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Policy critics and policy survivors: who are they and how do they contribute to a department policy role typology?

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the policy 'roles' adopted by teachers enacting policy in a department. It draws on a longitudinal study of two secondary mathematics departments endeavouring to make deep change aligned with a demanding curriculum policy. The study validates aspects of an existing typology, demonstrates the existence of a variety of policy 'critics' and adds a category of 'survivor' teacher, showing the role can have considerable impact on enactment. The paper argues for an extension to a group construct of 'policy role', here at a department level, and shows that as teachers struggle to marry the constraints of the range of policies to which they are subject with the time and effort needed to maintain deeply espoused professional values, an adopted group role can serve either to support or constrain individual teacher efforts.

KEYWORDS

Policy role; group typology; department; mathematics; survivor; critic

The policy context

Teachers in England currently operate to a 'performativity' (Ball, 2003) agenda accompanied by policy hyperactivity, and in secondary (11–16 years or 11–18 years) schools policy pressure is particularly felt in the high-stakes departments of English and Mathematics (Perryman, Ball, & Maguire, 2011). These teachers in particular juggle frequently changing and not always consistent policies which might or might not be well aligned with their core professional values.

The policy subject of this study was the 2010 introduction of a new curriculum for 14–16-year-olds, assessed by the high-stakes 'GCSE' (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations. The intentions of the policy, in particular a renewed focus on problem solving and deep conceptual understanding, were well aligned with values espoused by a wide range of the mathematics education community in England and more widely (Eurydice, 2011), although recognized as requiring demanding changes in teaching and learning if young people were to meet the increased cognitive and technical expectations (ACME, 2011). They were therefore 'principled' intentions and I use a 'principled enactment' to mean a valid enactment of those.

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Such changes have proved elusive at scale (Eurydice, 2011; Millett, Brown, & Askew, 2004; Spillane, 2004), yet the two departments studied both appeared well placed for principled enactment, since not only did they claim espousal of the curriculum intentions but also they had an unusual store of professional and particularly subject-specific knowledge (Ofsted, 2008). Further, they had in the preceding years worked together to introduce a fairly radical 'deep understanding, problem-rich' curriculum for 11–14-year-olds consistent with a foundation for the new GCSE. They therefore represented a 'telling' rather than a 'typical' sample (Mitchell, 1984), and the theoretical developments proposed below could reasonably be assumed therefore to represent only a partial model of teacher–policy interaction.

Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) argue that much school policy analysis work is inadequate to describe the complexity of individual teacher interaction with policy. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011b) begin to address this by identifying a typology of 'policy actors' derived from large-scale fieldwork and focused on policy enactment at a whole-school level. They describe highly differentiated roles, responses and actions adopted during processes of 'interpretation' and 'translation' of policy, as summarised in Table 1.

Ball, Maguire, and Braun's (2012) study does not draw significantly on classroom-level enactment, arguably the core intended site of much education policy. Further, their typology is for an individual, often a school leader since its development derives from the study of whole-school policy enactment. However, Siskin (1994) shows that it is often departments which are the critical unit for framing teacher classroom functioning in secondary schools. This study therefore used classroom-focused and other data at two levels – that of the individual teacher interacting with policy, and that of the department.

The study

The study asked what characteristics teachers draw on when enacting demanding imposed change, and what contribution that makes to our understanding of policy enactment, its constraints and affordances. Following first analysis, it asked further whether and how the above typology could be applied, and what it might mean for a department to 'adopt a role' in relation to a policy. The study followed two departments ('Greenways' and 'High Wood') over three years to incorporate teacher response to first examination results, adopting semi-structured interviews and lesson observations each developed iteratively, together with documentary evidence of schemes of work, department-initiated student questionnaire responses and meeting minutes. All given names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012, p. 49).

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting and facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-talk
Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency

The researcher was a senior teacher who was teaching at Greenways but had worked closely with both departments and continued to do so through the study. Data were collected as documents, transcribed interviews and field notes of observations and informal interactions, over five stages in each school. All data were validated by participants. Each stage and school used three 'telling' (Mitchell, 1984) participant teachers (plus one replacement at Greenways), representing a range of previous engagements with curriculum development. A summary of fieldwork is presented in Table 2.

Grounded data analysis was by reciprocal (researcher and assistant) coding and categorising of nascent themes, with gaps between field events allowing for these to be probed in later interactions. It led to the emergence of a constructivist grounded account (Charmaz, 2006). Complementary third generation activity theory (Engeström, 2005) and complexity (Davis & Simmt, 2003) lenses were employed at two levels, individual and department, where that made sense. These both accommodate different levels of focus and provide complementary lenses so that insights can be at least compared and contrasted, in Prediger, Bikner-Ahsbahs, and Arzarello's (2008) terms.

Activity theory produces a deterministic and dynamic account of activity (here, enactment of a new curriculum) undertaken by subjects who are motivated to achieve the purpose through the mediation of tools – here, posited to include talk, policy documents, teacher knowledge, and curriculum resource. The 'third generation' (2005) theory suggests how the interaction of two or more activity systems with common 'boundary objects' can be modelled. Here, for example, I modelled the classroom learning system as interacting with the teacher learning system, with a new scheme of work as a common boundary object, whether activity is modelled at a single teacher/classroom or at a department level. Learning then arises through destabilisation which causes tensions that have to be resolved by new tools and rules (here, of mathematics, of pedagogy, classrooms, schools or wider communities), or new division of labour, to re-acquire stability.

In contrast, complexity theory privileges the emergent apparently non-deterministic and dynamic aspects of teachers' learning, with change happening in a 'bottom-up' and non-

Table 2. Fieldwork events.

Event	Purpose/focus
Interview 1, Winter year 1	Professional background and espoused beliefs. Early ideas about GCSE 2010, including preparations and challenges.
Observation 1, Spring year 1	Chosen by teacher to exhibit changes in pedagogy catalysed by new curriculum.
Interview 2, Summer year 1	Probe observation and routes to change. Emerging ideas, priorities and understandings re content and pedagogy for new curriculum.
Observation 2, Winter year 2	Chosen by teacher to focus on problem solving.
Interview 3, Spring year 2	Probe observation, especially interpretation of 'problem solving' and any related challenges. Response to 'new' exemplar examination questions, chosen to illuminate aspects of teacher subject and pedagogical knowledge.
Observation 3, Summer year 2	Chosen by teacher to show 'new' pedagogy embedded for second cohort, including 'functional' mathematics.
Interview 4, Summer year 2	Probe observation and support for/challenges in adopting pedagogy shown. Reflection on first full cycle in terms of pedagogy, student learning and use of metacognition. Response to first GCSE examinations.
Observation 4, Autumn year 3	Chosen by teacher to show established pedagogy developed in response to 'new' curriculum.
Interview 5, Winter year 3 (2012–2013)	Probe observation. Current knowledge and beliefs in relation to new GCSE. Response to first examination results. What changes to practice have been made, at an individual and department level? What have still to be made? (What has helped/hindered those?)

deterministic way through the interactions of its agents. Complex systems are typically nested (here, for example, teachers nested within departments which are themselves nested within wider policy structures), with learning characterised as emergent adaptation. A complexity framework would explain how, for example, capacity distributed at the department level can compensate for, and interact with, individual competencies so as to produce a system that functions as ‘greater than the sum of the parts’, and – with individual teachers as the system – how different characteristics can interact to produce a creative and effective teacher. Davis and Simmt (2003) argue that ambitious ‘expansive’ possibilities, as required in the study situation, only occur if the system exhibits internal diversity and redundancy, enabling constraints, decentralised control and rich neighbour interactions, where the ‘neighbours’ here might be ideas and questions rather than people.

In both cases, the role of leadership is critical, in activity theory to initiate and maintain destabilisation of existing frameworks and in complexity theory to seed ‘attractors’ that act as enabling constraints. Heads of Departments were therefore included as key participants.

Policy enactment

Ball (1993) argues that policy enactment should be understood as both discourse and text. Policy as discourse enables and constrains teachers as subjects, framing what can be said or thought; policy as text privileges them as agents of policy (Ball, 2003). In complexity terms, together they may act as ‘enabling constraint’ for deep change that depends also on teachers taking suitable actions as agents. In this case, the intended curriculum was already established as discourse, but aspects of this were in tension with other policies such as those relating to performativity. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011a) discuss such tensions and develop heuristic tools of interpretation and translation: an understanding of policy as ‘implemented’ completely consistent with policy-makers’ intentions in the classroom is often far from the case. Instead, Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008) show that it typically undergoes ‘iterative refraction’ at a number of levels before impacting on students in classrooms.

In this case, Greenways managed over three years and more to develop a comparatively principled enactment of the policy, albeit through a number of structural and individual challenges to that. Teachers at High Wood initially also espoused the intentions of the new curriculum. However, over time their commitment dissipated, apparently weakened by repeated changes in GCSE regulations, confidence limited by a hiatus in GCSE results as they were about to start enactment of the new GCSE, by challenges in the personal life of the Head of Department, and by emerging draft GCSE assessments which were of limited validity, with little change from previous assessments.

Individual teachers as policy actors

During the course of the study, observations and interviews showed most individual teachers at Greenways adopted a succession and combination of policy-related roles similar to those described in Table 1. These were not fixed: for example, as the commitment of the young Head of Department (Nigel) to a principled enactment wavered for apparently performativity-linked reasons, others were observed short term to adopt his previous roles of

narrator and transactor, claiming those were needed for continued progress: 'We can't falter on this if it's to have the impact we want, so someone has to take the baton while Nigel worries about results' (Gillian, Interview 3). In common with practice in many English secondary schools, development of the policy was reified through a 'scheme of work' representing quite detailed description of intended classroom activity. Observations showed individual teachers then enacted this somewhat differentially in classrooms, though largely in ways consistent with their stated intentions. The role of 'critic' as described by Ball et al. (2012) was not overtly recognisable within this department, but they were observed to frequently and proactively engage in constructive critique/discussion of scheme of work development and of their own and others' reported classroom enactments. Watson and de Geest (2014) identify this as a characteristic of their mathematics departments successfully enacting autonomous change, and in many respects interviews and informal observations showed Greenways appropriated this policy as their own, adopting highly 'writerly' (Barthes, 1974) approaches to its enactment. This parallels higher level approaches to policy adopted by successful schools as reported by Day and Gu (2014).

An exception was 'Dan', an experienced teacher, who, despite supportive comments at department meetings ('I think this curriculum is great – the challenge makes them think'), was able to maintain an enactment only superficially compliant with the developed scheme of work. Observation showed that planned 'problems' were structured to be solvable by familiar (teacher-signposted) procedures, questions were largely closed, and little demand on student thinking was made: he claimed 'these students don't do challenge' (Interview 2). As such, he could be construed as policy-resistant, seeking a minimally compliant enactment consistent with his perception of the limitations imposed at the department level. Dan therefore appeared to adopt a role outside Ball et al.'s (2012) typology: I term him a 'survivor'. This role has something in common with that of their 'receiver', though the survivor is not trying to 'receive' and then enact the policy, but rather adopts a minimal adaptation in order to survive without external censure. Dan did not publicly resist or undermine the policy: he did however exert sufficient agency on an individual level to choose to engage only superficially with policy-related materials, at both planning and classroom levels, while simultaneously maintaining a compliant image.

Leatham (2006) suggests that when there is an apparent discrepancy between espoused beliefs and practice, there is a 'sensible solution', and here it appeared from Dan's interviews that it lay in belief-hierarchy. Interviews suggested that initiative-overload, and repeated experiences of seeing policy changes themselves replaced after relatively short periods of time, might have persuaded Dan that the benefits of active engagement with the intentions of the policy did not merit the cost in time and energy. Observations showed his talk conformed to in-department aspirations – and so did his practice, at least superficially. He was observed, though, using structures designed for 'deep' learning of mathematical linkages in a procedural way, apparently indifferent to whether this resulted in effective conceptual grasp, even though he had chosen this lesson as an exemplification of 'developed' practice. Some students' observed talk suggested they did not expect to make any sense of tasks: 'It's OK – just pick one of the blue ones' (Dan's student, Observation 1), apparently content to guess responses – but then nor did Dan appear to either notice much of their uncertainty or errors, or expect them to understand:

I didn't want to cloud the issue ... Just getting them to the idea of – generally – how they calculate it, is the important factor – I did feel I was drifting too much into that murky waters bit – it would have confused them – they're a group that like to be led. (Dan, Interview 2, reflecting on Observation 1)

Dan appeared to have the potential to comply with principled expectations to a greater extent than he habitually did. He could, for example, adjust his classroom enactment to produce lessons considered 'good' by national inspection criteria, using nationally 'valued' behaviours when observed by senior staff, but in interview he evidenced beliefs not fully aligned with those:

All this thinking stuff, you have to be very careful with it: if they are allowed to develop their own ideas ... misconceptions can creep in. That's a difficult one. Again, it's a fine line: I'm going to ask you to think for yourself. And now that you've thought for yourself, I'm going to tell you that you've been thinking wrong. (Dan, Interview 2)

Observation showed him well described as exhibiting 'creative non-implementation' (Ball, 1994, p. 20). However, the other teachers at Greenways, although peripherally aware of Dan's non-enactment of his publicly stated intentions, were able to tolerate his actions – as Watson and de Geest's (2014) departments were able to tolerate the actions of marginalised teachers.

At High Wood initially proactive roles adopted by 'Kathy', the Head of Department, were complemented by active policy-supportive roles in other teachers, each identifiable within the typology above. However, over time as the described variety of stresses emerged in the department, more passive relationships with the policy were adopted by all teachers. After two years of enactment, a high profile for 'survivors' emerged – as well as an overt 'critic' in Ball et al.'s (2012) terms. Roles adopted were more volatile than at Greenways, with changes most obviously apparently catalysed by hiatus in either assessment structure or Kathy's personal situation, and there were increasing overtones of change fatigue in both formal and informal department interactions. Teacher interviews showed that they came to feel the performativity agenda conflicted with the risks and effort associated with prioritising a principled approach, and as shown below, in Leatham's (2006) terms made a sensible decision to privilege results. As a department, they were highly experienced, and reactions might have stemmed from greater exposure to repeated innovations and change than generally experienced by Greenways teachers. It is interesting to note that Dan too was an experienced teacher whose interviews showed disillusion with repeated imposed change.

Particularly influential at High Wood was 'Norman', a key 'translator' in the department throughout the study, and Second in Department in a situation where the Head of Department was for some time unable or unwilling to fully meet the responsibilities she had historically undertaken. Norman's policy role developed through the study, from a critic/translator to predominantly a survivor/minimal translator. As a critic, his talk was sometimes but not always constructive, and it changed in emphasis over time:

Oh yes, it's a good move: obviously they do need to be able to solve problems ... so it's good if we're expected to teach them that ... and we could really do with building up more decent resources ... that you can pick up and tweak a bit for your students. (Interview 2)

(Interviewer: You were talking about putting it into themes to help the students make connections and think outside the box a bit. Have you managed that?)

Well no not really, I just thought we've got to have something that will work... It really has been a question of let's build the wall. Where are the holes? Where's the mortar a bit dodgy? So until they build the basics really securely... So actually building in problem solving is down the line, it's an optional extra. (Interview 5)

This reference to problem solving as an 'optional extra' became typical of his rhetoric in observed department interactions and he appeared to be increasingly influential in the department as a vacuum appeared where Kathy's leadership had been. As such, by Interview 5 I would term him a 'policy-subversive' critic, actively arguing for a minimally compliant enactment in the department, carrying considerable influence given the roles adopted by Kathy, and so far more influential than Dan in his 'policy-resistant' role.

On her part, Kathy's roles morphed from that of a transactor and enthusiast at the start of the new GCSE, a role apparently supported by an enthusiastic department, to that of a survivor 18 months later. The later role adopted included failing to resist Norman's emerging arguments for minimal compliance – there was little remaining leadership or even individual drive for principled enactment evidenced even though interviews showed her still actively espousing the intentions of the new GCSE.

By that time, every other teacher in the department also showed aspects of a predominantly 'survivor' approach in interviews and both informal and formal observations, and this continued for the rest of the study. Policy-supportive aspects of activity harnessed at Greenways, such as in-depth pedagogy-focused talk, and constructive critique of both details of the scheme of work and of emerging classroom enactments, were marginalised at High Wood. Teachers increasingly interacted on purely organisational matters, retreating to their classrooms when possible, as if besieged – as indeed their talk showed them to feel. Their perception in interviews was that there was neither time nor energy to develop a more principled enactment, at least at that time.

Further, roles adopted in both departments spilt over into the classroom, with student feedback at Greenways often commenting on active, fun, can-do enactment in a positive spiral that increased confidence of both teachers and students, whereas at High Wood the student response was much more equivocal, recognizing maths qualifications as valuable to their future choices but lukewarm about lessons. Each of these reactions was consistent with the prevailing ethos observed in lessons. There was therefore a clear contrast between the profiles of roles adopted.

Ball et al.'s (2011b) typology does not suggest that a given teacher adopts any given role exclusively, or across the range of their professional functioning. In their study, as here, most teachers adopted a predominant role or sometimes, pair of roles, in relation to their enactment of this policy at any one time. Teacher policy discourse, though, was usually aligned with their current classroom enactment: the obvious exception was Dan.

Interplay of adopted roles

This study would suggest, for the case where teachers claim espousal of the principles underlying a policy, a distinction between 'critics' who are policy-constructive (as most Greenways teachers became), policy-resistant (as Dan was, and most High Wood teachers became) and actively policy-subversive (as Norman became). Of these, it is the 'policy-subversive' critic who best aligns with Ball et al.'s (2012) typology. Other critics bring something very different to policy enactment. For example, the Greenways policy-constructive

critics used that role to develop shared understandings and ‘ownership’ of the changes they were attempting, and these appeared from observations to build resilience as well as redundancy of role capacity. The study further begins to expose the inter-dependence of the roles adopted across a department and some relationships of those with the dominant discourse. For example in High Wood’s case, the emergence of policy-neutral ‘survivors’ appeared to allow the prevalence of Norman’s policy-subversive critique, and the emergence of a minimal-enactment discourse. As shown above, this did not manifest itself as outright opposition for all time, but in the timescale of the policy (a replacement GCSE was introduced within five years) it effectively was.

Taken individually and collectively, roles adopted were observed to both mediate, and frame the possibilities for, enactment. For example, as a variety of Greenways teachers adopted a range of narrator/translator/enthusiast roles over time, they appeared to grow in commitment to the underlying ideas being discussed such as student choice of approach to problem, and thence to enhance appetite for risk-taking:

I never used to be confident to allow them that time, that they really need to get under the skin of a problem, in case they went off-piste, but we decided that’s how it ought to be and it’s paid dividends in spades, it really has. (Cathy, Interview 4)

Similarly, when High Wood teachers began to adopt ‘survivor’ roles so there were fewer and fewer in the department committed to attempting a principled enactment at least at that time, they seemed to perceive fewer possibilities, so that Heather moved from ‘I think it’s really exciting: hard, but we’ve started and can do it and we’ll enjoy working on it – it’s very good for us’ in Interview 1, to ‘it would be nice, but it’s not necessary and it’s just too ambitious and time-consuming for what we have available in reality’ in Interview 4.

High Wood enactment appeared undermined by a range of external factors leading to negative or neutral adaptation of some policy roles, as for example Norman adopted a policy-subversive narrator role. Most of these threats applied to both departments, but seemed to have had more impact at High Wood: for example, the fairly limited availability of course-specific supporting materials. High Wood teachers, and Dan, talked about these as ‘insufficient’ whereas other Greenways teachers described how they wrote or adapted their own, and how both developmental and affirming that was:

Sometimes we haven’t got just what we need to make a unit work, so we develop our own, which means we can make it fit our students – and actually it helps us clarify what we want out of the unit too. Then we know the materials really well and we’re committed to them and we own them – that’s a good place to be. (Nigel, Interview 3)

In activity-theoretic terms, their *perceptions* of these ‘tools’ differed. Other apparently limiting factors, such as Kathy’s domestic issues, or a poor set of exam results, while unfortunate, were not exceptional as facets of school life: it would appear that principled enactment, even of a policy consistent with teacher beliefs, can be fragile.

In this study, groups of teachers who worked closely together came to adopt a de facto dominant response to it, although roles within that both varied and changed. Within that dominant response observations showed variations of enactment were tolerated. Increasingly, it made sense to conceptualise the department at Greenways as ‘narrating’ the policy, and that at High Wood as ‘surviving’ the policy.

Departments as policy actors

As shown, both theoretical lenses used naturally accommodate a group as well as an individual application, as appropriate to a study at two levels. The lenses are not always consistent, activity theory being more top-down and deterministic in nature, but at different times in the study each seemed a better fit for what was being observed. By using both, complementary lenses on enactment were achieved. For example, activity theory privileges the role of 'tools'. High Wood's talk initially benefited from a greater resource of knowledge and experience, but other tools such as planning opportunities and curriculum resources appeared comparable across the two departments. Over time, though, *perceptions* of these 'tools' diverged: High Wood interviews showed teachers there came to believe that they had insufficient time or curriculum-supportive resources to realistically achieve a principled enactment. In parallel, as above, Greenways' tools for reflection, including their professional talk, expanded, building on the use of a different perception and appropriation of those time and curriculum resource tools.

Meanwhile, a complexity lens exposed the importance of an 'internal diversity and redundancy' of roles and other characteristics such as shared language and task development, as departments experienced stresses. At Greenways, this allowed flexibility of responsibility that supported continued focus on the goal and in complexity terms, supported (distributed) leadership in 'seeding' a variety of attractors such as the observed rich curriculum-focused task developments and solution-focused conversations. These appeared to catalyse continued adaptation. At High Wood, the apparent lack of redundancy of leadership, of close neighbour interactions and of flexibility of role, would be understood in complexity terms to undermine possibilities of expansive learning. Their apparently more deterministic enactment, as modelled in activity theory terms, suffered an absence of sustained destabilisation so that practice largely reverted to the status quo. The two theoretic approaches therefore offer complementary understandings of the range of enactments achieved.

But what does it mean to describe groups of people in ways which are usually adopted for individuals? In common with Davis and Sumara (2008), I choose to apply a 'department' adjective when predominant or prevailing characteristics exhibited are those shown by an individual who would be described in that way. For example, we describe an individual as being 'motivated' when (s)he evidences prioritisation and persistence in working towards a goal (and we take that to indicate a goal-orientated psychological drive). If that prioritisation and persistence predominate within a group, I call the group 'motivated'.

This use is consistent with a complexity understanding of learning as adaptation, that is, the behaviour consequent on psychological change (Davis & Sumara, 2008): a characteristic is inferred from related actions. In this study, it appeared that if most individual teachers in the group individually exhibited a goal-related characteristic, then talk, decisions and actions at the department level often aligned with that, at least over time, at Greenways to support a resilient principled enactment and at High Wood to allow a reversion to previous practice and approaches. Hodgen (2011) suggests that the effective 'learning' could then be greater than that of the sum of individuals', as one might expect with a complexity understanding. Such group characteristics were evidenced in observation of department actions, talk and documentation, underlining the centrality of the methodological decisions made.

I similarly attribute a ‘policy actor’ role to a department if the net effect is that there is a prevailing policy engagement of a particular sort. Hence, Greenways as a department acted as a narrator/translator/enthusiast in relation to the policy, in many ways appearing to engage with it as an ‘autonomous’ change. High Wood, on the other hand, over time adopted a largely ‘survivor’ role in relation to the GCSE, apparently catalysed by Norman’s policy-subversive critique and alternative (policy-subversive) narration.

With an activity-theoretic lens, Engeström (2005) develops the learning of systems. In more apparently deterministic aspects of the enactment, I conceptualised both groups of teachers and individual teachers as (interacting) systems drawing on a range of mediating tools, such as department talk, policy-related documents, teacher knowledge, used by the subject (teacher or group of teachers) to achieve the object – here a new scheme of work, reifying the teacher learning, and within rules that included teacher beliefs as well as pedagogical norms. This system interacts with the classroom system via the scheme of work as a common ‘boundary object’, and learning arises from destabilisation which causes tensions between elements, for example, between current pedagogical norms or teacher beliefs and policy documents. In High Wood’s case such destabilisation was temporary, with a reversion to equilibrium through minimal interpretation of policy documents and privileging of teacher beliefs consistent with that minimal compliance. This appeared to result at least in part from the range of tools and rules they perceived to be available, from a perceived lack of time, energy and resources and from system ‘rules’ which they believed privileged results over principled enactment.

If all or almost all teachers in a department respond to policy in a similar way it makes sense to apply that description to ‘the department’. Here, there were a variety of policy-supportive initial responses, though over time almost all teachers at High Wood adopted roles as ‘survivors’, with Norman becoming an active policy-subversive critic/narrator. At Greenways, though, barring Dan, the roles adopted both inside and outside the classroom at any one time continued flexible and were observed to complement one another to support maintenance and development of a principled approach to enactment. Within the classroom, there was some variety across teachers in each department, with Greenways teachers adopting different profiles of narration/translation/enthusiasm/entrepreneur of the policy as embodied in the emergent scheme of work, and then almost all teachers using their classroom experience to feed proactively into the next iteration of department-level documentation through both formal and informal interactions. There was recognition, too, of the role the related reflective skills can play in development of teacher expertise:

I’ve become much more aware of the subtleties of their algebraic understanding – or not! – in part I think because this sort of work exposes it so much more – they’re not just following a procedure, they’re having to be so much proactive in selecting not only tools but models and approaches ... I’m doing so much more listening to their thinking ... so I learn much more not only about their understanding but their skills for learning – their metacognition, and their resilience for learning, and all those supporting characteristics. So yes, it’s very exciting professionally: in this game you don’t stand still do you – you either move forward or you wither. (Gillian, Greenways, Interview 4)

At High Wood, though, proactive pro-policy roles became muted in favour of more passive discourse and actions aligned with creative compliance, suggesting the department as a whole be understood as a ‘survivor’.

Discussion of typology

This paper suggests a validation, expansion and refinement of aspects of Ball et al.'s (2011b) policy actor typology, in a case where teachers claimed an initial commitment to the principles underlying the policy. Narrators, translators, enthusiasts, entrepreneurs and transactors were each observed acting in ways consistent with those described in Ball et al. (2012), and the researcher in many ways acted as an 'outsider' in their terms. No 'receivers' were evident in these departments, which is unsurprising given there were no new teachers in the two departments and those least experienced were highly committed to principled policy enactment. The study distinguishes between three different types of 'critic', one of whose roles is very constructive and draws on reflection/learning dispositions:

It's about being prepared in a depth you didn't need before ... you have to put in a lot of time to prepare the task in depth ... you have to anticipate where they're going to get completely stumped and be prepared to support them in finding a way through it, or at least some signposts or some readiness-to-pick-up, so they do sometimes get a slightly artificial or slightly structured experience ... We're looking for depth and robustness ... not for people who will leave here and not want, or be able, to do maths again. (Gillian, Greenways, Interview 5)

The study also suggests introduction of the term 'survivor'. This is not an isolated instance of the described role: the English school inspection body, Ofsted (2012), show that in relation to demanding change aligned with that envisaged here, many mathematics teachers are to a greater or lesser extent, 'survivors'. Further analysis of policy enactment is needed to identify ways in which teacher characteristics might indirectly frame the possibilities for enactment via the roles adopted.

For this policy, designed to target a range of widely valued objectives, roles matter because of their implications for the classroom, as well as for repercussions on teacher job satisfaction. At the end of the study, Greenways teachers reported themselves 'energised' and 'grown' by the process of policy enactment, whereas High Wood teachers appeared drained and lacking in agency. Teacher beliefs about 'good practice' are relatively stable over time (McLeod, 1992) – often more so than the policy priorities exhibited by politicians. In this case, then, principled enactment, enacted via necessary policy proactive roles, is a matter of equity: this is a desirable policy in a state education system, so all young people should have access to it. The Greenways enactment evidenced a significant growth in a range of skills and knowledge for more informed, nuanced and challenging teaching, and with it, growth in job satisfaction:

Do you know, I think we've grown so much while we've been doing this: ... I never stop learning about this job, but the discussions we've had, and the disagreements we continue to have, they all feed into a really challenging and rewarding place to be, even if it is also exhausting. (Carol, Interview 4)

In contrast, High Wood experiences show that such capacity can very easily be dissipated by apparently small changes in policy context – the potential can appear no longer available, and is a fragile and complex construct. Further, teachers can then, as at High Wood, experience an espoused goal which they later abandon, and which can then deplete satisfaction: 'It's all feeling a bit negative really, as if we want to do something but *can't* given the competing priorities' (Kathy, interview 5).

How do teachers come to take up this variety of roles? Ball et al. (2012) show that some active policy roles support career progression, and it is certainly true that the roles the Greenways' Head of Department adopted were perceived within the school to enhance both his individual, and department, status. Further, mathematics departments in English schools are in a position of power, able to negotiate access to a variety of resources and support, because of the high status of their most valued 'output' – GCSE results – as shown in Perryman et al. (2011) and reflected in the position of both departments here. Greenways as a department was supported in a role of policy entrepreneur – provided headline results did not suffer – and that appeared to boost their confidence to engage actively with the policy. Their enactment suggests that the strength of the professional learning community (Hord, 1997), combined with redundancy and diversity (Davis & Simmt, 2003) of policy-supportive roles, can lead to resilience and stability in development of principled enactment, and here, to consequential growth of department potential as greater knowledge and positive affect emerge through 'adaptation' in the complexity sense. As student engagement and formal assessments began to emerge, they were affirmed in the (individual and departmental) roles they had embarked on. High Wood was similarly devolved considerable autonomy in enactment subject to maintenance of acceptable results, and first headline attainment figures with the new GCSE were comparable with those expected, so confirming the department in their different, minimal change enactment. Their pathway suggests that in a busy and pressured professional life, teachers will only adopt apparently optional change if they perceive that it is both achievable and worth the necessary effort.

If policy is highly valued, what are the implications for policy-related actions by those at a higher level – school management teams, but also local or national policy actors? Responsibility for policy enactment is delegated to a greater or lesser extent. Further, policy roles do not exist in isolation, but draw on a range of necessary knowledge and skills, as evidenced by these two departments when they developed similarly demanding change for younger students. Those need developing where they are scarce. High Wood's initial intentions, though, appeared at least diluted by a combination of factors which although also applying to Greenways, lie in the domain of national responsibility, namely provision of insufficient supporting materials and limited validity of examinations purporting to assess a curriculum. The former is challenging, since this study showed the limited availability of bespoke materials. While this served to undermine High Wood's intentions, it appeared to enhance commitment to the intended change at Greenways through teacher investment in developing their own materials: one policy decision might not fit all. In an environment of performativity, though, assessment materials should be perceived to reflect curriculum intentions if they are not to undermine desirable but challenging change.

Conclusion

These two departments were atypical in that both appeared well placed to enact policy in a principled way, including enjoying a high degree of delegated autonomy to do so. They were, however, typical of English secondary departments in experiencing a range of policy demands in rapid and sustained succession. Curriculum policy enactments in the two schools validate and support the expansion of Ball et al.'s (2011b) policy actor typology

in this context, to include at least a variety of (more or less constructive) critics, as well as a 'survivor' role which appears to have a significant dampening effect on the potential for principled enactment of policy. They further support the notion of departments coming to exhibit some level of common response amongst members – a sort of 'department policy enactment'. Other less well-placed departments, or other initial positions in relation to policy, might offer further expansion of the typology. A redundancy and diversity (Davis & Simmt, 2003) of policy-supportive roles across a department appears necessary to support resilient-sustained change. If principled enactment of policy is widely valued, the necessary teacher characteristics should be further identified and then nurtured by policy actors at all levels.

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