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Constraints on agency in micro-language policy and planning in schools: A case study of curriculum change

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In studies of language policy and planning (LPP) in schools, agency has often been understood in terms of how the impact of teachers, students and parents influence the implementation of top-down macro-LPP or of the ways that community stakeholders generate LPP from below (Wiley & García, 2016). Such studies have emphasised the agency of various school community actors in shaping LPP in their local context (Alexander, 1992). This chapter will consider the question of agency from the perspective of the school as an ecological context in which actors claim agency in school-based LPP and explore the ways that the local ecology has an impact on, and constrains possibilities for, exercising agency. It will do this by examining the process of a school-initiated curriculum change to increase time for the study of foreign languages in a particular school as a case study of teachers' agency in changing a schools' LPP. It will investigate the ecology of forces that influenced the exercise of the language teachers' agency as language planners within the school and the ways that this ecology of forces constrained their agentic possibilities. It will consider in particular the impacts of prevailing ideologies of education and the place of language study within education, conceptualisations of curriculum as a cultural artefact, structural features of school organisation, and professional relationships between teachers of different disciplines. As the language teachers worked to design and implement the new curriculum, these forces worked in different ways to constrain their possibilities for acting and ultimately led to the failure of the initiative.

Introduction

The study of language policy and planning (LPP) has traditionally focused on government level activity at the expense of local actors and the role they play in decision-making about languages (Baldauf, 2006; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). Where local actors are considered, they are often understood only as implementers of macro-level policies at local levels, and their sphere of decision-making is often presented in terms of decisions regarding how, or whether, to implement a particular policy (Johnson, 2009; Wiley & García, 2016). Studies aligned with the approach therefore investigate the impact of teachers, students and parents on the implementation of top-down macro-LPP. This means that the micro-level has often not been seen as a level at which language policies are created. This also means that language policy has often been considered as a part of *structure* – a factor of influence that works to determine or limit actions or decision-making – rather than as a part of *agency* – the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Coburn, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Such views of LPP assign agency to macro-level actors, such as governments and agencies, as creators of policies but see local actors primarily in terms of how their agency is constrained by policy documents or how it is responsive to them.

In reality LPP agents can operate at any level in the process of language planning, whether this be the creation of language policies or their implementation (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). In particular, schools can be sites of policy generation and there has been some study of how schools develop policy (Corson, 1999; May, 1991, 1997; Wright, 2008), but these have tended

to focus on LPP processes rather than on the ways that agency is enacted in construction and implementation of local policies. Such studies have tended to focus on the development of structure, which inevitably involves agency, but have not focused on agency as central and have therefore continued the view of policy as structure that has characterised much research on macro-level policy. Research on agency at the micro-level is more recent and much less developed (e.g. Canagarajah, 2005; Johnson, 2009; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). Because much of this research is seeking to redress the absence of considerations of local agency as a central analytical component of LPP research and practice, much of the focus of this work has been on how local actors claim and exercise agency within their contexts, often focusing on resistance to macro policy (Tollefson, 2013). This research, as Tollefson describes it, involves a movement away from a focus on state actors, top-down processes and policy texts to an emphasis on communities, actors and practices.

Even though studies of agency in micro-LPP have mainly presented a positive view of how actors can claim and exercise agency, the literature also occasionally remarks on limitations on agency: “local efforts are not powerful enough to make deeper changes” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 162) or “despite local agency, some macro ideologies and/or policies are too much for schools to overcome” (Johnson, 2009, p. 141). Such observations hint at the complexity of exercising agency and reveal that agency is not to be understood as total freedom of action just as it is not to be understood solely as something that is constrained by policy as structure (Coburn, 2016) nor should it be conceptualised only as resistance to macro-level policy. Rather agency needs to be viewed from an ecological perspective in which structure and agency are mutually constitutive and have equal ontological status (Giddens, 1984). That is, structure is not simply determining of human actions, but also is constituted by those actions and it is the interaction between agency and structure that creates the spaces in which human beings can act. This is an ecological space in which neither voluntarism nor constraints on action predominate but in which each is in a dialectic relationship; structure may constrain action but action can change structure. As Gramsci (1975, II § 6) argues:

La struttura da forza esteriore che schiaccia l'uomo, lo assimila a sé, lo rende passivo, si trasforma in mezzo di libertà, in strumento per creare una nuova forma etico-politica, in origine di nuove iniziative. [Structure is transformed from an exterior force that crushes people, assimilates them to itself, makes them passive, into a means of liberty, into an instrument for creating new ethico-political forms, into sources of new initiatives.]

For Gramsci, structure is essentially the result of an historical process; it is formed by past actions that leave their traces on understandings and expectations for future thought and action. However as the product of action, it also contains within itself the seeds of its own transformation. Thus, LPP agents may act in ways that change the structure in which languages are spoken, taught and conceptualised, or their actions may be constrained by these structures. Understanding agency as ecological means viewing it as contextualised in structure, influenced by it and has the potential to influence it. Ahearn (2001, p. 112) argues that agency refers to ‘socio-culturally mediated capacity to act’. Policies can be part of the process of mediation but to see this mediation only in terms of policy is problematic. Agents, in any context, are part of complex constellation of agents (Mayntz & Scharpf, 2001) who interact with each other and through action, discussion, etc. mediate the ways agency can be enacted.

One powerful element of structure is ideology as agents also act within an ideological field that gives social meaning to their actions; that is actions are interpretable and interpreted against a background of ideology (Voloshinov, 1929). Ideologies contain, (re)produce and transmit

values and assumptions about the phenomena they seek to act on and thereby define what is valuable and what is valued by LPP actors (Considine, 1994). Thus, ideology has the potential to constrain both what is considered to be possible action, what actions can be taken, and how actions are understood in a particular context. However, as ideologies are discursively constructed products, they, like other aspects of structure, both constrain and can be changed by agency (Voloshinov, 1929).

This chapter will consider the question of agency from the perspective of the school as an ecological context in which actors adopt agentive positions in school-based LPP and explore the ways that aspects of the local ecology mediates possibilities for acting. It will do this by examining the process of a school-initiated curriculum change to increase time for the study of foreign languages in a particular school as a case study of teachers' agency in changing a schools' LPP.

Research approach

The study described here comes from part of a multi-site ethnographic study of language planning (Canagarajah, 2006; Johnson, 2009; McCarty, 2011) in schools in South Australia. The project was a three year long, action-oriented research project on curriculum innovation in language education that focused on increasing time for language learning in secondary schools. The project was a collaboration between a team of researchers, including the author, and the school to develop a new model for school-based foreign language teaching and to design curriculum, materials and assessment to support the new model. Although only one site is discussed in this chapter, the project involved four sites in total, three schools working independently and one cluster of three schools working collaboratively on primary-secondary transitions in languages.

Ethnographic data collection occurred over a period of three years, with schools visits at least once per term, as the project team worked with teachers and school leaders to develop the models chosen by the school. Data collection involved ongoing meetings with teachers to plan and develop the models, including professional learning activities for the teachers, formal and informal meetings with teachers and school leaders, focused semi-structured interviews with teachers, school leaders and students, and participant and non-participant observations of the school. These activities were documented in field notes and/or in audio-recordings. Within each site, there were cycles of collaborative planning (including teachers, school leaders and the research team), implementation and analyses, including a contextual analysis of policies and structures, collaborative curriculum planning and implementation, planning of interventions relevant to each site, monitoring and on-going evaluation and annual reporting. As the project coincided with the release of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* document (Australian Curriculum, 2016), significant professional learning time was spent with each participant group. All of these processes involved extensive support and facilitation by the academic team to work through development and review. The data collection also involved collecting documents. Structural data were collected through an analysis of school profiles, including information about the school context and learner groups. Curriculum data, including programme documentation, resources, student work samples, tasks and assessment data, teacher and student evaluation data were also collected.

The school reported on here is a public secondary school with over 900 students. It identifies as a school with a strong focus on mathematics and science. The school offers German and Japanese and all Year 8¹ students are required to choose one of the languages offered. On completion of Year 8, language learning becomes an elective, which if chosen must be studied

for a full year. Classes are offered in all year levels with groups often combined in the senior school because of limited numbers. In each year level, Language is allocated five lessons a week (225 minutes), the same as English and Mathematics. Depending on the timetable, students may have language lessons each week for either four days or three days, including one or two double lessons.

Students in the schools are streamed based on their scores in national standardised testing in literacy and numeracy from primary school. Streaming is considered to be important for the study of English and mathematics, but language choices influence how streamed students are allocated to classes. In Year 8, students are allocated to particular homerooms based on a combination of streaming results and choice of language. The result is that a number of German and Japanese classes are offered to students with relatively similar testing results. There is a strong sense in the school that Year 8 classes are made up of 'stronger' or 'weaker' students. From Year 9, streaming continues for English and mathematics, but classes are no longer allocated to homerooms in the same way as in Year 8 as a consequence of the number of elective subjects in Year 9. The free choice of electives means that students cannot be grouped easily into classes but rather the composition of classes varies according to subject choices and how students are streamed for particular subjects.

Teachers as agents of change in the school

The agentive work of the Languages teachers began in electing to respond to a call to submit an application to show their interest and preparedness to participate in the curriculum development project. The statement required a proposal to implement a model of increased language provision and an expression of school support from the principal. It was the Languages teachers, specifically the Head of the Languages area, who decided to submit the application to participate in the project and negotiated this with other stakeholders in the school. In response to the call for government financial support for pilot projects to increase time on task for language learning, the school opted in to the project by proposing to implement a model of a lesson a day for one class each of German and Japanese initially in Year 8. This involved securing an extra lesson, which required negotiation as the curriculum in Year 8 is fully allocated and an increase in time in one curriculum area meant taking time from elsewhere in the curriculum. In developing the application to participate in the project, the Languages teachers negotiated with the Head of the Humanities faculty to take on one of the Humanities lessons and to teach part of the Humanities curriculum through the target language. The model adopted was thus an instantiation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle, Marsh, & Hood, 2010) and involved a collaborative responsibility for Humanities content shared between Humanities teachers and Languages teachers. The programme was not, however, a pure CLIL programme but instead a blended CLIL with the regular Languages programmes and it was initially conceived that the CLIL component would be taught as a single lesson in addition to the regular language programme. In actual classroom practice, however, the CLIL component was much more integrated in the programme.

The original plan was for the CLIL programme to be taught to one class of Year 8 students in each language, the top level streamed class taking each language. The main motivation for restricting the programme to these students was that they were deemed by the school to be more academically capable than other students and would therefore benefit more from and be able to cope better with the more demanding nature of learning content in another language. In the school, there was a strong ideological commitment to streaming based on national standardised testing in primary school² and equating such test results with academic ability. In fact, the decision to offer this programme to 'better' students was important for securing the

principal's agreement in securing the programme as he was concerned that other students might be disadvantaged academically if course content were to be taught in a new language. It was also envisaged in the application to participate in the project that the proposed CLIL model be continued into Year 9 for the same group of students.

In developing the application to participate in the project, the Languages teachers themselves were the leaders of the initiative. It was the Languages teachers, especially the Head of the Languages faculty, who decided that the school would benefit from involvement in the project and then worked to prepare the application and worked strategically to establish a model that would be acceptable to the school. The Head of Languages was active in securing a constituency to support the submission of the application that included the Principal and the Head of Humanities. The Head of Humanities had previously been a teacher of French in the school, but had moved full-time into the Humanities area after French was discontinued at the school. As a Language teacher, she understood the aims of the programme and had an understanding of teaching content in the target language. The Languages teachers were thus able to draw from similarities in professional identity and knowledge to leverage a change in both the organisation of the curriculum and in the form of language education to be provided. The school principal agreed to the CLIL model proposed by the Languages teachers and endorsed the school's application to be involved in the project, even proposing to initiate the CLIL model in the following academic year.

The project developed within the school was generated externally in that the basic shape of the models proposed was designed prior to the call for expressions of interest. Indeed, the fact that the project was ultimately implemented is largely due to funding provided by the Department of Education. However, the project was also generated by the school; specifically, the decision to participate and the specific form of the model developed were determined by the school. As such, it can be understood as an instance of school-based LPP generated by teachers as grass-roots language planners, also supported explicitly by the principal. In spite of this support, however, the Languages teachers' initiative was ultimately unsuccessful. The CLIL model was implemented for three years, but at the end of the project the school decided to return to its previous language learning programme. The discussion that follows will examine factors present in the particular context of the school that mediated the work of Languages teachers as LPP agents and ultimately ended their initiative.

The mediation of agency

In responding to the project call and elaborating a change in the ways that Languages were taught in the school, the Languages teachers played a creative role as micro-level language planners. They were in this way able to exercise agency within their local context. However, this agency was enacted within a context and aspects of this context had a significant influence on the ways that the project developed. The following discussion will examine the factors that mediated the agency of the Languages teachers as language planners within the school. There are two types of factors that played a significant mediating role: ideologies and institutional structures.

Ideology as a mediator of agency

One of the ways that teachers' agency was mediated in the project was through ideologies relating to how education was understood. The two most significant ideological constructs that emerged were beliefs about the nature and ownership of curriculum and beliefs about the relative value of particular areas of study in the overall curriculum.

The project was centrally a curricular project, and as it attempted to bring two curricula together, beliefs about curriculum and how curricula were structured and policed were significant in shaping what the teachers were able to achieve. Intervening in the curriculum at the school made visible a number of ideological framings of curriculum.

At an overarching level, curriculum was viewed as a disciplinary space; that is, curriculum is composed of a number of discrete disciplinary areas (c.f. Priestley, 2011). This view of curriculum is strongly entrenched in Australian educational policy; for example, national level statements about education have identified education as consisting of a delimited set of (key) learning areas³ and the Australian Curriculum has been produced as a series of discipline-specific curricula (ACARA, 2017). Although policy and curriculum documents discuss transdisciplinary concerns, these are expressed in terms of their inclusion within disciplinary areas. This view of the curriculum as a disciplined space was expressed by teachers regularly in the discussions; for example, Languages teachers talked about the Languages focus and the Humanities focus as separate and separable entities within their discourses about their own work and students coined the blended terms 'Germanities' and 'Japanities' to reference their understanding of the Languages curriculum as being different from other than the Languages discipline. Disciplinarity was thus a central construct of the ideologies of curriculum, even for those engaged in transdisciplinary work.

Disciplines in this view are understood primarily as epistemological categories (Frodeman, 2014) that form ways of organising knowledge for the purposes of teaching and learning (Perrenoud, 2000). However, such categories are ideological products in terms of both their creation and their application. One function of disciplines is to allow for regulation; that is, for delimiting practitioner roles within a particular discipline and what constitutes appropriate practice within that discipline (c.f. Parker, 2002). This understanding of disciplines as regulatory fields had a significant impact on the development of the project as it required that disciplinary content (Humanities) would be taught by people outside the discipline (Languages teachers), who were perceived from within the discipline as illegitimate or less legitimate teachers of Humanities content. That is, disciplines and disciplinary expertise were constructed as specialised and discrete so that disciplines came to be seen as a form of demarcation of academic territory and claims of ownership.

This construction of legitimacy is derived from the credentialing practices of disciplines through which individuals are recognised as having disciplinary expertise. However, this issue of qualifications was complex, as few Humanities teachers were in fact qualified across each of the sub-disciplines of Humanities. Indeed, teachers may have studied either history or geography in their university degrees but had rarely studied both. They had however studied Humanities-related teaching methodologies as part of their teacher education and training. Qualifications were thus considered in terms of which teaching methods the teachers had studied, that is their pedagogical knowledge, rather than in terms of their disciplinary study in Humanities, content knowledge (Perrenoud, 2000). In fact, the teacher of German, who had studied history at university, but was qualified as a Languages teacher, was considered by Humanities staff as less legitimate as a teacher of history than a teacher who had not studied history but was qualified as a Humanities teacher.

In reality, disciplinary qualifications were much less of an issue in the school for determining who was a legitimate teacher, than perceptions of professional identity and belonging. That is, if a teacher was assigned to the Humanities team and perceived therefore to be a Humanities teacher, he or she was perceived as having a right and responsibilities to teach the Humanities curriculum, and a teacher assigned to Languages was seen as a Languages teacher and thus as

not having the right to teach the Humanities curriculum. The play-off between qualifications and identity could be seen in the case of the head of Humanities, who had qualifications as a teacher of French, although when French was discontinued as a study area in the school, she was reassigned as a Humanities teacher. It was her belonging to the Humanities faculty that legitimated her work as a teacher of Humanities rather than her actual qualifications.

The ideology of the curriculum as a disciplined project had other consequences for how the Languages teachers' work was understood. The disciplined divisions of the curriculum were associated with a particular model of curriculum delivery: one teacher teaching the disciplinary content to a class throughout the school year. Disciplines were thus seen as discrete units of organisation that were understood primarily as administrative: "a discipline is at bottom nothing more than an administrative category" (Jencks & Riesman, 1968, p. 523), and the model of curriculum based on 'one teacher – one learning area' had come to be viewed as natural and normative. This was further reinforced by a view of curriculum in terms of time; that is, the curriculum was understood by teachers primarily in terms of contact hours in which they taught a particular course content to a particular class. This idea of curriculum as time was reflected in school practices, in which curriculum delivery was structured in terms of amounts of class time and also by curriculum documents such as the Australian Curriculum, which presented 'indicative hours' for each curricular area. Although these indicative hours had been intended as guidelines for curriculum writers, they came to be seen as requirements for curriculum delivery.

For the Humanities teachers, the transdisciplinary CLIL model in which languages teachers taught part of the Humanities curriculum was in conflict with the prevailing ideological construction of the curriculum. The Humanities teachers saw the model as removing time from the Humanities, as each teacher had one less lesson with the students, and allocating that time to Languages, as each teacher had one more lesson. The model was thus conceived as a curriculum loss for Humanities and a gain for Languages, and some Humanities teachers complained that it was a weakening of, or even an attack upon, the Humanities. The fact that the Languages teachers were teaching the Humanities curriculum was not seen as relevant by the Humanities teachers. It appears that the view of curriculum as self-contained disciplinary content, with an allocation of time and of staff mediated teachers' ways of understanding alternative models of curriculum in terms only of losses and gains rather than as redistribution of teaching and learning. In the second year of the project, the principal tried to address the Humanities teachers' sense of loss by framing the CLIL model as one in which each discipline contributed one hour to the transdisciplinary project, but the end result did not change the number of contact hours taught by Humanities and Languages teachers, this change had a limited effect on perceptions.

Overall, the prevailing ideologies of curriculum reflected a marked teacher-centred view of curriculum – a curriculum as something a teacher teaches – rather than a learner-centred view of curriculum focusing on learners' experience. In terms of time for example, the students had the same allocation of time to Humanities as before; the difference was that this time was taught by a different teacher. In reality, the Languages teachers argued that in fact the students spent more time on the Humanities content as this content needed to be integrated into the language learning objectives. On them, this required more than one lesson to achieve. Despite this, the inclusion of Humanities in the Languages programme remained invisible for many teachers as it conflicted with the dominant understandings of the nature of curriculum. The view of curriculum as discipline and as time created a context within the school in which Humanities teachers came to see themselves as disadvantaged. This perception eroded their

sense of place and value within the ecology of the school, which eventually led to resistance against the implementation of the model.

These ideologies of curriculum intersected with another important ideology that strongly influenced the possibilities for teachers' agentic movements – the relative values assigned to particular learning areas. The disciplinary curriculum is not simply made up of discrete areas of knowledge; it is internally structured with some disciplines understood as central or necessary and others as peripheral or optional. This internal structure represents a hierarchy of disciplines which are based on ideologies of the value of certain types of knowledge or of their application in the world (Liddicoat, Scarino, & Kohler, 2017; Merle, 1993). In the Australian context, Languages have thus consistently been accorded low value (Bense, 2014; Liddicoat et al., 2007; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009) and the reasons for this are complex.

This idea that disciplines form a hierarchy in terms of their perceived value draws on broader discourses in society about what is considered to be significant within the field of education. The idea that human knowledge can be hierarchically structured dates from Aristotle's hierarchical treatment of metaphysics and has been a commonplace in understanding learning in Western societies (Sandoz, 2017). In the nineteenth century, for example, Comte (1830) proposed an epistemological hierarchy of the sciences in which the natural science held the top position, social sciences were at the bottom and the biological sciences held an intermediary place. Comte's structuring of knowledge continues to influence contemporary perceptions of what is valuable knowledge in education, although it has been influenced by other ways of thinking about the value of knowledge. Derrida (1990) has argued that there has also existed a hierarchy between theoretical and practical disciplines in education, which he sees as ultimately deriving from the work of Aristotle, and which gives precedence to theoretical disciplines over practical ones. The idea that disciplines have greater or lesser value has become well entrenched in thinking about education. In contemporary Australian education, however, the basis of the hierarchy is not based on a primacy of theoretical knowledge and the instrumental value of disciplines has become the main determiner of where disciplines sit on the hierarchy. Within the ideological framework of neoliberalism, education in Australia has increasingly been conceived in terms of a system for producing human capital and entrepreneurial actors (Davies & Bansel, 2007). The resulting hierarchy of disciplines is one in which literacy and numeracy occupy the highest place, as they are perceived as contributing most directly to human capital development and the productivity of the entrepreneurial actor. In the Australian education context, literacy is narrowly understood as literacy in English (Liddicoat, 2013) and thus in secondary education English and Mathematics are the pre-eminent disciplines. These disciplines are assessed through national standardized assessment at various levels of schooling. The neoliberal emphasis on utility also intersects with the Comtean hierarchy of the sciences and favours the physical sciences as more economically useful, although favouring practical realizations of these sciences, such as technology, over theoretical sciences, such as physics.

In Australia there is a discourse that languages are useful for economic purposes and most defences of the role of languages in education reference this discourse and so it would seem that, as a subject area, Languages had a position of some prominence in the hierarchy of disciplines. However, neoliberalism itself does not entirely explain the position of language study in the Australian curriculum hierarchy. The neoliberal ideology of utility is also influenced by a prevailing monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2008). This mindset is an ideological position that is characterised by a strong belief in the normality and sufficiency of monolingualism in English for both intranational and international communication. This ideology of monolingualism constructs knowledge of other languages as being of little utility

and thus interacts with neoliberalism to position languages low within the hierarchy of disciplines. There is thus an inherent conflict around the idea that languages are economically useful. This conflict is reflected by students in their thinking about language study; students acknowledge the general use of languages but do not see that they are particularly useful for their own aspirations (Kohler & Curnow, 2007). This student perception of the lack of personal utility of languages contributes to large attrition rates in non-compulsory language study, which further weakens the perception of the place of Languages in the curriculum.

The hierarchy of the disciplines was reflected in the practices of the school. School leaders emphasised the importance of the Year 9 standardized assessment of literacy and numeracy, which was a major focus of curriculum planning for Year 9 students, but also affected Year 8. Languages were seen as peripheral for this assessment. The importance of the standardized test, which is used for school ranking as well as measuring student achievement, was invoked as a reason for not extending the CLIL module into Year 9, although other structural reasons were more important in this decision. Moreover, Languages as a learning area were mandatory in the school only for one year, while other 'core' subjects were mandatory for two or even three years. The perception of Languages as a low status subject was troubling the established norms of the school made it more difficult for Languages teachers to develop the CLIL model, and opposition came from curriculum areas that had greater status.⁴ In the final year project, the principal proposed increasing time allocations for science to reflect the indicative hours of the Australian curriculum, but the proposal did not appear to generate the same reactions from non-science staff that the change to Languages had generated. This indicates that the ideologies associated with the perceived value of particular subjects may have implications from what is possible or achievable in terms of teachers' agency to implement change in schools.

Institutional structures as a mediators of agency

Decision-making structures

Curricular innovation, such as the project discussed here, are the results of decision-making processes within schools, and how decision-making occurs can shape the future of innovations (Austin & Starkey, 2016). In the school studied here, the processes of decision-making acted as a form of mediation for teachers' agency that constrained possibilities for future action.

The initial decision to apply for the project and to increase time devoted to language learning was made by the Languages teachers, led by the teacher of German, who was also the head of Languages. This teacher was supported by the principal and a decision was made to proceed with the submission of the application. The teacher of German then negotiated with the head of Humanities to secure the additional lesson and agreed to a CLIL model in which the Languages teachers would teach Humanities content through German and Japanese. This process reflected the normal processes of decision-making in the school in which the principal was the primary decision-maker. Proposals were passed through a hierarchical process from staff to the principal and negotiations were conducted at leadership levels. The school had thus adopted a managerialist model of decision-making that itself reflected the roles constructed for principals in an education system aligned with decentralised decision-making but which at the same time increased accountability for school leaders (c.f. Gewirtz, 2003; Hatcher, 2005).

At the same time, the school did not have an effective approach to transmitting decisions made at the top-level to the rest of the school. The communication processes closely reflected the decision-making practices of the school and most communication was through hierarchical structures, reflecting a close relationship between communication processes and overall school

culture (Ärlestig, 2007). The overall result was that information about the project was not well communicated to staff and most Humanities staff were not aware that an application to participate in the project had been submitted by the school, as the project had been understood by school leaders as a Languages-specific project rather than as an interdisciplinary collaboration. The communication problems were further compounded by the timing of the submission, which was just before the summer break and the decision to include the school in the project was made only shortly before the end of the school year. In the end, the success of the school's application was not communicated to the school before the break and in fact was not communicated generally until well after the new school year had begun.

The result of this process was that Humanities teachers did not find out about the agreement until after the school had been successful in the selection process and had agreed to implement the model as part of the project. The Humanities teachers were thus informed that the CLIL model was to be implemented, rather than the implementation being negotiated with Humanities staff. The agreement between the head of Humanities and the head of Languages was not seen as an appropriate process. The perception among the Humanities teachers was that the decision was imposed from above and they felt disenfranchised from decisions about their own work. In this way, the agency of the Humanities teachers had been constrained by the decision-making processes in the school. They felt that the decision-making process had favoured the Languages teachers and marginalised the Humanities teachers. The Humanities teachers resisted the model in a number of ways. For many, this took the form of lobbying the head of Humanities and the principal to reverse the decision. For those teachers who shared responsibility for the teaching with the Languages staff resistance took the form of limited engagement with the Languages teachers with whom they were supposed to be sharing teaching responsibilities.

The decision-making processes in the school may have opened spaces for Languages teachers to exercise their agency as language planning actors, but at the same time they compromised the agency of the Humanities teachers. The result was to create a school climate which framed the innovation in terms of conflict between the teachers of the two discipline areas involved rather than in terms of transdisciplinary collaboration. The culture of decision-making interacted with the ideological framings of curriculum discussed above in ways that reinforced the prevailing ideologies of curriculum and the idea of loss and gain.

Timetabling structures

The school structure which created the most difficulty and which was least easily addressed during the three years of the project was the software used to timetable lessons. This software was problematic because it did not have the flexibility to assign a Humanities lesson to the Languages teachers. Teachers and lessons were assigned to specific 'lines', and Languages and Humanities were assigned to different lines. The computer software used by the school of timetabling worked rigidly on this line structures and so transferring lessons or teachers to different lines was problematic, considerably complicating the overall timetabling process, and required a significant time commitment from the Deputy Principal to make manual adjustments to the programme.

The rigidities of the software were further complicated by the school's timetabling practices. Timetables were prepared beginning with lessons for Years 11 and 12, which were for students studying for the senior secondary certificate. Timetabling then proceeded through descending years finally reaching the year 8 students: "we prioritise from the higher year levels down" (Interview, Principal). Years 9 and 10 lessons were timetabled next to allow English,

Mathematics and Science to be timetabled in blocks to allow for streaming, which was used by the school to ensure that students “got the right support for these subjects” (Interview: Deputy Principal). This process of streaming reflected the ideological valuing of curriculum areas, and the result was that areas considered core to the curriculum were timetabled before those that were considered more peripheral. Year 8 was timetabled last and had been considered as a way to solve timetabling issues that resulted from earlier timetabling decisions: “it’s with our Year 8s that we do our shuffling around to fix our staffing clashes” (Interview, Deputy Principal). The CLIL model adopted by the school therefore introduced additional complexity into the very part of the timetabling process that had been used to resolve complexities. Allocating an extra lesson for Languages at Year 8 required significant reshaping of timetabling across year levels.

Initially, the school had been planned to extend the CLIL model into Year 9, but this was rejected by school leaders at the beginning of the project, with the complexities of timetabling being cited as the reason for the change of decision. The problem in Year 9 included the same issues as for Year 8 but the introduction of electives in Year 9 made the timetabling of Year 9 more complex than the timetabling of Year 8, especially as Languages were elective subjects. This also meant that class cohorts could not progress together but had to be reconstituted to reflect streaming and elective choices.

The issue of timetabling was outside the control of Languages teachers, yet had a significant effect on the viability of the innovation. Solutions were found to enable the CLIL model to be implemented in the three years of the project, but the model was perceived as far too difficult to be of value. The Deputy Principal, for example, recognised that the model had led to significant improvements in learning for students of German and Japanese but doubted that the learning was commensurate with the effort required to implement the model, especially for a subject that most students would discontinue at the end of Year 8. At the end of the project, the Principal decided not to continue with the CLIL model and to return to the pre-existing arrangements for Languages and Humanities, citing the difficulty in timetabling as one of the key reasons for his decision. This means that, rather than facilitating learning, the timetable worked to limit possibilities for change (c.f. Fink & Stoll, 2005) and the limitations of the software used became the main driver of how the curriculum was presented to students and how learning and teaching were organised.

Planning structures

In the CLIL model adopted by the school, collaborative planning was an important factor in developing the change and creating a sense of an integrated curriculum (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). As the Languages teachers were to take on responsibility for teaching part of the Humanities curriculum it was important to plan which part of the curriculum they would teach, how they would assess Humanities content and how students’ overall performance in Humanities would be understood and recognised. Successful implementation of the CLIL model therefore rested upon the assumption that collaborative planning would be a feature of the curriculum innovation. The Languages teachers felt that it was important to discuss the content to be taught and share progress in Humanities taught in German and Japanese with their colleagues. However, opportunities for discussion were difficult to create.

In the school, planning had been organised in terms of disciplines and discipline groups. Groups of teachers teaching the same discipline at the same year level, were involved in regular planning and monitoring meetings. These meetings were frequently scheduled at the same time as meetings for other discipline groups. Subject groupings thus provided the main framework

and structure for professional dialogue (c.f. Priestley, 2011). The discipline-based structure meant that there were no established processes that could be used for collaborative planning of the CLIL curriculum. The Languages teachers were not invited to attend Humanities meetings and the reasons for this seem to have gone beyond the logistics of meetings being scheduled in parallel. As the Languages teachers were working only with a single Humanities class each, their work was not considered as relevant for discussion with the Humanities teachers. Moreover, many of the Humanities teachers were not prepared to engage with the Languages teachers perhaps as a way to resist the imposition of the model from above, as discussed earlier. As this group included some of the teachers who were sharing classes with the Languages teachers, this resistance made collaborative planning difficult.

The communication between the teachers was largely one-way, with the Languages teachers presenting their ideas and plans to the Humanities teacher. It was rarely the case that Humanities teachers kept the Languages teachers up to date with what was happening in their Humanities classes: "I make a point of going to [name] and saying I'm planning to do this, what do you think? If I didn't do that I wouldn't know what he was teaching". (German teacher: team meeting). In response to these communication problems, the Languages teachers sought alternative avenues to help them develop their curricula. One Languages teacher reported talking to the students about their Humanities classes and using this input to adjust her planning of the Humanities content.

During the three years of the project, no formal planning structure was established between the Humanities teachers and the Languages teachers. Throughout the project, collaborative planning was only done when the languages teachers initiated meetings with their Humanities counterparts. Thus, communication between staff primarily occurred through ad hoc discussions, initiated by individuals, outside of mainstream school processes such as faculty meetings. The flexibility needed for collaborative planning was created by individuals because structures did not allow for it. Yet at the same time, because such planning was not a part of formal structures it was not particularly valued or felt necessary by all teachers. The lack of structures to support collaborative planning seemed to perpetuate the views of those teachers who saw the change encroaching on their territory. Reluctance to engage in collaborative planning was a form of resistance to this encroachment, given that there was little sense amongst teachers that the CLIL curriculum was a shared enterprise. The frequency and duration of planning meetings varied depending on the degree engagement of the Humanities teacher with the project, but meetings were brief and informal, and in some cases, infrequent.

Employment structures

The CLIL model also created problems for staffing because of the employment structures in the school. Teachers' workloads were determined by an agreed industry award which stipulated amounts of contact and non-contact time. This meant that, when Languages teachers took responsibility for teaching Humanities content, they increased their contact time by one lesson per week and decreased the contact time of the Humanities teachers. Resolving this issue proved to be an intractable problem for the school. It was not possible to reduce or increase teachers' workloads by reassigning their teaching for a number of reasons. First, it was not possible for the Humanities teachers to take on one of the language lessons as they did not know the languages concerned. One of the Humanities teachers was also a French teacher, but French was not taught at the school. Moreover, the timetable had been used as a mechanism to regulate workloads and the lack of flexibility of the software used meant that allocating teaching loads for a single lesson could not be done within the timetabling system. The principal decided that the workload issue would be addressed by reducing the amount of yard

duty expected of the Languages teachers. However, this was not a solution that could cover the entire time investment because yard duty was generally perceived by the teachers as an onerous burden and too much of a reduction in yard duty would have been seen by others as privileging the Languages teachers. This meant that the Languages teachers accepted heavier workloads as part of the implementation of the CLIL model, although this ultimately was not a sustainable way of managing workloads.

Conclusions

This case study has sought to consider agency in LPP as something other than resistance to official language policy. It has reviewed a case in which teachers were initiators of LPP within their schools and has examined the ways that this exercise of agency has played out. In addition, while many studies of agency report the taking up of agency as a positive experience, this study has focused more on the ways that exercising agency can also be complex and difficult. In this case study, one of the important issues would appear to be the limited power of Languages teachers in countries such as Australia to influence practice, given how they are positioned within education systems and the society at large. Languages and languages teachers in Australia have had to struggle for legitimacy in the school curriculum, in the face of external constraints including the learning of languages not being seen as important, falling enrolment figures in language programs, students' perceived limited interest in language studies, and the impression that language studies are relatively unimportant for future success (Bense, 2014; Curnow, Kohler, Liddicoat, & Loechel, 2014; Liddicoat & Curnow, 2009). One of the difficulties the teachers experienced in this case was the belief that what they were doing was not important enough to justify troubling existing structures and relationships. This raises the issue of the extent to which Languages teachers have the power to exercise agency in educational contexts, or to put it differently, how subject status divergences impact curricular change.

The discussion above has sought to identify factors which mediated Languages teachers' agency in developing a school-based LPP initiative. Although the presentation of the analysis may have developed the impression that analytical factors in this study are ontologically discrete, in reality they are closely interrelated. Ideologies constituted frames in which structures were understood, operationalised and (re)produced. Each of the structural factors was closely tied to, and mutually influenced by, others. That is, these factors not only mediated teachers' agency but also mediated each other. Some of the factors were specific to the school, while others were present also in the wider society. Some factors were supported by external institutional structures, while others were products of the dynamics of the school.

As mediators of LPP actors' agency, these factors need to be considered as contexts that can stimulate action, make certain actions possible or limit actions (Mayntz & Scharpf, 2001) can constitute a micro-structure. The discussion above has examined how an initiative taken by teachers to change the way that Languages were taught in one school was mediated by contextual factors present in the school. Such contextual factors influenced how the teachers were able to exercise their agency and ultimately the success of their language planning work. This finding shows that teachers as agents do not act in isolation but in complex webs of relationship both within and outside the school. Humanities teachers were also agents within the process of change acting in ways that closed down spaces for change by reinforcing or reconstituting aspects of structure. Many of the factors discussed above are elements of the particular culture and circumstances of the school being studied and reveal that local cultures have a significant role in mediating action, while others reflect wider societal phenomena.

Collectively they reveal that multiple contextual factors are inevitably present and influence the actions, and potential for actions, of local language planners.

They also reveal how structure and agency are processes which unfold in a dialogic relationship. As van Lier (2008, p. 172) notes “[a]gency is interdependent, that is, it mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context”. The actions taken by teachers as language planners shaped the structure in which they acted. This was most noticeable in the relationships that the project created between Languages and Humanities teachers. The development of a lesson-a-day model brought Languages and Humanities teachers into a new form of relationship that had multiple dimensions: collaboration in the sense of joint responsibility for the Humanities curriculum and conflict in the sense that the model created a sense of loss for the Humanities teachers. These relationships were influenced by other elements of the context such as the ideologies of curriculum and the decision-making and communicative practices of the school, which ultimately contributed to the sense of conflict. The result was a situation in which the curriculum innovation was predicated on collaboration, but the collaboration needed was rendered impossible by the conflictual relationship that emerged. What occurred in this school is not the conscious alteration of social structure as proposed by Giddens (1984) and as discussed in most studies of agency in micro-level LPP. Rather it was an unplanned, unconscious restructuring of professional relationships. That is, the actions of the teachers had consequences that had not been intended, but which were perhaps inevitable, given aspects of the pre-existing structure. The interactions between agency and structure in micro-LPP are thus one of the “spaces of unplanned language planning, the micro realms” that (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 98) argues need to be given more attention in LPP scholarship.

Notes

- ¹ In South Australia, Year 8 is the first year of secondary education.
- ² In Australia, national standardised testing in the form of the The National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The students had thus been assessed in the year preceding their entry into secondary school.
- ³ For example, the 2008 Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) identifies the eight learning areas – English, Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, Information and Communication Technology – as the basis of the curriculum. These areas continue, with only some revision of names, those established in earlier declaration on school: the Adelaide Declaration (Australian Education Council, 1999) and the Hobart Declaration (Australian Education Council, 1989).
- ⁴ The history curriculum for example had been championed by former Prime Minister John Howard as central to the project of building a particular national identity (Taylor, 2009)

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