This is the author version of the paper published as:

Author: I. Hardy  
Author Address: ihardy@csu.edu.au  
Title: The impact of policy upon practice: An Australian study of teachers' professional development  
Year: 2008  
Journal: Teacher Development  
Volume: 12  
Issue: 2  
Pages: pp.103-113  
Date: May  
Publisher: Taylor & Francis  
ISSN: 1366-4530  
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664530802038089  
Keywords: teacher professional development  
case study  
policy  
Bourdieu  
fields  
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CSU ID: CSU310900
Teacher professional development as contested:
An Australian case study of policy in practice

Abstract: This paper presents a case study of the sociological effects of two Australian educational policies – one federal and one state – upon the professional development practices supported by a group of teachers and administrators working together across a cluster of six schools in a rural community in south-east Queensland, Australia. The paper draws upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘fields’, and recent extensions of this theory, to show how policy tensions between managerial and democratic approaches to professional development played out in practice. Data sources included transcripts of monthly meetings, interviews, and observations of the group and the activities they organised within the cluster. The data show that policy pressures to engage rapidly in a complex reform agenda ultimately militated against policy support for more context-specific, long-term, inquiry-based, collaborative professional development practices. Understanding how policy tensions influence practice is necessary for the design and implementation of more effective policy interventions.

Keywords: Teacher professional development, case study, policy, Bourdieu, fields.
Introduction

This article explores the effects of state and federal Australian educational policies upon the professional development practices which transpired within a cluster of six schools in a rural community in south-east Queensland, Australia. The paper focuses particularly upon how tensions at the policy level between managerial and democratic approaches to professional development played out in practice, during a period of educational reform. In this way, the paper foregrounds issues of power within policy-practice relations.

To investigate the hierarchical nature of these power relations within policies, and how these affected practice, the study draws upon the theoretical resources of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and recent extensions of his work. For Bourdieu (1990; 1998), the social world consists of separate social spaces or ‘fields’, each of which is a site and product of contest over the practices of most worth. More recent theorising reveals how fields influence one another (Lingard and Rawolle, 2004; Marliere, 1998; Maton, 2005; Naidoo, 2004). Collectively, these theoretical resources are employed to explore the contested nature of specific policies, and how this contestation at the policy level influenced practice.

The principal policies relevant to this study are an influential federal Australian government policy, the Quality Teacher Programme (QTP), and a state-based policy, Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE2010). The QTP was designed to foster ongoing, workplace-based teacher professional development within and across public, independent and Catholic schools throughout Australia. At the same time, QSE2010
advocated pedagogical, curriculum and assessment reform in Queensland public schools, with such reform being sustained by improved, systematic teacher learning. Importantly, both policies advocated much more active, inquiry-based and collaborative modes of professional development which differ from typical, individualistic workshop approaches that dominate in schooling systems in Australia (McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland, & Zbar, 2001). However, both policies were also influenced by strong accountability agenda to ensure resources were expended in particular ways, and that resultant professional development was seen to have a rapid impact upon student learning during a period of change and instability.

The primary focus of the study is the nature of the learning supported and enacted by a group of teachers and administrators working within this policy milieu. Because many of the reforms within the cluster were curriculum-related, this group became known as the ‘Curriculum Board’. The four primary schools, one secondary school and environmental education centre from which members were drawn were described collectively as the ‘Future Schools Cluster’.

**Methods & methodology**

To explore this specific instance of policy in practice, the research is presented as a qualitative case study. The research involves a detailed case study of a particular organisational unit, the ‘Curriculum Board’, and how the work of the Board influenced the professional development which occurred within the ‘Future Schools Cluster’. It is this interest in a ‘singular case’ which delineates the boundaries of the study (Stake, 2005). The findings were generated using an emergent thematic
analysis, which involved searching for patterns within the data (Shank, 2002). This was an iterative process which involved initial interpretation and subsequent reinterpretation on the part of the researcher, in light of participants’ responses to earlier analyses.

While the advantage of such an approach is that it yields a rich resource of data on a particular case, as Hough (2002) outlines, by its very nature, it is also limited because of the particularity of any given case. This means the findings of such studies cannot be easily generalised beyond the specific case. Nor are they necessarily replicable, or transferable, to other settings. However, as Bourdieu (1998) claims, it is only by studying specific social practices in detail that it becomes possible to make informed analyses of social practices at all. It is this process of engaging in detailed research which may be replicated to better understand social practices in other contexts.

In keeping with case study research in general (Hough, 2002; Stake, 2005), a rich data set was generated using several data collection methods. Data included twelve one-to-two hour transcripts of meetings of the Curriculum Board, which were collected over an eighteen-month period. Observation notes were taken during Board meetings, and during five professional development events undertaken as a result of these meetings. These professional development events ranged in duration from two hours to two days. Observation notes were also taken during two, day-long visits by an external, university-based ‘critical friend’ commissioned to provide an additional perspective on the work of the Board. Observation notes focused on the nature of the meetings/events which occurred, and the interactions of those involved. In this way,
efforts were made to draw upon detailed and multiple sources to address concerns about objectivity associated with case study research (Hough, 2002; Stake, 2005).

At the end of the data collection phase, ten semi-structured, hour-long interviews were also undertaken with individual Board members and key administrators involved in the development of the Future Schools Cluster. Interview questions related to how the Board came about, the nature of its work, the relationships between Board members and other teachers in the Cluster, and how the QTP and QSE2010 explicitly influenced the professional development which transpired in the Cluster. These interviews were used to triangulate, verify and clarify earlier findings from the Board meetings and professional development events. After Warren (2002), the interviews were also seen as an opportunity for participants to engage in a process of ‘making meaning’ about their experiences. The inclusion of participants’ voices also sought to address imbalances within the research relationship between a group of teachers and a university-based researcher, engaged in a three year, federally funded doctoral project, which was also endorsed by the Queensland state government. To help alleviate teachers’ concerns about the intensity of interest in the Board, and as part of the ethical standards guiding the research, participants were provided with ongoing formal and informal feedback about their work, and were invited to respond to analyses of the data throughout the project.

**Tools of analysis: A Bourdieuan approach**

To make sense of the hierarchical nature of the power relations inherent within teachers and administrators’ responses to a particular policy ensemble, the paper
draws upon the theorising of the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and recent extensions of his work. For Bourdieu, all social practices are inextricably political (Bourdieu, 1998). However, power does not permeate society randomly, discursively or rhizomatically, but is instead hierarchical in nature. That is, power is concentrated into particular domains, or what Bourdieu (1998) describes as ‘fields’, in which groups and individuals are more or less dominant in relation to one another. Furthermore, Bourdieu makes some tentative claims about how fields are more or less dominant in relation to other fields (depending upon specific circumstances) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and also argues that all fields are dominated by a broader ‘field of power’ (Bourdieu, 1998). This process of domination is made possible by the particular characteristics, features, or ‘capitals’, which are possessed by the individuals and groups who constitute any given field. The most influential capitals are those associated with the power of the state (Bourdieu, 1998). Capitals are responsible for generating individual or group ‘habitus’, which are collective sets of identifiable traits or dispositions and proclivities to act in particular ways (Bourdieu, 1998). As a result of the contestation between different groups and individuals over the capitals considered of most value, fields come to develop their own peculiar characteristics or ‘logic’ (Bourdieu, 1990) – their own logics of practice.

In this study, educational policy is recognised as a social field, dominated by a broader field of power (Bourdieu, 1998), and which has its own particular characteristics that distinguish it from other fields, including the field of practice. In support of such an approach, Ladwig (1994) construes educational policy as operating quite separately from what occurs in practice in schools and school systems.
However, more recent theorists have contested Bourdieu’s theory of fields, arguing that inadequate attention is given to how fields exert influence upon one another (Lingard and Rawolle, 2004; Marliere, 1998; Maton, 2005; Naidoo, 2004). To this end, Lingard and Rawolle (2004) showed how science policy was influenced by the logics of practice of the media field, while Maton (2005) revealed how higher education policy was influenced by managerial and marketisation principles associated with the broader field of power. Naidoo (2004) revealed how admissions policies in higher education in South Africa had significant and material effects upon the nature of the student body which was able to access different universities within the field of higher education in that country. This paper takes up the nascent theorising of these researchers to explore how the policy field exerts influence upon professional development practices in the context of educational reform in Queensland, Australia.

**Contextualising professional development**

In western countries, including Australia, Day and Sachs (2004) argue that professional development policies and practices have been influenced by competing ‘managerial’ and ‘democratic’ discourses. Managerial discourses emphasise the needs of large educational bureaucracies, involve substantial regulation of teachers’ work, are often influenced by neoliberal, marketised and competitive models, and serve to deprofessionalise teachers by fostering dependency upon systemic requirements. In contrast, more democratic conceptions of professional development involve teachers working collaboratively both with colleagues in schools and beyond schools (such as other teachers, university researchers, bureaucrats, parents and other
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educational stakeholders) to effect ongoing learning which is meaningful in local contexts.

More managerial, neoliberal and economistic influences are reflected at the level of practice in the intensification of teachers’ work (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Smyth, 2001), the tendency to cram teacher learning into the ‘crowded interstices’ of teachers’ daily work (Little, 1999), and the continuation of one-off workshop approaches to rapidly transmit information about state-endorsed initiatives. Such pressures perpetuate the ‘individualism’, ‘conservatism,’ and ‘presentism’ associated with teaching (Lortie, 1975).

More democratic approaches are characterised by support for collaborative, ongoing, site-based and student-centred learning by teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Ball & Cohen, 1999). This is evident in advocacy for ‘teacher professional learning communities’ (Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2003), and teacher networks, such as the Teachers Network Leadership Institute in the U.S. (Rust & Meyers, 2006).

However, support for these collaborative practices may also be problematic. Depending upon the broader circumstances in which they arise, collaborative arrangements and networks may also be contrived (Hargreaves, 2003), difficult to establish (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001), and reinforce entrenched prejudices against already marginalised students (Lipman, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Networks are also unlikely to succeed without teacher input into the goals of such groups (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992).
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The federal policy: The *Quality Teacher Programme*

Within this broader context, the principal federal policy which sought to influence the professional development practices of teachers in the Future Schools Cluster was the *Commonwealth Government Quality Teacher Programme* (QTP). This policy reflected some of the tensions between managerial approaches and more progressive and democratic approaches to professional development.

On the one hand, the policy encouraged long-term, context-specific and focused inquiries into student learning, and encouraged teachers to take students’ contexts into account (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). However, there were also rigid restrictions upon how QTP funds could be used. For example, only 15% of funds available through the scheme could be used to release teachers from their classes to meet during school time (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). The QTP policy also emphasised the need to collect quantifiable data as evidence of the effects of the fund.

The state policy: *QSE 2010*

The second policy which affected teachers in the cluster was the state-based *Queensland State Education 2010* (QSE2010). Like the QTP, QSE2010 was influenced by conflicting approaches to professional development.

The policy advocated collaborative, site-based learning. It also emphasised teacher learning associated with extensive curriculum, pedagogical and assessment reform.
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(Education Queensland, 2001). In particular, the policy promoted the principles of a project-based approach to curriculum known as the ‘New Basics’. This was seen as a way for schools to reconsider the nature of the curricula experiences they promoted. QSE2010 also supported professional development for pedagogical and assessment reform. This included promoting a list of twenty ‘Productive Pedagogies’, or elements of good practice, derived from a large scale study of the quality of teaching practices in Queensland, known as the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS). Endorsement of these initiatives was designed to foster in-depth conversations amongst teachers about teaching and assessment practices.

However, advocacy of the principles undergirding the New Basics was more symbolic than material. While it was being formally trialled in a very small number of schools, including the secondary school mentioned in this study, teachers in other schools were simply encouraged to consider how it could serve as a vehicle to renew curriculum development within schools. There was no systemic support for this, only general rhetoric in favour of the New Basics approach.

Furthermore, the bureaucratic arm of the state, Education Queensland, was pressuring schools to quickly learn about the Productive Pedagogies. This was in the context of QSRLS findings which revealed low quality teaching in Queensland public schools - particularly in the middle years. There were also concerns about student results on state-wide ‘Basics Skills’ literacy and numeracy tests.

These reforms were being advocated at a time when public schools were losing market share to private schools, and there was increased media attention on the
quality of public education in general. Both the New Basics and Productive Pedagogies were seen as a way to respond to these market and accountability-oriented pressures. As the overarching policy advocating these reforms, the QSE2010 was complicit in promoting these more managerial practices.

The Future Schools Cluster

This paper therefore focuses upon how the tensions within these policies, and the broader contexts in which they arose, influenced the activities of the teachers and administrators within a particular group of schools located in a rural community in south-east Queensland. Known as the ‘Future Schools Cluster’, the group comprised four primary schools – ‘Cresswell Primary’, ‘Merton Primary’, ‘Laramie Primary’, ‘Qando Primary’ – one secondary school, ‘Cresswell High’, and an environmental education centre. Of particular interest was the work of a group of representative teachers from each of these schools, the ‘Curriculum Board’, who facilitated teacher learning for educational reform within the Cluster.

Findings: teacher learning in the Future Schools Cluster

Three broad themes were identified as emerging from the data, and have been used to organise the findings. The themes relate to the initial push and support for reform-oriented collaborative learning within the Curriculum Board and Future Schools Cluster, the difficulties of sustaining such learning, and the dominance of traditional workshop approaches within the Cluster.
The push for collaborative teacher learning for educational reform

From the outset, principals felt the pressure to respond to the various reforms supported by the state:

At the time, we felt that … there were certain agendas that were coming forward from Education Queensland or from district office … (Mike, principal, Merton Primary).

These agenda related to curriculum, pedagogical and assessment reform, particularly across the middle years. In this context, principals promoted the development of the Future Schools Cluster as a mechanism for the development of a cross-school ‘seamless curriculum’ across the upper primary and lower secondary schools:

From my perspective, [the Future Schools Cluster] was started off to provide the linkages between the various schools in the Cluster and to focus on developing a seamless curriculum between the primary schools feeding into the high school (Andy, principal, Cresswell High).

Principals were also under pressure to improve academic results in light of the findings of the QSRLS and standardised, state-wide ‘Basic Skills’ tests:

And it was again, I suppose, Education Queensland’s influence in that … they were the ones pushing the, ‘Are your marks up to scratch? Are you doing this, that and the other?’ And no matter what we think of their testing and all the rest of it – I must say I’m very much against it – but still it … they were producing things, producing results and all those other sorts of things that said, ‘You should concentrate on this area…’ (Mike, principal, Merton Primary).
As a result of these collective pressures, the principals encouraged selected teachers from each of their schools to meet together to promote teacher learning across the cluster. This group became known as the “Curriculum Board”. The principals then made a successful bid to secure QTP funds (AU$27,000) to assist Board members in establishing a collaborative middle-years network to respond to pressure for improved educational practices across the middle years.

Even though the concept of the Board was initially imposed upon them, those teachers who became members saw their involvement as potentially beneficial:

I was given the option to say if I didn’t think it was worthwhile that I didn’t have to belong to [the Board] any longer but I thought it was important (Hilary, environmental education centre Board member).

As the Board steadily evolved, members felt they were taking on responsibility for the educational reform agenda of their own volition:

I know the Board – much less so now than at the start – it was always, the fact that I think we thought that the principals had more power or more say and that they would veto any decisions, some decisions we made, or maybe that we would look to them for guidance, or that it seemed to be that we were in opposition. But I think it’s evolved now - the fact that we both have got the same agenda. They have a few more guidelines, a few more requirements, placed upon them by the district office than we do (Kim, Cresswell Primary Board member).

Consequently, there was hope amongst Board members that their work would be beneficial for teachers within the Cluster.
The difficulty of fostering long-term sustainable learning

However, as their work began to unfold, some Board members became concerned about the complexity of the reform agenda:

It was initiated from, I guess, as I said, the high school because they were very interested in the New Basics program. But we already had coming on board the [new KLA syllabi] outcomes so it all came about at the same time. So, we are sort of being battered with coming to terms or coming to grips with the [KLA] outcomes and then New Basics came on board ... it’s important that our kids aren’t disadvantaged, so we had to really look at this and try and do the best we could (Cilla, Cresswell Primary Board member).

Even the task of Board members meeting together for the first time took a long time:

… that would have been sort of five, six months after we’d actually got going, and it was at that time then we really started looking at what we actually did in the schools, what the similarities were and … where we needed to, I suppose, to collaborate, if you like (Mike).

It was also apparent that within the Future Schools Cluster, teachers were reticent to become involved in a cross-school teacher learning initiative:

Cresswell Primary and Merton Primary were the ones that appeared to me … they were sitting … in our case, definitely sitting on the fence … not going there. Qando Primary were hedging for some time too (Barb, Merton Primary Board member).
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… I mean, like all schools, there’s a few teachers who just want to do their own thing and this [collaborating with colleagues from other schools] is just another onerous thing, you know, coming from the Department (Cilla, Laramie Primary Board member).

For these teachers, the network was seen as an imposition.

The dominance of traditional workshops

Eventually, there was also a tendency amongst Board members to treat teacher learning as something which could be divided into discrete activities, and which was responsive to departmental requirements:

I think that assessment is the next step. It’s the next way and it comes around and that’s in line with what the Department is sort of expecting and is doing, so that’s the next … stage that has to come around as well. And possibly, teachers would be able … would be looking at that as the next little bit (Kim, Cresswell Primary Board member).

This emphasis upon disjointed activities was exacerbated by restrictions on the QTP funds, which were perceived to limit more collaborative practices:

I think if we, within the Board, if we could have used the QTP money more for TRS [teacher release] and to get our teachers together in school time, we could’ve made more use of it for our purposes (Lisa, chair of Board and Cresswell high teacher).

Board members also attempted to develop multiple networks beyond the middle years, in an attempt to engage all teachers across the school sites with the reforms affecting them:
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So we had an afternoon that involved Year Seven staff and we targeted our learning coaches here at Cresswell High [teachers in Years 8 and 9] and had them meet to share across the Cluster the work that they’ve been doing in classrooms… And then we said, ‘Well, we’ve done the 7 to 9s [teachers in Years 7, 8 and 9], so the next time we meet, let’s look at the 4 to 6s [teachers in Years 4 to 6] or let’s look at P to 3 [teachers in Preparatory to Year 3].’ So we had a student-free day later in the year when we had those different groups meet at different times of the day (Lisa).

Within such events, delivery by external ‘experts’ featured prominently:

Well, I think if we can have like Todd Smith\(^1\) doing his ‘Community of Inquiry’, he can do that in two hours…

[The] plan for student free days: So we’ll have Di Monk\(^2\) for [Years] 4 to 6 and [Years] 7 to 9 and we’ll have June\(^3\), and we’ll worry about our other high school … (Lisa, as chair, during Curriculum Board meeting, 28 Aug., 2002).

There was some evidence that members of the Board would continue to promote such decontextualised, one-off days in the future:

We now have a reputation that has developed for providing professional development for staff and so on, so I think that can just continue on through normal school funding… (Terry, curriculum co-ordinator, Cresswell High).

This tendency to favour short-term approaches to teacher learning was evident even when teachers recognised the short-comings of these activities.

\(^1\) External academic consultant from Sydney
\(^2\) Local independent, external consultant
\(^3\) Education Queensland consultant from regional office
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I think we probably … would have liked … to have developed the use of Productive Pedagogies more in a contextual sort of [way] with teachers from their [individual school], fitting in how they would …[fit] the Productive Pedagogies in with what you’re teaching, with your planning and your assessment, rather than what seems to have been done … There’s a bit of an isolation thing now. But unless you can have … and I really think you need probably close to a good half day and morning tea, or maybe a day-per-term meeting, with teachers [to ask], ‘How are you going with your planning and assessment?’ (Kim).

Finally, there was considerable concern about how to engage teachers in professional development activities in general when teachers were struggling with the reforms influencing their work:

They’re jaded about all the changes. So we’ve got to step very carefully … (Cilla).

As a result, members of the Board struggled to sustain the momentum to continue with their work.

Policy in Practice: the Future Schools Cluster as a site of contestation

The nature of the learning which occurred within the Future Schools Cluster, and which arose as a result of the efforts of the Curriculum Board, reveals that policy does influence teachers’ professional development practices. That is, the ‘policy field’ has an impact upon the ‘field of practice’. However, this influence was neither predictable, nor, in many instances, desired. Rather, the capitals which were valued and the logics of practice which dominated reflected more managerial emphases within QTP and QSE2010 policies, and the broader policy contexts within which they were developed. As a result, more internal, intrinsic emphases which were oriented to
the improvement of educational practices for their own sake, and which were more attuned to teachers and students’ contextual needs, tended to be marginalised.

The way in which principals responded to ‘certain agendas’ (Mike, principal Merton Primary) emanating from the state revealed the influence of more managerial pressures within QSE2010 upon the activities of those in schools. While the principals had reservations about the culture of testing, they still saw the establishment of the Board as a way to respond to such pressures. This was the most obvious example of how more managerial logics of practice affected the principals. Professional development became a means of delivering on departmental requirements (Day & Sachs, 2004). QTP and QSE2010 support for collaboration and more active engagement on the part of teachers was appropriated by the principals in this context of policy pressure for reform, and to perform. The Board represented a valued capital to the administrators, as they determined how best to respond to these pressures.

However, and at the same time, those logics of practice of the policy field associated with more managerial practices did not totally expunge alternative practices. The way in which teachers construed membership of the Curriculum Board as intrinsically beneficial revealed how more democratic policy logics exerted influence. More progressive pressure for educational reform within the QSE2010 policy, and advocacy for collaborative teacher learning within the QTP policy, were at least partially evident in Board members’ decision to continue to work together after the initial stages of its development. These logics were evident within the teacher habitus of Board members who came to perceive membership of this collaborative body as a
potentially useful capital which could enable them to respond to more intrinsically educational calls for reform.

Nevertheless, as time progressed, there was also evidence of how pressure for reform within the policy field also led to a sense of dismissiveness about the middle years’ network, and of the work of the Curriculum Board in general. In some schools, there was a sense in which the development of the middle-years’ network was simply a response to yet another demand imposed upon teachers by Education Queensland. As a consequence, some teachers simply ignored calls to collaborate with colleagues. Teachers felt they had no input into the goals of the network, which is necessary if networks are to be successful (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992). Such responses were indicative of a habitus dominated by work intensification, and subsequent disengagement and disenchantment resulting from the influence of a plethora of external, managerial policy reforms in recent times (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Smyth, 2001). Those capitals associated with more performative and managerial policy demands, which have contributed to such intensification in general (Day & Sachs, 2004), resulted in inertia within the Cluster. As a result, the capitals which were most valued by teachers were those which were seen to be immediately relevant to their circumstances. Consequently, teacher individualism, conservatism and presentism persisted (Lortie, 1975). Even amongst Board members themselves, the considerable amount of time which elapsed before they even met for the first time reflected the complexity of the policy and practice environment in which the QTP and QSE2010 exerted influence.
Also, QSE2010 policy pressure for teachers to quickly engage with the reform agenda, and restrictions within the QTP on how funds could be used, meant that the capitals which were valued and the norms which became established within the Board as a learning community were those which reinforced traditional individualistic approaches to teacher learning. The strong policy push from Education Queensland to ensure that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment reform were embraced by all teachers as soon as possible resulted in Board members hurriedly organising one-off workshops for teachers from all grades, rather than just focusing their efforts on the middle years’ teachers. The capitals which were valued did not reflect those more collaborative, long-term and inquiry based approaches supported within QSE2010 and QTP policies. Instead, dominant capitals already existing within the field of practice were reinforced. The capitals which dominated reflected the difficulty of translating support for effective, collaborative learning communities in the QSE2010 and QTP policies into practice, and the Board became yet another example of a ‘learning community’ characterised by problematic effects (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001; Lipman, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). The findings validate the work of policy theorists such as Maton (2005) and Naidoo (2004) who argue that more managerial and neoliberal pressures within educational policies have indeed influenced practice.

Support for teacher learning associated with the Productive Pedagogies was emblematic of how contested policy emphases could influence practice. On the one hand, Board members’ support for the Productive Pedagogies revealed the influence of QSE2010 support for genuine pedagogical reform in schools. However, Board members’ advocacy for more traditional workshop approaches as the best way to
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achieve such learning, and to ‘fit in’ with what teachers were already doing, also revealed the simultaneous valuing of those capitals within the policy field which valorised immediate solutions. Under these circumstances, those capitals which already dominate the field of practice, namely one-off workshop approaches to teacher learning (McRae, 2000; Pickering, 2007), were reinforced. Calls for ‘a good half day’ or ‘maybe a day per term meeting’ (Kim) to respond to the Productive Pedagogies revealed how Board members’ habitus was dominated by a sense of having to try to find a rapid solution to more performative policy pressures about educational reform. The result was the continuation of traditional approaches to the provision of teachers’ learning within the field of practice.

Conclusion

A Bourdieuan analysis of policy in practice within the Future Schools Cluster reveals that not only does policy influence practice, but this occurs in unanticipated ways, and that practitioners are heavily influenced by conflicting policy pressures. The findings show that while there was evidence of policy support for the promotion of more authentic, long-term learning, such efforts were difficult to sustain, and dominant managerial policy pressures resulted in a tendency to revert to the promotion of more traditional workshop approaches. In this way, the findings reinforce existing literature which reveals how external managerial pressures at the policy level can inhibit more intrinsically educationally-oriented professional development approaches, and may encourage superficial and reactive responses which already dominate practice. The findings also validate the work of researchers who argue that fields exert influence upon one another (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Maton, 2005), and
that the educational policy field exerts influence upon the field of practice (Naidoo, 2004). While the findings of the study are not replicable nor transferable in terms of more traditional experimental approaches, they do reveal the value of an understanding of the power relations inherent within policy, and how these play out in practice. Such an understanding challenges advocacy for generic and general approaches to professional development which ignore the contexts in which such learning occurs.

References


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