondary field. The 'recontextualising context' is concerned with the transfer of texts and practices from the primary context to the secondary context, i.e., the transformation of non-pedagogical knowledge to pedagogical knowledge. This context involves those in the administration of educational programmes, i.e., in Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (which emerged in 1997 after the dissolution of the Scottish Examination Board (SEB)) and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) (now subsumed within Learning and Teaching Scotland). Within each of the stipulated levels there can be some degree of specialisation of agencies. Higher Grade Physical Education (HGPE) in the school context is the result of recontextualising principles that have selected and delocated what constitutes HGPE from the primary context of the production of discourse and relocated, refocused HGPE in the secondary context of the reproduction of discourse. Figure I illustrates the three fields for the production, recontextualising and reproduction of pedagogic discourse and the agencies and agents specific to HGPE working within each field.

[Insert Figure I about here]
The SEB and SCCC have been primarily involved in managing the dissemination of HGPE and in order to understand their official position it is worthwhile discussing the recontextualising context more. The terms SEB and SQA are used interchangeably throughout this paper. While it was the SEB that was involved in the construction and production of HGPE, it is now the SQA who is Scotland’s national body for qualifications at schools, in the workplace and colleges. The SQA have almost identical duties and powers as those held in the past by the SEB. Its responsibilities include all secondary school external examinations. It is the job of the SQA to monitor qualifications and make sure they meet people’s needs, are relevant and valued, aiming ‘to make sure that everyone who has a stake in education and training in Scotland is consulted about developments’ (SQA, 1999). The SCCC is expected to support and promote curricular developments with one of its main responsibilities being to issue guidance on the curriculum to local education authorities and to schools (Clark, 1997). Reference to the SCCC will be used throughout the paper, as it was the SCCC that was primarily involved at the time of the research before being subsumed within Learning and Teaching Scotland.

In discussing the positions of ‘producers’, ‘reproducers’ and ‘acquirers’ in the pedagogic field, Bernstein dismisses that one can only occupy only one of the mentioned positions at any one time, pointing out that there is a tendency to separate producing and reproducing functions institutionally. The occupancy of a group in more than one of Bernstein’s ‘production-reproduction’ sites will become evident in this paper by illustrating that the SEB fulfilled the roles of ‘producers’ and ‘reproducers' in relation to HGPE.

**Construction of Higher Grade Physical Education**

The construction of HGPE involved a number of stages (Author, 2001; Niven, 1998a). A paper describing the outline proposals for HGPE was prepared and submitted by a Central Advisory Group of the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) in the summer of 1990. Approval for a course was given in the autumn of the same year by the Secretary of State for Scotland (Niven, 1998a). It was the task of a Joint Working Party
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(JWP) to undertake the necessary work in developing the course and examination. The selection of the ten individuals (including four teachers) who served on the HGPE JWP lay primarily with the SOED and a Senior Inspector in physical education. An unofficial pilot scheme was devised in twelve schools, with the physical education teachers who were on the JWP agreeing to develop and deliver one of four elements expected to make up HGPE. A consultation document was issued for comment to a wide range of interested bodies at the end of April 1992. In light of submissions received from the consultation process proposals were amended, producing the finalised Arrangements document which was issued to all presenting centres and interested bodies at the end of January 1993. The initial phase of dissemination took place at a national conference held in February 1993. It has been suggested that the national conference was a token gesture in an attempt to allow people to respond to concerns they had regarding HGPE, as the Arrangements document was already finalised and distributed and could therefore not be changed (Niven, 1998a).

**Higher Grade Physical Education**

HGPE is the Scottish 'equivalent' to the 'A' level examination in Physical Education and Sport Studies in England and Wales and the Senior Syllabus in Physical Education in Queensland (Australia). Although all three target the same age group (17 and 18 year olds), Higher Grade study has, until the introduction of the Higher Still development (SOED, 1994), normally been completed within one year compared to two years for 'A' level and two years for the Senior Syllabus. HGPE aims to develop concepts that are introduced within Standard Grade Physical Education (SGPE), although SGPE is not a pre-requisite for students wishing to undertake HGPE.

The discourse of HGPE is detailed in the 'Arrangements in Physical Education Higher Grade' (SEB, 1993) document, commonly referred to as the HGPE Arrangements document. The four Key Features of the HGPE course (at the time this research was conducted) were Performance, Analysis of Performance, Investigation of Performance and Personal and Social Development. The first three features were assessed for certification. Performance was assessed internally and has a weighting of 40% towards
the final grade while Analysis of Performance and Investigation of Performance were assessed externally with a weighting of 40% and 20% respectively. Two activities contributed to the assessment of Performance and pupils were therefore to study a minimum of two practical activities. Analysis of Performance was sub-divided into four main areas that were Structures and Strategies, Preparation of the Body, Skills and Techniques and Appreciation of Action. From the four areas, schools selected three areas they considered to be most appropriate to the activities chosen for Performance. The Investigation of Performance required the pupils to produce an Investigation report on a specific aspect of performance in one or more physical activities. With the introduction of the ‘Higher Still’ initiative (SOED, 1994) to Scottish secondary schools, the format of HGPE has since changed very slightly in relation to the weightings of the components and the terminology of the four main areas of Analysis of Performance (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1997).

The integrated nature of the course is reinforced in the recording of an award. No award is possible unless the assessment requirements for all three key features have been met. Consequently, if pupils score exceptionally well in Performance but fail either the Analysis of Performance examination or the Investigation of Performance they fail to gain any acknowledgement for what they have scored well in.

**Methodology**

Bernstein’s three fields of knowledge production and reproduction informed the construction of the questionnaire. I was interested in teachers’ views regarding the level of involvement and assistance from the recontextualising agents, such as the SEB and SCCC at the time, in informing their decision to offer, or not offer, HGPE (Author, 2004). This paper focuses on teachers’ views on the process of the construction of HGPE, the subsequent subject content and the management and delivery of HGPE in schools.

A single-stage sampling process was used where access to the names of 170 secondary schools, in the largest local regional authority in Scotland at the time, was available through a regional mailing list. Special schools and fee-paying schools were not included.
in the sample. A questionnaire was addressed to the Head Teacher of each school asking if they were willing to allow a member of their physical education staff to complete the questionnaire. A 93% response rate was achieved, with 87 (almost 58%) returns from schools offering HGPE (denoted as ‘Teach’ in the following sections) and 64 (42%) from schools not offering HGPE (denoted as ‘Not teach’). This paper deals only with the qualitative comments that teachers chose to write at the end of the questionnaire. Any comments teachers made on topics included in the questionnaire, or indeed topics that were not included in the questionnaire, were welcomed. Analysis was completed by manually sorting, organising and indexing the data before comparing, developing and describing the comments that had been received (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Results and discussion

Without prompting to discuss particular issues on completion of the questionnaire, teachers’ comments primarily focussed on three areas. Firstly, the process that was pursued in constructing HGPE and secondly, the consequent subject content that arose. The third issue was concerned with the relationship between agents and agencies in the secondary field managing the delivery of HGPE. This issue is the strongest in identifying factors that aided or hindered teachers from supporting and delivering HGPE and is discussed in greater depth.

(1) The process of construction and the agents and agencies involved

Historically in Scotland decision-making regarding structure, syllabus content and examinations in relation to school innovation has been centralised (Philip, 1992). Scottish physical education teachers involved in this study were critical of the process of constructing HGPE and the agents and agencies that had been involved;

'As always a bare framework is set out with so called efforts from Moray House College [the only physical education teacher education training institute in Scotland at the time], who have never taught the course being brought in to develop courses. There should be a coherent approach to teaching. Why do all the physical education teachers have to re-invent the wheel?' (Teach, 20).
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In my opinion there has to be a far more national-based course, prepared by a knowledgeable working party who understand what goes on in schools’ (Teach, 29).

The above comments encapsulate three main concerns that are raised in relation to the HGPE Arrangements document being the intended text for teaching the subject. The first concern is that the framework is inadequate and will consequently lead to different teacher interpretations. Second, that those involved in constructing the text were too removed from the secondary context to have experienced the needs of students and the delivery of such a course. A third concern, related more to the management of HGPE, was that teachers were spending time duplicating work that they believed should have been produced and made available nationally along with the HGPE Arrangements document. Time is at a premium in schools (Hargreaves, 1994) and teachers do not have the luxury of being able to afford time to produce materials. Teachers currently appear unable to afford any substantial amount of time away from their day-to-day teaching activities.

Such comments highlight the disparity between the recontextualising agents (in this case Moray House College, who were responsible for the pre-service training of physical education teachers, and the SEB) and agents in the secondary field (physical education teachers) in the process of curriculum change. The implication from such comments is that teachers are expected to implement a change in the curriculum produced by people who are not primarily involved in teaching that specific curriculum in schools.

The level of power, in terms of the construction of the HGPE syllabus that recontextualising agents exercised in relation to agents in the secondary context was incomparable. The production of the HGPE syllabus was regulated directly by specialised departments and sub-agencies of the government, controlling what text and support materials were made available. The recontextualising agents involved in the more recent Higher Still reforms for physical education also appear not to have addressed the
issue of the extensive preparation of work in the secondary field necessary for the
delivery of a physical education programme (Freel, 1998).

The consequent and continuous involvement of the SEB in relation to the regulation of
the HGPE course in the secondary context illustrates the level of power that this
recontextualising agent maintains in the reproduction of the HGPE syllabus. The SEB
was not only involved at the conception of HGPE but also continued to prepare
examination papers, mark the examination papers, moderate the internally assessed
Performance element and determine the national pass rate.

(2) Subject content and the level of prescription

The HGPE Arrangements document encourages teachers to create a version of HGPE
that meets the needs of schools. While this does not advocate the involvement of
teachers in the production of the instructional discourse of HGPE, it does acknowledge
the impact that local school contexts can have on the transformation of text between the
recontextualising and secondary field. However, in this study no teacher voiced support
for the flexibility encouraged in the HGPE Arrangements document, with teachers
believing that the HGPE Arrangements document was inadequately prescriptive;

'Arrangements...are vague and open to misinterpretation' (Teach, 7); 'Staff have
to develop own ideas from general headings' (Teach, 12); 'It [HGPE
Arrangements document] was very vague and much (too much) was left to
individual members of staff on their own to sort out' (Teach, 18); 'As always a
bare framework is set out...There should be a coherent approach to teaching'
(Teach, 20); 'Teachers are all working on their own in the preparation of materials
without proper guidance' (Teach, 29).

The above comments hint towards a possible link between teachers' reading of the
proposals for the HGPE syllabus as not being prescriptive enough and a lack of support
materials being made available. Numerous comments were made in relation to the latter
issue;
'Most schools have had to soldier on with their own developments' (Teach 8);
'Almost no useful information on syllabus construction has been produced in the
three years of HGPE. Staff has little or no idea what to teach. Staff has to
develop own ideas from general headings - no one available to advise on material
being used in the course' (Teach 12); 'There were no exemplar materials available
for the Investigation or Analysis of Performance which proved difficult. People
were in fact working blindly on these elements' (Teach 15); 'As at the start of SG
[Standard Grade] each school is basically left to their own devices' (Teach 20).

It is therefore evident that Scottish physical education teachers were in favour of a more
prescriptive document. There is a fine line between teachers favouring a level of
flexibility that acknowledges the impact that school contexts can have on the
transformation of text between the recontextualising and secondary field and the plea for
a more definitive document. Requests for a definitive document such as a textbook or a
less informal recognised text covering the syllabus have been made by teachers (Douglas,
1998). The following comment from one teacher confirmed Douglas' perception that a
less definitive syllabus makes the teaching of a course more difficult;

'Initially, as usual, much was expected by the [physical education] department
staff to set up and write the course with in my opinion little support in in-service
development. I did not want my department to go through the programme blind
as to the pace, programme, assessments without a clear idea of expected
performance particularly in the written elements' (Not teach, 20).

The recontextualising agents' role in the formulation of the HGPE Arrangements
document seemed to be perceived by teachers as being inadequate. Teachers appear to
have made their judgement on not being able to deliver the HGPE syllabus without
having to carry out a substantial amount of work on 'fleshing out' a 'skeletal' syllabus (Not
teach, 23). Although the HGPE Arrangements document allows schools a high level of
independence in planning their courses, the amount of work that such independence
involves appears to be unacceptable to those in the secondary context. Due to the gradual increase of curriculum developments that teachers now have to deal with, the preference for 'fully fleshed out teaching packages' (Not teach, 6) may be deemed more valuable in terms of saving time. Such a disparity between the recontextualising agents' expectations of the time teachers could commit to 'fleshing out' the proposals and the reality of the actual time teachers had to prepare a school programme could have perhaps been addressed before the Arrangements document reached schools. For this to have happened it would have required teachers to have had played a more prominent role in the formulation of the proposals in the recontextualising context where HGPE was constructed.

(3) The management and delivery of HGPE
Numerous teachers commented on the difficulty of evaluating the learning and teaching approaches they had taken towards HGPE without adequate feedback from the SEB;

'The national results from HGPE indicate that something is far wrong but sadly the majority of teachers do not know where they have gone wrong. Until teachers become more informed, the future of HGPE is not looking too bright' (Teach 29).

Incorporated in the above selection of comments is the belief that the situation regarding feedback is not going to improve, perhaps implying that teachers are beginning to accept that the SQA are not prepared to, or are unable to, disclose details of pupils' marks.
is the internally graded, and externally moderated, Performance. Consequently, teachers are working blind towards what is likely to produce an effective discourse;

'Difficult to evaluate your approaches to the teaching of Higher Grade as you are not given any breakdown regarding the Investigations submitted and the actual exam results' (Teach, 22).

'[There is] Far too much uncertainty as to where and what is required of a student. If as during in-service provision, professional teachers are unsure of what is required to answer, and indeed understand, already undertaken papers, what chance do youngsters have?' (Not teach, 25).

Teachers offering HGPE do so despite the lack of communication from agents and agencies in the recontextualising field. There was clearly a lack of support and provision from agents and agencies operating in the recontextualising and secondary field regarding adequate assistance on assessing HGPE;

'Having taught HGPE since its inception, I am, at present, really frustrated, confused and slightly disillusioned because of the distinct lack of feedback from the SEB (they give you no idea how each individual student performed from the Analysis of Performance exam and Investigation), the erratic availability of courses, appropriate guidance for the Investigation, and the lack of exemplar questions and proper marking instructions for Analysis of Performance' (Teach, 29).

The above comment includes a number of points in relation to the lack of understanding as to the roles both are expected to fulfil between the recontextualising agents and those operating in the secondary field. Firstly, the teacher voices concern that there is a lack of assistance and feedback from the SEB concerning the disclosure of detailed marks for individual pupils who have completed HGPE. However, the SQA do not identify with such a role and consequently the trend is the same for every school subject. Also, the
plea for marking instructions for the Analysis of Performance examination is a request that the SQA are unable to fulfill. Questions or areas of the question papers that have elicited a particularly poor response from candidates, and the overall distribution of marks scored in the paper, can effect the final pass mark decided by the SQA. Consequently, the marking instructions as they appear on the actual examination papers may not be accurate in relation to the final mark attributed to the paper. The SQA do give a very brief summary every year in their Annual Reports on how pupils have performed in the three Key Features of HGPE that are assessed, i.e., Performance, Analysis of Performance and Investigation of Performance.

Secondly, 'the erratic availability of courses' is read as referring to the number of in-service training (INSET) courses that were offered in relation to teaching HGPE. The lack of INSET provision appeared to result in two teachers abstaining from undertaking HGPE for the time being:

'Still not prepared to take on HGPE without adequate training' (Not Teach, 28);
'Staff now wish re-training (all Diplomas)' (Not teach, 29).

However, it was up to individual regions usually under the guidance of physical education Advisers, and not the SEB, to decide how they would disseminate information. This may have lead to the availability of INSET courses being referred to as 'erratic' in the likely scenario that some regions secured more resources and funding to support such courses and consequently were able to offer more courses. The provision of INSET courses related to the teaching of HGPE continues to be reported as inadequate (Niven, 1998a & b).

Thirdly, as mentioned previously, it is the SCCC, and not the SQA, that has the remit to promote information between the recontextualising and secondary fields. Niven (1998b) commented on the appropriateness of the HGPE exemplar materials provided by the SCCC, believing that the selection of topics that had been developed for exemplar materials did not focus on the kind of information that teachers required. She believed
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that the lack of relevant documentation discouraged many teachers from implementing HGPE initially. As mentioned previously, time has been reported as a perennial issue in the innovation literature. Time is at a premium in schools, especially when changes to the curriculum take place, and as Fullan (1982) pointed out, "time spent on materials development - on re-inventing the wheel, for example - takes time away from classroom application" (p.123).

Expectation of roles in managing HGPE and (potential) teacher de-professionalisation

The lack of understanding regarding the roles expected to be upheld between those in the recontextualising and secondary fields is not encouraging towards the possibility of merging the agents in both sites, and consequently teachers fulfilling the role of 'producers' as well as 'reproducers' of knowledge. The agents operating in the recontextualising field produced the proposals for the HGPE syllabus and then were unable (or unwilling) to disclose information deemed useful by those operating in the secondary field. It appeared to be the case that the SEB had completed their task in producing the proposals and that it was now the teachers' task to reproduce the knowledge contained within it. This is illustrated by the following comment made by a teacher;

'Questions put to them [SEB] were given [a] standard reply - 'Refer to the Arrangements document'. As if this cured all' (Teach, 15).

Consequently, teachers lack of involvement as 'producers' of knowledge may have constituted a number of problems they were now facing in a bid to successfully reproduce the HGPE syllabus in the secondary context. Problems highlighted in this paper include a lack of supporting material and the inability to evaluate the learning and teaching approaches.

Such a level of control over the dissemination of information and feedback from the SEB leaves teachers with no direction on how teaching and learning approaches can or should be changed in order that more students complete the HGPE course successfully. This
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may also contribute to teachers using rote learning with students in a bid to prepare them for the externally assessed elements of the course (SQA Annual Statistical Reports, 1998 & 1999) and subsequently result in a de-professionalisation of physical education teachers’ work. Hargreaves (1994) explained the notion of teachers’ work becoming more routinised and deskilled in the following statement;

“Teachers are depicted as being treated almost like recovering alcoholics: needing to adopt step-by-step methods of instruction, or to comply with imposed tests and curricula in order to be effective” (p.14-15).

Hargreave’s comment is relevant in reviewing the SQA Annual Statistical reports for 1998 and 1999. Withholding of information by the SEB appears to have resulted in teachers consequently being very cautious about straying from the text in reproducing the syllabus in order to fulfill the requirements set by those in the recontextualising context. Both reports state that a rather prescriptive and limited approach has been adopted towards the Investigation of Performance element of HGPE and that there was evidence that candidates had been preparing for the Analysis of Performance examination through rote learning of answers. The significance of this is that teachers' sense of ownership of HGPE is minimal, having to teach the subject in a prescriptive way that they believe is more likely to result in a pass mark for the candidates. Bryce (1999) believed that assessment in Scottish schools had become ‘more conspicuous than curriculum’ (p.657) and Brewer & Sharp (1999) discussed how the effects of external assessment procedures on physical education influenced teachers’ practice of primarily teaching to fulfil the knowledge and understanding obligations of SGPE and HGPE syllabi. McGowan (1993) reinforced the notion of the de-professionalisation of physical education teachers’ work in relation to the delivery of HGPE, evident in the following statement;

‘…we [the physical education profession] are now subject to centrally produced curricula and teachers are cast more in the role of curriculum implementors than curriculum innovators, evidence perhaps of a move towards de-professionalisation of teaching’ (p.29).
Helping students pass the exam has become the major preoccupation for teachers with the worth of the subject matter taking second place (Kirk, 1988). In discussing the English examination system over twenty years ago, Woollam (1979) believed that rather than examinations serving the curriculum, the opposite has happened in physical education where syllabi has been written to meet the requirements of the examination board. Even today, this appears to be the situation where the end product is deemed to be more important than the learning process.

Conclusion

This paper examined how teachers’ views towards the way in which a curriculum innovation was constructed impacted on their views of the consequent subject content and the management and delivery of the subject in school. Returning to Bernstein’s theoretical framework of the social construction of pedagogic discourse, he notes that the major activity of the recontextualising field is constituting the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of pedagogic discourse. Subsequently, if teachers are not involved in constructing the pedagogic discourse it can only be expected that they will require specific knowledge to deliver the particular discourse. Tensions and conflicts between recontextualising and secondary agents and agencies are likely to be heightened when teachers' interpretation and reconstruction of, in this case, HGPE in the secondary field differs from the way it was expected to be delivered by those operating in the recontextualising field. As Paechter (2000) believes ‘it does not pay to introduce an educational innovation without thinking about what it would feel like to be on the receiving end of the changes, either as a teacher or as a student’ (p.156).

The implication from this study is that the curriculum appears to be shaped in the secondary field in relation to the amount of information and assistance from the recontextualising field. The relationship between agents in the recontextualising field and secondary field was very much one-way. The SEB set out the proposals that teachers were expected to follow and did not appear to entertain any concerns or feedback on the
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proposals from teachers. Consequently, it might be suggested that the SEB exercised both direct and indirect power over the teaching and assessment of pupils in relation to HGPE.

There is a lot of support in the literature for teachers to be central to curriculum planning and development, accepting that it is ultimately teachers who decide whether or not to implement an innovation. In reality this is rarely pursued. An alternative way of addressing the management of a syllabus in the secondary context and transferring the power of agencies external to schools to those operating in schools, i.e., teachers, has been developed and is currently being conducted in secondary schools in Queensland, Australia (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). This paper emphasises the need for such developments to extent from Australia and inform an overall strategy that will result in the construction of physical education being a collaborative venture between all interested parties in education systems worldwide. This is turn may lead to those with a remit to construct and support the implementation of curriculum to be concerned with making sure everyone who has a stake in education and training is consulted and involved in curricula developments.

References


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Figure I: Bernstein’s construction of pedagogic discourse (examples of agents and agencies operating within each field given in relation to HGPE)

Primary field
- Biophysical science
- Sport
- Health
- Arts

Recontextualising field
- HGPE JWP
- SEB (renamed SQA)
- SCCC

Secondary field
- Schools
- Physical education teachers
- Pupils

Production of discourse

Recontextualisation of discourse

Official recontextualising field (ORF)

Pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF)