Cultures of Curriculum Making in Post-Compulsory Education: The Shared Curriculum Between School and College

Kate Miller, Richard Edwards and Mark Priestley
The Stirling Institute of Education
University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA


Introduction
Over the years, there have been significant changes in the boundaries between secondary schooling and further education in the UK. With the attempts to articulate different parts of the education and training system through the development of credit frameworks, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and a common prescribed curriculum, questions arise over the nature and extent of similarities and differences in the enacted curriculum in different contexts. Here we take the prescribed curriculum as that inscribed in unit descriptors and outcome statements and the enacted curriculum to refer to the choreographing of people and artefacts in the enactment of practices – cognitive, practical, communicative – designated as learning. At one level, the specification of learning outcomes at particular levels within a common framework points to a rational curriculum within which attainment and progression is, in principle, transparent. Learning at the same level is assumed to be equivalent. However, while this may be the case in relation to the prescribed curriculum, what interests us in this paper are the differences and similarities that emerge through the translation of the prescribed curriculum into different contexts, into what is enacted as learning and teaching.

This paper presents and discusses some preliminary findings from an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funded project that has sought to explore the curriculum-making practices in school and college in the context of Scotland to identify similarities and differences, but also the factors which are at play in the translations of the rational prescribed curriculum into enacted practice.

The paper is in three sections. First we outline the background to the project, the questions addressed and the methods adopted. Second, we draw upon data from the three curriculum areas we have researched - Hospitality, Life Sciences and Technical Studies – to outline the factors that most influence the translations from the prescribed to enacted curriculum. Finally, we draw out some inferences for curriculum policy and pedagogy from our analysis.

Background to the project
Historically, in Scotland, schools focused on an academic curriculum, while colleges provided a more occupation-related curriculum (Bryce & Humes, 1999; Leech, 1999). This has changed, as some schools have sought to provide more occupationally-oriented opportunities for students for whom the academic curriculum may be less appropriate, while colleges have developed their provision of the higher level occupation-related curriculum and also developed academic opportunities for students.
(Thomson, 2003; Canning, 2007). The result is that currently parts of the curriculum are common to both schools and colleges, both organisations provide learning opportunities for the 14-18 age range and there are increasing numbers of students attending both school and college at the same time. These changes impact upon curriculum coherence, transition and progression for students within the curriculum and between institutional contexts.

In Scotland, two significant developments are the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The SQA acts as a single awarding body for qualifications other than university awards. It therefore provides a single framework for both schools and colleges. The SCQF, although still in an early stage of development, seeks to provide equivalence between different forms of learning and awards, to provide the possibility for credit accumulation and transfer between institutions and qualifications. The SQA sets its awards within the SCQF structure of levels and credits. To a greater or lesser extent, colleges and schools both offer courses at levels 2–7.

It is the outcomes-based SQA unit descriptors which schools and colleges mainly utilise when developing a curriculum in particular subjects. These provide the basis for the 'prescribed curriculum' (Bloomer, 1997). In theory, there are many curriculum routes to achieve the outcomes; this provides the possibility for creative approaches to pedagogy on the part of institutions, departments and teachers/lecturers (Osborn et al., 1997; Higham, 2003). It is such possibilities that are often represented in the 'described curriculum' (Bloomer, 1997), those narratives of practice provided by teachers and lecturers.

Research evidence from around the world suggests that there is less diversity in the described and enacted curriculum than envisioned or desired (e.g. Cohen, 1988; Smyth et al., 1998). Indeed many unit descriptors do not only specify outcomes, but also make broad statements about expectations in relation to teaching, learning and assessment practices to achieve those goals. Many of the reforms in curriculum since the 1980s have been characterised as a top-down, centre-periphery model of dissemination, described by Goodson (2003; xiii) as ‘brutal restructuring’ delivered in ‘ignorance or defiance of teachers’ beliefs and missions’. At one level, this apparent standardisation might be said to be a good thing as it provides the basis for greater trust in the equivalence of learning within the qualifications frameworks. However, it might also be said to stifle diversity and creativity in the enacted curriculum.

Moreover, a great deal of research points to a tendency for continuity rather than change in what goes on in schools and colleges in response to centrally mandated reform initiatives (e.g. Cuban, 1988; Sarason, 1990; Helsby, 1999; Lang et al., 1999; Spillane, 1999; Goodson, 2004). For example, in relation to the school curriculum, Eisner (1992: 610) stated that ‘it is much easier to change educational policy than to change the ways in which schools function’. Tyack and Cuban (1995: 88) talked of the difficulties in changing the grammar of schooling, those ‘institutional habits and widespread cultural beliefs about what constitutes a “real school”’. Cuban (1984) identified a number of stability factors that militate against change in practice, for example: schools prize obedience over independent thinking; the pragmatics of organisational structures; the existing culture of teaching; those who avoid risk are rewarded; and the socialisation of teachers through their own schooling.
Such stability factors and the persistence of established practices contribute to the gap between the prescribed, described and the enacted curriculum. These latter aspects of the curriculum might show some modifications, but change has been assimilated into the existing subject and organisational culture.

The research thus suggests that attempts to provide a rational prescribed curriculum with equivalences across contexts is not being achieved in the enacted curriculum, which raises questions about the presumed equivalence of learning. Existing research also identifies a range of factors which influence and militate against diversity in curriculum-making. This is significant insofar as curriculum reforms can be absorbed into existing organisational and professional cultures rather than being a vehicle to transform them (Cuban 1998). Thus, while in the prescribed curriculum there is a notional equivalence in terms of outcomes at a certain level of performance, in the enacted curriculum there can be a great deal of difference, which itself then raises questions about the equivalences established.

The factors affecting curriculum making in these settings can be identified at various levels, using a simple typology:

- contextual factors e.g. national policy, funding arrangements;
- organisational factors e.g. nature and size of institution and subject department, styles of management, level and type of resources, locus of decision-making, internal or external assessments;
- curriculum factors e.g. the ways in which the curriculum is prescribed, nature of the curriculum i.e. academic or vocational;
- micro-political factors e.g. collegial, hierarchical or individualistic, expectations of students and parents; and
- individual factors e.g. professional formation and dispositions of lecturers and teachers, student backgrounds and prior experiences.

Thus, for instance, the availability of published textbooks and other resources, and teachers’ existing frames of reference act to enable and constrain curriculum-making. Bates (1989) stresses the importance of teachers’ material, especially career interests in determining how new initiatives are mediated. Doyle and Ponder (1977) suggest that teachers have a ‘practicality ethic’ which means new practices emerge when they are congruent with existing values, instrumental and the benefits outweigh the costs. Daniels (2001) refers to ‘stuck’ and ‘moving’ schools to contrast those in which teachers are less willing to take risks and those where this is not the case. One factor affecting this is a contrast between a hierarchical and collaborative culture. These factors could also be relevant in curriculum-making in the further education context also.

Cultures of Curriculum making

The data, upon which the remainder of this paper draws, were generated in two associated settings, a secondary school and a college of further education. We have explored these issues in the context of the following three curriculum areas, drawing data from various SQA courses at Intermediate 2(SCQF level 5) and Higher levels (SCQF level 6).

- Hospitality: Pauline (Woodland Academy) and Malcolm (Riverside College)
- Life Sciences: Donald and Debbie (Woodland Academy) and Isabelle (Riverside College).
Technical Studies: Gerald (Woodland Academy) and Duncan (Riverside College). These have been taken as telling cases. Data was derived from existing documents, and cycles of classroom observations and interviews with staff and students on the selected units over the course of one term. These have been subject to descriptive interpretation and thematic analysis. Pseudonyms have been used for schools and individuals to protect the anonymity of respondents.

Preliminary thematic analysis of the data indicates that two of the factors in the curriculum making typology outlined above exhibit the greatest significance in helping to explain the processes of curriculum making for teachers/lecturers in those contexts: these are individual and organisational factors. This is not to deny other factors that influence translations. However, within the context of this paper we want to focus on those that have emerged as most significant. The following sections therefore provide descriptive case studies of each curriculum area, and analysis of each case study in respect of these two significant factors.

Hospitality

Individual factors
Pauline went from school to university then back into school as a teacher. She had been teaching at the school for eight years, and this was her only school. Her mother was a headteacher of a primary school. ‘I vowed I would never be a teacher… the thought of secondary scared the living daylights out of me’ (Pauline). However, after two weeks of a school placement while doing her undergraduate degree, she ‘just got such a buzz out of it, such buzz’. Her lack of commercial experience and connections was reflected in a lack of awareness of how things are developed at SQA. Pauline tended to follow the sessions as laid down in her materials, although with occasional deviations. She could then be said to have a strong curriculum focus in her teaching, with the purpose of getting students through their assessment. Any wider curriculum purpose beyond subject coverage in the direction of the hospitality industry would appear to be limited.

Pauline followed the learning outcomes as prescribed, although with creative flourishes. She was however critical of the types of meals that were specified as necessary for assessment. She felt the meal reflected individual dishes put together for the purpose of demonstrating assessment criteria rather than combinations of dishes that worked well together. She brought an enthusiasm about food and a professionalism based on taste and design to her teaching. She was very loyal to her colleagues and proud of their department and what they could offer to the students. She was also very concerned about how the decisions of the senior management team around funding and availability of a range of different units and qualifications would impact on some of the students’ progression routes into hospitality and care-related occupations.

By contrast, Malcolm’s experience as a chef and his contacts in the hospitality industry meant that he had a very clear sense that he was preparing students for the occupation. This curriculum purpose resulted in Malcolm introducing elements into his teaching that enhanced the prescribed curriculum specifically around preparing students for the industry. Malcolm had a clear view of the different aspects to hospitality that need to be learned – ‘the food-side… the customer-side… the
hygiene-side... the safety-side’. The practical focus to the curriculum was valued by
the students. Malcolm tried to develop their understanding of the theory aspects of the
course by drawing upon the practical, but this was not unproblematic. It was a
‘curriculum for the industry’ (Malcolm). He saw theory and practice as going hand-
in-hand, although there seemed to be some tension between this and the
differentiation between the kitchen and classroom sessions.

Malcolm recognised the importance of contacts in the industry for students to obtain
work and encouraged this through inviting external contributions to the course and
students to have part-time work in hospitality. He was clear about the orientation as a
professional course aiming towards a ‘professional cooking exam’. Interestingly,
given the position of the hospitality teaching in the Home Economic department of
the school, Malcolm explicitly differentiated ‘professional hospitality’ from ‘home
economics’. Malcolm identified the staff in schools as not having the relevant
experience to provide the professional focus. He contrasted himself as ‘tutor’ with a
‘teacher’.

Malcolm’s personal commitment to hospitality was evidenced by the way he
promoted it to potential students – ‘I really gonna sell hospitality’, ‘I have a passion
about it’. He talked in enthusiastic terms of teaching – ‘I still enjoy it. I love it’. He
bought books about cookery and brought them into the college for students to use. He
also recognised the intensity for students – ‘they’re having to learn new things every
second they come in’.

Malcolm also saw himself as treating the students as adults, giving them more
autonomy. In the class he liked to negotiate rules and expectations with students.
However, the views from the students were more mixed. Most identified their
engagement with Malcolm as different from school, but not always as clearly as
Malcolm himself saw it. This points to the importance of the students as actors in the
curriculum-making process.

The college students often had prior experiences of working in hospitality and a clear
desire that this was their career direction. The role of other members of their families
in working in hospitality also seemed significant in terms of the reproduction of
occupational aspirations. A number of students also aspired to join the armed forces
and saw hospitality as an occupation to follow therein. This raised interesting
potential tensions between Malcolm’s understanding of hospitality in relation to
commercial restaurants and the students’ aspiration to learn catering for the armed
services.

Some of the college students expressed themselves as having bad school experiences.
This reflects a tradition in colleges of offering educational opportunities to students
who do not do well in school. Contrasting their experience of college with school was
common. At school ‘just loads of information chucked at you, and you’re meant to
learn it’ (N). N saw the teaching in college as more being treated like an adult – ‘in a
way its up whether you want to learn or not, rather than being told you have to learn
it’. The culture of the class was less focused on discipline than school. Some students
liked help from staff but not in the way it was provided in school. Other students like
to try things out for themselves.
By contrast, the school students were very different in terms of background and aspirations. Like the students in college, some students had connections into the occupation, for example, T who had an uncle and cousin who were chefs. However, all these students aspired to go to university rather than into the workplace. For some students in the group, studying cookery was seen as relatively easy by contrast with other more academic subjects. For instance, for K ‘it’s a bit different… it breaks up the day a bit, than sitting in the classroom’.

The background and aspirations of the students from the school and the college appear to match their teachers/lecturers’ backgrounds in at least some respects. Malcolm had left school early having had a rather unsatisfactory experience at school. He went into the industry and learnt the trade from his professional practice and training. Pauline stayed on at school and then went on to university to do an occupationally orientated degree before specialising in teaching. Malcolm’s focus in his teaching is on preparing the students for the industry and sharing his passion for food and his broader ethos on life. Pauline’s focus is on the food and the artistic aspects of food preparation and appreciation. She is equally passionate about her role as teacher in terms of getting the students to appreciate the importance of the artistic side of cooking, which can only be achieved through a thorough knowledge of the ingredients and processes involved. The students studying hospitality at school have not been rejected by the school, nor have they been rejected by it; they still see that they can use the hospitality experience within the organisational environment of the school. The students at the college have all rejected or been rejected by the schools they attended and are looking for something different. The prescribed curriculum is really not very different on paper, but the college environment in terms of spaces, artefacts, rules and interactions are significantly different from their perspective.

The occupational orientation of the college enacted curriculum can be contrasted with that in the school, reflecting wider institutional culture as well as the differing backgrounds and aspirations of both staff and students. However, in one respect, there is also a great similarity for students. All students positively contrasted learning in the kitchen environment with more conventional classrooms. So while their study of Hospitality did not always arise from direct interest in the subject, nor in moving into the occupation, the students at school, like those at college, valued its more practical nature. In other words, it was the participative form of learning that engaged them more than the acquiring of knowledge.

Organisational factors
Organisational factors that influenced curriculum-making in these cases included the nature and size of the institution and subject departments, styles of management, level and type of resources, the organisation of space and time, and the locus of decision-making. The Hospitality department in the college had a large staff base with a variety of expertise across the industry to draw on. They also worked closely with staff in other subjects – e.g. Enterprise and Social Studies - to pool resources and provide cross-curricular projects. For example, the design and construction of a new restaurant was done in collaboration with the Construction students. They also have themed nights in the restaurant where the students invite the Drama and Language students to help with entertainment. Students advertise the evening in the local paper and with posters in the college. The proceeds are then used to invest in the department.
The Hospitality department in the school mainly consisted of part-time female staff with little or no direct experience of the industry. They did have other experience and expertise to draw on, but this contributed to a distinctly female and more domestic feel to the way the curriculum was enacted. There was a high degree of loyalty and cooperative working between the members of the department, but less cross-curricular working.

In the school, the timetabling had an impact on size of class, which impacted upon the type and level of interactions between the teacher and students. The class size was originally eight but had dropped to four because of timetabling issues. Pauline identified the individual attention she was able to give the students as advantageous, because ‘their skills come on much, much quicker, much and much better… much more chilled out’. Double sessions were identified also as advantageous over single sessions in order to address the compression of activities by the timetable. There was only a limited possibility of obtaining these highly prized timetable slots.

Timetabling was also an important influence in the college. Malcolm contrasted the three hour sessions in college with the shorter sessions in schools. Working in a timely manner is important in professional cookery, and the sense of needing to work within the limits of the timetable was enhanced by the requirement to prepare food for the restaurant. The organisation of space was also significant. In contrast with the school’s kitchen, which was set up like a number of domestic kitchens and students cooked on a domestic scale, in the college, the kitchens were similar to those to be experienced in the workplace. The suite of rooms with two kitchens and a classroom with good equipment supported the curriculum well and Malcolm used a wide range of medium. The fact the students were given professional clothes, knives and a cookery book suggests good resourcing of this area. The college students also received a bursary whereas the school students had to pay for their ingredients and provide containers and dishes. Staff-student ratios were good at roughly 9-1 (the limit is 14), but this was partly governed by Health and Safety legislation.

**Life Sciences**

*Individual factors*

The unit in the school was taught by two teachers during the course of the observations. The first teacher Donald is the permanent biology teacher who had a motorbike accident in October and was replaced by Debbie a supply teacher who took the class up to Christmas.

Donald, when he was at school, thought teaching was amongst the three worst jobs that anyone could do. He did his degree in human biology then a post grad in Biotechnology. He was attracted to teaching because of the career structure and the security of becoming something: ‘you’ve got a qualification in something you become a teacher. So that’s always quite handy cause it’s you know what you gonna do’. He said he quite liked the demonstrating he did which is what gave him the idea of going into teaching.

He describes his approach to teaching as relaxed though he sets out the boundaries in terms of discipline early on so that the students know exactly what he expects of them. He explains how the change in senior management and the general disciplinary
procedures have helped to create a better environment for teaching and learning. He describes his teaching in terms of a performance.

Donald ‘it’s an act, it’s a show. ….I think that if it’s enjoyable that you learn more’.

Interviewer ‘So how do you do that…’?

Donald ‘I don’t know, I ..dance…oh I don’t know, do silly voices, sing…’

In terms of the course content he says ‘it comes in sheets. You know, every topic is in work sheets’. His performances are designed to make the whole experience more enjoyable and help the students remember the content. He takes the SQA arrangements documents and uses them to write booklets with all the relevant information and little exercises to do. He also uses the past exam papers as he thinks that from the arrangement documents it is difficult to know everything they may be tested on. He is trying to make the new course as short and concise as possible. This is partly in response to student lack of motivation. He remarks that ‘Biology as a subject is knowledge based’. This seems to relate to what he calls a ‘lead from the front approach’. This is significant in terms of his approach to teaching. He states that the students at this level don’t actually like doing practicals. However, the students were not of the same opinion on this issue. He is very careful that they learn the specific terms for the content they are covering. As he went through the PowerPoint presentations the students filled in the correct answers in their booklets.

The supply teacher, Debbie, who came in October, has a very different background. She says:

‘I used to be a Agricultural Biologist….and I had my kids and then I did some voluntary work in schools and then some err special educational needs stuff in playgroups and primary, and then up here (to secondary) as an Auxiliary and then changed (trained to be a teacher)’.

While she worked in the industry she did research and development comparisons between the chemical and the biological both in the lab and out in the field. She had a very different educational and training route into teaching. When she left school she got a job and then did an ONC, then an HNC and then the degree in life sciences. During which time she was employed by the Scottish Agricultural College. She considers Biology to be a practice-based subject but accepts that there are other ways of viewing it. It would seem probable that this contrasting view of the nature of the subject is also significant in terms of her approach to teaching the subject.

The first class observed with Debbie was a practical lesson done in groups. Each group had an instruction sheet. She starts by getting them thinking about what they are going to do and how. She has a maths problem on the board which also relates to the theme of the practical. While the students are reading the instructions she gets a microscope out of the cupboard and sets that up. Under the microscope she has slides of various types of DNA. Both of these support activities involve visual imaging of DNA in relation to its scale and form. As the experiment progresses she is constantly asking them questions and reminding them to think about why they are doing what they are doing. She doesn’t give the answers but leaves them thinking about it and trying to work it out in their groups. She points out to them that they could do this at home with various other ingredients. Debbie explains to me that she got the idea for this class from the internet and chose it specifically because it was an experiment that they could do at home as it did not need any specialist equipment.
At the end of the lesson there is a bit of informal chat as they wait for the bell to go. The students learn that she has a son at university and that he commutes from home doing a course in Geology, which he loves. She tells them that there are various routes to university and they don’t have to go straight there. One girl from the focus group says that her brother is in Iraq getting shot at. She says that she is going to join the army too as all her family are in the forces. The teacher’s response is simply to remark that she could do other things if she wanted.

In the college, the unit is taught by Isabelle who is a full time member of staff teaching both biology and chemistry in the science department. Isabelle has been working at Riverside College for 15 years and says:

‘I love teaching. I love being in front of classes. I love teaching adults. I love seeing people come in with very little confidence, people that hated science at school, and all of a sudden they go, ‘This is not so bad. This is ok! I can do this, I can achieve it!’ I love seeing people go off to university and then, sometimes meeting them years later and they go, ‘You know, I’d never had done that if I hadn’t come to the college.’

She started part time and gradually got more hours until recently going full time.

Isabelle did her degree specialising in biochemistry. She then went on to work in hospital labs for several years before starting a family. She stopped working after her second child for a while. When she was ready to go back to work she didn’t want to go back in too the labs which she says ‘had become very automated and boring’ so she applied for a part time lecturing post at Riverside College.

She is friendly but brisk and appears to be very efficient in all she does. Isabelle’s approach to teaching is very eclectic in that she likes to use lots of different sorts of activities. Most of them are content centred. She does like to try lots of different ways to help them learn the content through stories, anecdotes, mind maps, role play and practical activities in the lab. It seems that all the members of staff in the department are female and work closely together in the sense that they share teaching materials and ideas for learning activities.

Isabelle describes her approach to teaching as very relaxed. She says that she encourages the students to stop her and ask questions if they are unclear about something. She thinks up activities to help the students when she gages that they have not quite got the hang of it. Irene remarked that ‘when she had been at school the teacher just talked at you and you had to get on with it whereas now teachers have to be much more aware of how people learn and try and use different strategies’. These include giving the students plenty of practice of doing the NABs and practice past papers.

Irene combines a content driven approach with lots of different kinds of practical activities aimed at helping them learn the content but also to facilitate a ‘learning to do’ science. All three teachers have slightly different approaches to the subject and to teaching the subject which seems to relate to their previous experience of studying and/or working with in the academic subject/vocational area.
The college students are mainly there for a specific purpose - they want to become nurses, care workers or social workers and are doing this course as part of a wider programme of training. The few that are not sure what they want to do are the younger ones that have come straight from school. The school students were very mixed in terms of their motivations and expectations of doing the course. The one boy wanted to go on to do a sport related job and sees the course as being very relevant. He hoped to be going to college the following year. One girl is competing nationally in dance competitions and sees the relevance in terms of her own career in this direction. The other girls were less sure at what they wanted to do; one wanted to do something to do with child care and the other wanted to join the army. There were also a number of students who were rather lost and unsure in terms of the direction they would be going in.

The college and school student bodies were not dissimilar in the sense of there being a mix of students who were highly motivated and those who were rather unsure what they wanted to go on to do, and hence unsure how relevant biology might be to their future routes of progression. The approaches and strategies that the teachers implemented in the face of this diverse group were distinct and related firstly, to their view of the subject in terms of its practical or knowledge based nature; secondly, to their assumptions about the student body; and thirdly, to their ideas on how students learn.

Organisational factors
Both the teachers from the school talked quite a lot about the new Headteacher and how discipline is improving. There is a feeling that control has been taken back and senior management is very hands on in this respect. Both teachers also talked about particular strategies that had been implemented in relation to improving discipline on a school wide basis but also strategies for maintaining order and discipline within the classroom to facilitate the teaching and learning environment. The more formally implemented quality assurance mechanisms from senior management reportedly help uphold standards of discipline in the classroom and encourage the implementation of policy initiatives. However, the less formal visibility of senior management around the school and popping in and out of classrooms was also noted for its effects.

In the college the teacher talked about the importance of differentiating the learning experience from that of the school as many of the students had had very negative experiences at school. Isabelle identifies the size of class as being crucial. The priority of this teacher is finding ways to motivate the students so that they will stay on. In contrast in the school the push for results is an important factor. Students are encouraged to do five Highers. Those who do not want to do five are dissuaded from returning to the school for further study.

The teaching and learning spaces in the college and the school are very different. The school building is new and very modern and considered to be well equipped in comparison to other schools in the area. The science department in the college has also been recently refurbished and is considered to be top of the range. However, the way the spaces are distributed and used are very different. In the school each teacher has their own classroom which is equipped to perform as a traditional classroom and a laboratory. There are several biology classrooms but each one belongs to a particular teacher. This means there is no specialisation in terms of how the space is used. In
contrast the college has three main teaching spaces which are shared by the students and the teachers. There is one room which is set up as a traditional classroom, another large modern laboratory and a very large classroom fitted out with IT equipment and tables in groups to allow for a range of different layouts and types of group formations. The lab facility is modelled on an industrial lab and is quite distinct from the sort of layout in the school. The college also has a technician who is able to prepare all the labs in advance of the teachers taking their groups in to the space. She also helps the students with their experiments and contributes her industrial experience and practices to lab work. These are important resources that impact considerably on how the curriculum is enacted enabling a much more practice based approach. In the school the teacher has to do all the preparation and supervision of any practical activities within the classroom.

**Technical Studies**

*Individual Factors*

The Higher Technology course in the school is taught by Gerald, who has a background in industry. After leaving school he did City and Guilds qualifications in motor mechanics before working for 12 years in the local naval yard. Following this he completed a degree in engineering as a mature student, then undertook a succession of electronics/engineering related jobs locally. Following redundancy, he worked in England as a project manager, but this was short lived and he subsequently became redundant again. This uncertain set of experiences led him to return to Scotland, initially in youth work, then training as a teacher. At this point, he developed an interest in pedagogy, which has been subsequently developed in school. Gerald has worked at Woodland Academy since qualifying as a teacher, and while he has extensive life and career experience, he is comparatively new as a teacher, something he credits for his enthusiasm for his job. Part of this enthusiasm is evident in his extra-curricular activity running a football team. Gerald appears to be a popular teacher who enjoys good relationships with his classes.

Gerald espouses quite firm views about his teaching and students’ learning, which appear to be in some tension with the ways in which he was observed to teach. Describing this as differences between the described and enacted curriculum would seem to over-simplify what is a complex situation, where the agency of the teacher to teach as he wishes is circumscribed in various ways by the context within which he teaches. It would seem to be more apt to explain the phenomenon in terms of tensions between aspirations and actual practice, where decisions about such practice are inevitably influenced by the practicalities of having to work within pre-defined assessment and school quality assurance frameworks. Gerald’s aspirations about his teaching appear to have their roots in his industrial experience (a focus on experiential and relevant activities) and his experience as a youth worker (an emphasis on the relational aspects of classroom practice) and this manifests itself in his desire to make lessons fun.

He sees students as individuals and is critical of one-size-fits-all approaches. He emphasises the role of dialogue in learning and states the desire to do more practical work. However, there is a sense that the majority of the classroom experiences of the students are driven primarily by the demands of getting through the syllabus, even where this is plainly not what the teacher sees as an educational experience. In
Gerald’s case, the process of curriculum making seems to be influenced by the organisational culture of the school.

Gerald has strong opinions about the place of his subject within the school curriculum. He is sensitive about colleagues viewing technology as purely a practical subject, seeing it instead as a high status academic subject. He talks about the ‘ignorance’ of other teachers, including those in guidance, about the breadth of the subject, and is critical of those who see design and technology as woodwork. He discusses recent changes to provision, whereby foundation Standard Grade has been replaced by a less academic craft course, with a focus on practical skills, and of the increased orientation of the Standard Grade craft and design course toward the design aspect.

The situation at the college in terms of the teacher’s background is both similar and different to that in the school. Higher Mechatronics is taught by Duncan, who also has a background in industry, having worked in the offshore oil industry for 7 years, where he was involved in electronics and computerised systems. In 1995 he left this industry following an injury. At this stage he retrained as a teacher, doing a 4 year BEd. Prior to working at Riverside College, Duncan worked at other colleges. Duncan is well known in local schools for his demonstrations of robotics (Robot Wars), where he promotes technology. The technology department at Riverside is split between 2 sites, with the bulk of the engineering being done at the other campus.

Duncan is an enthusiast for technology. He plays web-based computer games in his spare time and builds robots. He comes across as being quite spontaneous in his approach to his teaching and appears to be highly regarded by students. His espoused approach to teaching involves talking through procedures and letting the students loose on the internet to engage in personal and group-based inquiry. He claims to be an advocate of group work and team building activities, although there is more evidence in the observations of individualised approaches to inquiry. He relies quite heavily on presentation technology and he uses the SQA notes to structure his teaching, highlighting key passages and then talking through the content. He describes these notes as didactic, suggesting that the content is quite prescriptive. He does not like the major influence of exams on the students’ learning and on his teaching; he points to the decontextualised nature of the syllabus content, and seeks through his teaching to bring in relevance to real life and variety to keep students interested, even where this means drift from the confines of the syllabus. In this respect he often draws upon his industrial experience. In one interview he referred to ‘sneak[ing] education in there as well’ to supplement the teaching to the test, and stated that he sees his role as broadening horizons as well as training students to pass the exam. Duncan suggests that the course is overcrowded in terms of content and assessments and stating that time constraints make practical work difficult. His approach to class management is fairly formal at first (school students are not used to being on first name terms with teachers when they arrive), but this soon relaxes as the course progresses. He is happy to go the extra mile for students, including in one case allowing for absence where a student is clearly able, and in other instances running out-of-class tutorials.

The industrial background of this teacher seems to be a rich contributor to the curriculum-making process. His views about relevance and his slant towards the vocational are clear in the transcripts, and this leads him to bring in additional content
which makes the SQA syllabus content more contextual. In doing so, he draws upon a rich vein of contextual knowledge. His background also seems to have a bearing on pedagogical approaches. Duncan is always keen to promote student inquiry, even though he sometimes leaves insufficient time to do this. His background perhaps explains his approach to the NABs, which are built into the work programme rather than being seen as formalised tests. He uses a good deal of formative assessment, allowing students to resubmit assessed work quickly.

As with the other case studies, there are some interesting differences between the student cohorts in the school and the college, although in both cases, there is little evidence from the data that this impacts significantly on the curriculum making processes undertaken by the teachers. The school students seem to take the Higher in Technology for various reasons. Two boys aim to progress from this to university engineering course. A girl says that she just likes the subject. The students like the teacher, whom they describe as ‘vibrant’ and ’fun’, albeit strict. They state that they find much of the work difficult and tiring, as it involves a lot of listening, taking notes and answering questions. They believe that there are only limited chances to do practical work, although opportunities for group or practical work occur, they enjoy this. One student stated that the practical lesson is the best way to learn, as she was ‘figuring out how it works’ herself. The students see passing Higher as the primary goal, in tandem with the teacher, and do not see any problem with being placed under pressure about grades.

The college class contains a mix of students, some full time at the college and the majority attending on afternoon release from local schools. These latter students describe college as being more fun than school, even though they cover the same sort of work, tested similarly through regular national assessments (NABs). Students point to a more relaxed atmosphere in college. They state that resources are better in college. An interesting perception is that more time is available for studying Highers at College, despite the roughly equivalent allocations of time at the two institutions. Uniformly, the students describe school as dull, and complain about what they see as petty restrictions on their behaviour – for example restrictive access to the web. They note that the college allows students to do Highers, who are prevented from doing so at school.

As with the school Higher course, there is little evidence of students affecting the teacher’s approaches to teaching, learning and curriculum making. The nature of the class has two obvious effects: the semi-formal approach in the early weeks, although this relaxes; and a tendency to finish the class early (the teacher cites the fact that school students are not used to long sessions). The positive attitude of the students towards the teacher and subject seems to encourage a climate of trust, with students being allowed out of class for breaks during the long sessions. It also seems to encourage the teacher to put in extra time out of class for tutorial work.

Organisational Factors
The department at Woodland Academy is large. There is some evidence of hierarchical decision-making processes, with policy set by the Principal Teacher in line with management generated priorities, reinforced by performance management procedures, including observed teaching by line managers. Despite this, there is a clear evidence of a collegial and supportive environment and a shared departmental
philosophy about learning and teaching, with considerable leeway for variations in individual practice. Gerald reports that there is generally a lack of time for (and a lack of an existing culture of) peer observation; this perhaps militates against the development of common thinking about teaching and shared practices. Departmental collaboration leads to the production of schemes of work and the generation of strategies for teaching (e.g. peer assessment), approved by the PT. It also extends to staff with particular expertise in an area of the curriculum supporting colleagues who are less confident in the area.

Department meetings have a major focus on attainment and the dissemination of management and other policy. The department has been involved in formative assessment pilot study, which attracted some funding. This has led to the generation of strategies for peer assessment, including peer marking and traffic lighting. The impetus for this project was an Education Authority initiative, but the development was also in tune with the values of the staff in the department, having a focus on classroom dialogue and group work to promote learning. The school’s involvement in these initiatives appears to be predominantly driven by pressure to raise attainment and improve the school’s position on a league table of comparator schools. This focus was identified by Gerald as being the over-riding priority of the senior management, with greater importance even than the development of aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

Such pressures invariably encourage a style of teaching geared to meeting the demands of the arrangements documents and subject matter tested at the end of the year. Gerald makes an effort to contextualise the maths elements, rather than teaching them separately, as do some colleagues, but ultimately his teaching is set up to prepare students for answering exam questions, including the teaching of strategies; he does not like this, which he contrasts with education, but sees little option. As he states, the exam content is fairly predictable from year to year; and he is ‘pretty good at predicting a test and teaching to it’. Moreover, despite his support for more interactive modes of teaching, the pressure is on him to do just this. Gerald is quite open about an apparent disjuncture between espoused theory and enacted practice, pointing to a number of factors that impact on his teaching: lack of time, the fragmented nature of timetabling (which means short periods), lack of equipment (such as that available in the college), the lack of a technician (which places pressure on the teacher’s already limited time) and the attainment agenda.

The college data suggests a quite different focus and ethos in terms of the organisational factors that impact upon curriculum making. The attainment agenda appears to be far less intrusive at the college than it is at the school, and a higher priority seems to be given to retaining students throughout the year. In general the impact of quality improvement procedures seems to be less in the College than in school. Duncan talks about peer observation of teaching, which has increased in regularity since he came to the college. He states that the focus is often on whether new resources are being used. Managers check that meetings take place, but do not regularly attend them. Duncan states that there is little management pressure in respect of results, but this is possibly because his results are good. The data imply a sense of laissez-faire and isolation, but this is possibly only the case in respect of this teacher/department; for example, he states that he is the only person in his area
teaching Highers and the split site contributes to the isolation for the teachers in this part of the department.

Resources are a key factor in the curriculum making process at college. IT resources are seen as being an enabling factor by students used to school procedures, but are also an inhibitor. While the college has better IT resources than the school, the unreliability of computers means that planned activities are not always possible, perhaps adding to the ad hoc nature of some of the observed teaching.

**Inferences**

Although ostensibly taking similar units within a unified and rational curriculum framework, it is clear that the enacted curriculum varies significantly across the different contexts of school and college. A focus on individual and organisational factors helps us to understand how the translation from prescribed to enacted curriculum occurs. We may infer from this that schools and colleges may provide similar opportunities at a formal level, but they are very different organisations serving different student groups and with often different types of staff with varying professional formations. Curriculum-making is therefore very different in the different organisations. What implications can we infer from this?

If we take a rational view of curriculum, we might decry the differences in the enacted curriculum and seek ways to produce greater consistency. Further standardisation becomes necessary. This assumes difference can and should be eradicated. If we take a practice focused view of the curriculum, it then becomes important to realise the ways in which the enacted curriculum is differentiated in order to avoid false assumptions about achievement, articulation and progression. It also becomes necessary to recognise that achieving similar outcomes as specified in the prescribed curriculum does not mean that one has engaged in equivalent learning, despite what might be inferred from the development of credit frameworks. Acquiring similar outcomes can be based upon participation in very different learning experiences. In this sense, some of the discussion about turning teachers into technicians through prescribed outcomes-based curriculum seems somewhat misplaced, as organisational and individual factors already do support the play of difference in curriculum-making. More creativity may be desired in curriculum-making, but this would entail addressing the existing play of difference, which is not simply about curriculum policy.

These are significant inferences. The question then becomes one of the extent to which similar issues arise from the study of other curriculum areas, and how differentiated the enacted curriculum is across the full range of education and training providers. However rational the prescribed curriculum and credit structures may be, difference remains infused in the enacted curriculum. Equivalence of learning is therefore a far more substantive issue than the prescribed rational curriculum suggests.

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References


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