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News from WA......(more than just iron ore and great footy teams) – policy principles to course design

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In February 2007 a new senior secondary Physical Education Studies (PES) was introduced in Western Australia (WA). The course was one of some 50 new courses that were developed in conjunction with the introduction of new Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). This presentation draws on initial findings from a PhD study that is investigating curriculum change and reform, specifically in the context of the initial years of implementation of PES in WA. The study draws on Bernstein's (1990) model of the social construction of pedagogic discourse as a framework to locate and position teachers in relation to other partners in the design process and implementation phase. In particular, the study seeks a better understanding of the relationship between policy making and course design intentions and the often contradictory, contrasting and unintended practices subsequently arising in schools amidst implementation. The paper will present emerging evidence to identify the policy principles and discourses that were established as central to the PES course and how these were progressed and expressed in key course texts. Secondly, it will consider compatibility, tensions and pragmatics featuring in the development and the ways in which these played out in the course design. Finally, discussion will consider how this case study can provide arguably timely input to contemporary policy making and curriculum design processes associated with the Australian Curriculum.

Keywords: Senior secondary schooling; Physical Education; curriculum; assessment

Introduction

In February 2007 a new senior secondary Physical Education Studies (PES) course was introduced in Western Australia (WA). It was one of some 50 new courses that were developed in conjunction with the introduction of the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). The changes arose from a review of post-compulsory schooling (later to be renamed Senior Schooling) in WA. The review identified a need for greater alignment between senior secondary education and Kindergarten to Year 10 curriculum; a broadening of the range of tertiary entrance options and subjects available to students; and a rationalisation of course structures, assessment systems and subject selection criteria in senior secondary education (Curriculum Council of WA, 2002; see also Penney & Walker, 2007). The reforms meant that for the first time in WA, achievements in PES would be recognised for tertiary entrance.

This paper draws on initial findings from a PhD study that is investigating curriculum change and reform, specifically in the context of the initial years of implementation of PES in WA. The study uses Bernstein's (1990) model of the social construction of pedagogic discourse as a framework to locate and position teachers in relation to other agents in the design process and implementation phase. The paper initially details the methodology and data gathering, before presenting emerging evidence that identifies the policy principles and discourses that were established as central to the PES course. It considers compatibility, tensions and pragmatics featuring in the development and the ways in which these played out in the course design. Finally, discussion explores how this case study can provide arguably timely input to contemporary processes associated with the Australian Curriculum.

Conceptual Framework - Bernstein's (1990) model of the social construction of pedagogical discourse

The wider study uses Bernstein's (1990) model of the social construction of pedagogical discourse, as a framework to develop an understanding of the discourses, processes, texts and "translations" that formed course design and implementation, and in turn, planning for teaching, learning and assessment. In short Bernstein's model of the social construction of pedagogic discourse proposes that three sites of interaction namely, primary, recontextualising and secondary, organise pedagogic discourse. Time and space precludes detailed exploration of Bernstein's model but the author lent heavily on Bernstein's (1990) text and a number of interpretations and applications of his work in physical education research (MacPhail, 2004); MacPhail & Halbert, 2005); Penney, 1998, 2013; Penney & Chandler, 2000; Penney & Evans, 1999). As explained below, Bernstein's framework of three inter-related sites informed development of research questions, to be explored sequentially. Drawing specifically on the modified version of Bernstein's model of construction of pedagogic discourse utilised by MacPhail, (2004) in the context of the Scottish Higher Grade Physical Education, we similarly designed a customised version of Bernstein's Model (Figure 1). This paper particularly directs attention to the complexities of text production associated with the primary field and points to emerging implications for subsequent interpretation and action in the recontextualising and secondary fields.
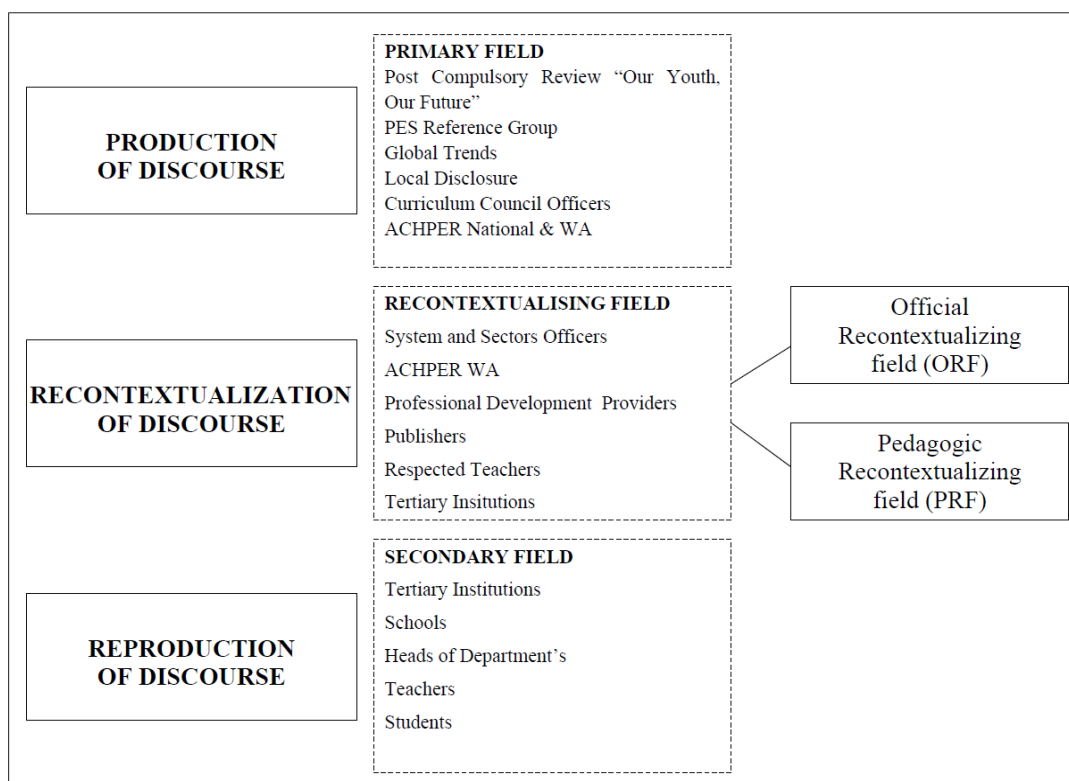

Figure 1: Adapted version of Bernstein's Model of the social construction of pedagogic discourse in the context of PES in WA (Jones, 2013)

Research Questions

The study takes a phased approach in addressing the following three research questions:
Primary Field of Production.

Q1. What were the discourses that formed the policy principles from which the PES was designed, and why was there a particular "central" focus on the "integration of theory and practice"?
Field of Recontextualisation
Q2. What texts and "local translations" (Fullan, 1999) of the PES central focus, to integrate theory and practice, have been made at "intermediary sites" (Hargreaves, 1986) during initial implementation?
Secondary Field of Production.
Q3. What integrated "theory and prac" pedagogical practice has emerged from the implementation process?

Methodology

Document analysis and semi structured interviews were identified as appropriate methods for the intent of the first two research questions. The study draws on the experiences of others in the field (Penney and Evans, 1999; Macdonald and Hunter, 2005) who successfully used document review in large implementation studies. Initial development work for the PES was typically through committee work, lobbying, drafting, consultation, redrafting and development of support material. This was developed against a backdrop of a broader educational landscape influenced by national and international discourses. Only publically available documents were considered.

Semi-structured interviews were designed to extend enquiry. Hitchcock and Hughes (1994) argue convincingly that semi- structured interviews "provide room for negotiation, discussion and expansion" and in particular provide a greater "balance between interviewer and interviewee" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1994, p.157). It was the capacity to listen to people's translations of the PES, and then investigate further leads in their construction of reality that guided this study towards the use of semi-structured interviews.

A series of case studies will form the basis for research into question three. Space precludes detailed consideration of this methodology. However, the reader should note the selection of case study schools will emerge from preceding phases of data collection and analysis.

Selection of texts

Our Youth Our Future. Post-Compulsory Education Review (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2002) represented the starting point for the selection of texts for the document analysis. We held the view that this document represented the 'primary field of production' (Bernstein 1990) or "meeting place" for discourses, and constructed, positioned and articulated the proposed reforms for Post Compulsory Education in WA.

Initial analysis of this text and reference to its bibliography, generated a list of further documents for analysis. These included: *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA, 1999); *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008); *Curriculum framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia*

(Perth, Curriculum Council 1998); and *Our Youth, Our Future. Post-Compulsory Education Review.* (Perth, Curriculum Council, 2002).

A series of PES specific documents were also identified and analysed using the PES syllabus (2005) as a starting point. These included, the PES Syllabus (2006; 2008), Teacher Jury Report (2007), The Chief Examiners Report (2008; 2009) and PES Support materials Unit 1A and 1B (2008).

Selection of interviewees

At the time of writing semi structured interviews were being arranged and undertaken with key "actors" (Curtner-Smith, 1999) from Department of Education of WA (DoE Consultant, DoE Teacher representatives), Catholic Education Office (CEO Consultant, CEO Teacher representative), Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA Teacher Representative), Lead Writer, Chief Examiner and Tertiary Institutions including, Notre Dame University and Edith Cowan University, who were members of key groups such the PES Reference group and the Course Advisory Committee.

Interview questions were designed in view of themes and categories emerging from the documents analysis. Interview questions were piloted with Tertiary HPE colleagues to ensure they were pertinent, structured and timely. Pilot study participants were asked to comment on suitability and some changes were made accordingly. The opportunity was also taken to practice exploring issues emerging, by way of impromptu and ad hoc questioning.

Data Analysis

A template for the document analysis, similar to that proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), was designed. This included three categories:

1. Location: Source and date
2. Classification, authenticity, credibility
3. Interpretation and meaning (words, phrases, concepts, comments, quotes, directives)

Analysis was undertaken manually, using a colour coding system to identify common and emerging themes and categories. Following analysis, themes and categories were combined to create "super themes". At the end of this process cross-referencing between broader educational and specific PE themes was undertaken. To further test the emerging themes, a grid was drawn up and documents were cross-referenced against the themes to quantify the regularity of their appearance. As a consequence themes were clustered again and emerged accordingly.

Semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio digital recorder with a MPS player and field notes were also taken. The interviews were transcribed. During this process topics and themes from the interview transcripts were coded and key quotes and references that would later be used for illustrative purposes were highlighted. Finally the responses were further correlated and cross referenced against the grid of themes emerging from the document analysis and clustered accordingly.

Findings

The following section presents emerging policy principles, discourses and "super themes" that were central to the design of the PES course in the "primary field of production". For the purposes of this paper a synopsis of broader educational and specific PE themes are identified (see Table 1 and 2). We then consider compatibility, tensions and pragmatics featuring in the "recontextualising" of these discourses and the ways in which these played out in the course design and subsequent revisions.

Table 1. Themes emerging - Broader Educational Landscape

Themes emerging	Document Source
Life - long learning and the desire to ensure that "all students leave senior school years with foundation skills for life and the capacity for, and inclination towards ongoing learning"	*Our Youth, Our Future.* Perth, Curriculum Council 2002, p.18
Western Australian State Imperatives	*Post-Compulsory Education Review Position Paper*. Perth, Curriculum Council
The extension and alignment of the WA Curriculum Framework (1999) and Learning Area Outcomes from K - 10 into Senior Schooling	*Our Youth, Our Future.* Perth, Curriculum Council, 2002); *Post-Compulsory Education Review Position Paper*. Perth, Curriculum Council
The alignment of Vocational, Educational and Training and school based post compulsory courses	*Our Youth, Our Future.* Perth, Curriculum Council 2002*; Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians,* (MCEETYA, 2008)
The extension of post school destinations through the development of a broader range of subject based courses	*Our Youth, Our Future. Perth, Curriculum Council, 200*2; *Post-Compulsory Education Review Position Paper*. Perth, Curriculum Council
Access and Equity for all	*Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians,* (MCEETYA, 2008)
Personalised learning to support and fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian	*Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians,* (MCEETYA, 2008)

Table 2. Themes emerging – PE Studies

Themes emerging	Document Source
The extension and alignment of the WA Curriculum Framework (1999) and Health and Physical Education Learning Area Outcomes to "PE Studies"	Physical Education Studies Syllabus, 2005; *Our Youth, Our Future. Perth, Curriculum Council, 200*2
A new senior school PES course with a strong practical focus	Physical Education Studies Syllabus, 2005
Personalised learning with content and contexts that were relevant to students and that best support their individual achievement of the outcomes	Physical Education Studies Syllabus, 2006
The integration of theory and practice to be central to the course	Physical Education Studies Syllabus 2008
What is relevant content in a PES course?	Department of Education and Training Consultant & Teacher representatives, AISWA Teacher representative
Inclusivity and the catering for a range of cognitive and physical abilities and interests.	*Our Youth, Our Future.* Perth, Curriculum Council, 2002); *Post-Compulsory Education Review Position Paper*. Perth, Curriculum Council

In the following section we focus on two of these emerging themes and provide a short evidence based narrative of how these were progressed. Readers should note that interview sources are referenced using annotations referred to above.

Pursuing the extension and alignment of the WA Curriculum Framework (1999) in PE studies

The extension and alignment of the senior school environment to the existing K – 10 *Curriculum Framework* and learning area outcomes not only in HPE but across the board was a major imperative of *"Our Youth, Our Future"* and was a key discourse during the primary field of production (Bernstein, 1990).

> "The Council is committed to maximising learning outcomes for students through a seamless focus on outcomes from kindergarten to year 12, as expressed in the *Curriculum Framework"* (*Our Youth Our Future. Post-Compulsory Education Review* in 2002, Perth, Curriculum Council, 2002)

Pragmatically the PES Outcomes were designed to indicate the close relationship to HPE within the WA *Curriculum Framework*, yet an argument (DET Con, CEO Teacher Rep) was made these needed to be distinct from the HPE learning

outcomes in the *Curriculum Framework* to represent PE rather than HPE. This was broadly accepted, as Health Studies and Outdoor Education Studies would make the same argument.

In 2005 outcomes were to form the basis for course design and assessment, as was the case in K -10. Analysis of PES Syllabus between 2005 and 2008 reveals a number changes and recontextualisations were made to the course outcomes. The progress of the Attitudes and Values outcome and socio cultural strands that supported it is significant, ultimately resulting in their omission by 2008. Two new outcomes were introduced reflecting specific content at the expense of the Attitudes and Values, while the Knowledge and Understandings outcome was reshaped and extended.

It was perceived that the Attitudes and Values outcome "lacked clarity" (DET Consultant), and was "unfocused", "non scientific and lacked rigour", moreover "kids didn't get it" (AISWA Teacher Rep), "the literacy of sociology was difficult for students to access" (CEO Teacher representative). In addition the Attitudes and Values outcome in K – 10 was not assessed formally, and this was raised as an issue in PES (DET Consultant), "Values and Attitudes disappeared as it was perceived as difficult to teach and assess" (DET Teacher representative).

Surprisingly, in light of the desire to align senior school courses to K-10 and the important role course outcomes had in the design of the course, there is little evidence to suggest that they feature as significant components in the design of curriculum and pedagogic plans at school level. The pragmatics of teaching content seemingly takes over;

> I think the content was fine but the whole issue was hijacked by biomechanics and then assessment issues. Mainly because the outcomes and levels were still unclear in K – 10. So you could see from the start, while the course itself was sound, the focus would be on a number of issues that could hijack initial conversations (AISWA Teacher representative).

Indeed the outcomes do not appear to have played a role in the examination brief and design, "the outcomes were never part of our examination planning" (Chief Examiner).

The alignment to Learning Area Outcomes was ultimately terminated in 2009 with the political decision through the Minister to end assessment via outcomes. "Once that came out that was it, they went and did not feature again. There was no reason, that was just one complication gone and out of the way" (AISWA Teacher representative).

A strong practical focus to "celebrate the physical in physical education" (Penney and Evans 2005) was a central focus of the PES course

From the initial point in the construction of the PES course there was advocacy for a strong practical focus. "It was important for all sorts of reasons that practical performance was part of this course" (DET Consultant); "It was a question of what would captivate students" (CEO Consultant); "I advocated for the course to link theory to practical sport" (CEO Teacher Representative). Also inherent in this emphasis was a desire to support Specialist Sport programmes (DET representative) and the pragmatic perception of "No sport, no kids" (DET representative).

The 2005 and 2006 PES syllabus refers to the integration of theory into practice as a key focus of teaching with an emphasis on physical activity acting as a "context for learning" and "learning *through* movement" (Physical Education Studies Syllabus 2005, p 5). Significantly, the nature of "practical" and physical activity changes after

2008 with the design of the external Practical Examination. Interestingly neither of the first two PES syllabus documents (2005 and 2006) included a list of practical sports.. However;

> "once the practical examination was on people's radar, the notion of practical changed to mean purely performance. The arrival of support materials (CD's of drills that would form the basis for the exam) changed the way practical was viewed. Now it was about performance and using your practical lessons for improving raw performance, linking theory got lost. It was about getting kids over the line in the practical exam" (CEO Teacher representative);

The identification of various sports that would be offered for practical performance assessment was not overtly linked to the syllabus. "I am not sure where the initial 14 sports list appeared from, I think it was a survey of the most popular taught in the old course" (CEO representative).

Ultimately "while teachers were still encouraged to use practical teaching and learning contexts that would best illustrate theoretical concepts, the practical examination assessed skills and tactics in performance only. Students were not asked to apply theoretical understandings to that performance. Not even in the written exam" (AISWA Teacher representative).

Discussion

As indicated, the above are initial findings from an ongoing PhD study. The data presented provides some insight into a complex and contested relationship between policy making and course design intentions and the practices subsequently arising amidst implementation. The new senior school PES course in WA emerged on the back of significant reform that reflected relatively accepted broad ranging educational discourses. Initial evidence points towards a "relatively" compatible and consistent set of policy principles and discourses forming the basis for the course during the 'primary" design period and through to the first published PES Syllabus in 2005. During the initial "recontextualisation" of the PES course amidst implementation, a number of tensions arose. These centred primarily on the pragmatic needs of teachers and those supporting them, (specifically with regards examinations, and difficulty with some content areas) and political and system changes, including the termination of Learning Area Outcomes as assessment tools. In the context of the PES in WA the tensions played out through what appears to be relatively ad hoc decision making and curriculum planning, with pragmatics sometimes taking precedence over the philosophical basis of the rationale that formed the design of the course.

What are the lessons here for the current Australian Curriculum development and implementation?

While this study focuses on the senior secondary curriculum in PES in WA, it can be seen as pertinent to the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum in HPE. The findings so far highlight the influence of competing texts and priorities and the effect these can have on the pedagogical and curriculum intent of the course. In the context of the Australian Curriculum we contend that there is a clear need to keep eyes firmly on the road ahead and not to be caught like a rabbit in the headlights, as

potentially competing texts emerge. The profession arguably needs to keep the rationale of the Australian Curriculum in HPE at the forefront of implementation and articulate this clearly during "recontextualisation".

As evidenced in WA, the headlight(s) that may seduce the rabbit include such issues as, assessment, school based planning and in the case of the Australian Curriculum in HPE, external agencies and providers who offer their own specific text. We argue that implementation of this national reform for HPE needs to be strategic and sustained with the intent clearly articulated. In the clamour for change we need "Champions" and resources to clarify meaning and understandings, and ensure that these are not lost as the message trickles down and is variously translated at different sites, in "recontextualisation" and "secondary" fields.

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