

Curriculum Development
in Higher Education:
Investigating Practice and Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Curricula in higher education is under increasing pressure to contribute to economic and societal enhancement. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 view higher education as not only central to economic and social advancement but also as having a fundamental role in developing learners that have a broad sense of world agency and responsibility. These challenges and obligations are delivered through appropriately designed curricula. Educators are the primary source of curricula development and thus most centrally placed to help deliver on these significant requirements for higher education. Given their central role, the aim of this research was to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this aim were to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development; build capacity among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development; and to irradiate current curriculum development practices. The study was conducted across four higher education institutions in Ireland. Discourse analysis was used as a methodology within a post-structural theoretical framework which facilitated layered analysis and questioning of curriculum development practice and discourse. The discourses used in the analysis included transcripts from in-depth interviews and focus groups with educators involved in curricula development during 2012-14, institutional strategy documents, and validation panel reports. An advisory group was used to offer depth and validity to the analysis and interpretation, and as a capacity building tool. The findings were enlightening. In some cases they echoed concerns revealed in the literature; in addition some unexpected narratives were also uncovered. In any event, the findings contribute to the current curriculum development conversation by offering a framework for curriculum development practice and discourse. I argue if this framework is used as an early discourse and planning tool it can offer transformative potential for curricula. It does so by facilitating the development team scope out the project through questioning and challenging existing curriculum development practices across three key areas – policy for curriculum development at institutional level; practice at development level; and discourse guiding practice.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Overview

In my role as educational developer in a higher education college in Ireland I have been closely involved in curriculum development for over a decade. Curriculum, in my view, has the potential to truly change a learner's life, and thus, the environment they advance into. I am concerned that conversely, it may leave learners unchanged and indifferent about the world they inhabit. This, to my mind, would be a lost opportunity for everyone. The following quote by Popper (1945) resonated with me and caused me to wonder had much changed in seventy years:

Instead of encouraging the student to devote himself to his studies for the sake of studying, instead of encouraging in him a real love for his subject and for enquiry, he is encouraged to study for the sake of his personal career – he is led to acquire only such knowledge as is serviceable in getting him over the hurdles which he must clear for the sake of his advancement....I do not know a better argument for an optimistic view of mankind, no better proof of their indestructible love for truth and decency...than the fact that this devastating style of education has not utterly ruined them.

(Karl Popper, 1945 in Lawton 1984, p.145)

I argue that curriculum is a powerful tool. It can offer transformative potential for learners, educators, the economy and wider society. Educators are privileged to be entrusted with responsibility for the learner's journey while they are with us, the curriculum shapes that journey – and that is the genesis of my research. I work closely with educators, helping them inquire into and reform their pedagogy to create a more engaging learning environment (the subject of my M.Ed thesis), and with them on programme review or design – curriculum development. What never ceases to amaze me is the level of passion and enthusiasm these educators bring to teaching and learning. They inspired this research. This inquiry contributes to curricula conversations through investigating curriculum development practice and discourse in higher education. It addresses a gap in the current space of curriculum development by using discourse analysis as a methodology to help build capacity and stimulate greater curriculum discourse, whilst simultaneously illuminating current practices, thus allowing development of a framework for curriculum development practice and discourse. Curriculum development in higher education has undergone enormous change in recent decades. Some contend curriculum reform has been occurring

simultaneously in Europe, the USA and Australia (Coombs, 1985; Kennedy, 1995) whilst others view one of the greatest paradigm shifts in curriculum development as that driven by the Bologna Process (Ewell, 2004; Kehm, 2010; West, 2010). Nationally, higher education is in a state of flux and change emanating from the combined efforts of European directives through the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and national imperatives driven by the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (Ireland). The changes attend to high level issues of governance and structure and are aligned to national strategy; and with concerns of quality through consistency and transparency driven by the national regulating and governing bodies of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI), reflecting European requirements of the EHEA. The proposed framework for curriculum development practice and discourse which emanates from this research will help stimulate curriculum development discourse and reflection regarding issues of compliancy as directed by the national and European regulating bodies. Additionally it will expand discourse beyond concerns of the state and economy to include educators' philosophical positions and agency in curriculum development. By way of a point of clarification – in the current national and European environment - curriculum development is referred to as programme design. However, the literature in the area is on curriculum development and so this piece of research uses that term to imply all things related to programme design in higher education.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this aim were to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate their philosophical beliefs and influence on curriculum development; irradiate current curriculum development practice; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development.

Following extensive examination of relevant literature (see chapter two), which included the review of curriculum development theories and concepts combined with

analysis of the current context of curriculum development in higher education, the following research questions were developed:

1. What do educators see as the purpose of higher education?
2. What are educators' experiences of curriculum development discourse?
3. Are educators' philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?
4. What contextual factors do educators see influencing the practice of curriculum development?
5. Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?
6. How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?

The objectives of the study are addressed through analysis of data gathered to answer each of these research questions. The questions are deliberately broad to encourage open ended discussion and questioning of participants experience in curriculum development. In addition, two other curricula development discourses related to the four colleges in the study were used as part of the analysis. They were college strategy documents and validation panel reports. This is in keeping with the principles of discourse analysis, as discussed below and in greater detail in chapter three.

Background to the Study

The study was conducted across four providers of higher education, two from the private sector and two from the Institutes of Technology (IOT). Discourse analysis was used as a methodology which allowed for layered analysis of different conversations to illuminate current curriculum development practice and discourse. The discourses used included primary data collected, using the research questions outlined above, through in-depth interviews and focus groups with educators involved in curriculum development between 2012 - 2014. Other discourses included in the analysis - referred to in discourse analysis as 'found documents' - are those that represent institutional input or influence on curriculum development which are institutional strategies; and policy influence through analysis of validation panel reports across all four institutions. Additionally, in an effort to bring greater validity and reliability to the study, and also to help stimulate wider curricula discourse, an advisory group was used to assist with the research. This proved an invaluable support. The advisory group was made up of willing and motivated colleagues who have a keen interest in teaching and learning. The use of an advisory group combined with the

methodology of discourse analysis, I contend, helped contribute to capacity building around curricula development and discourse.

Dissertation Structure and Outline

This chapter presents an overview of and an introduction to the research. It sets out the background to the study which includes the rationale and motivation for this research. Then the research aims, objectives and research questions which guided the study are outlined. This is followed now by the structure and outline of the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter two explores related literature pertaining to curriculum development in order to provide the conceptual and contextual framework for the study. The research questions used to gather data came from this review. Traditionally literature on curriculum focused on compulsory education and so the earlier discussions regarding curriculum as reductionist, divergent, and the role of discipline domains, are dominated by literature relating to first and second level education. Much of the conceptual thinking from this earlier literature influences subsequent discussions relating to higher education, in particular the current outcomes-based model with subject benchmarks. Use of this model results from EHEA directives and regulation (ENQA, 2015). This is explored in greater detail along with other concepts included in curriculum development in higher education, for example, learner-centred curricula and new ideas for curriculum in higher education. The final section in this chapter focuses on curriculum discourse and assumes the ideas presented throughout the chapter by presenting an argument for curriculum discourse to inform curriculum development.

Chapter three presents the research methodology adopted, including the theoretical perspective framing the methodology. Post-structuralism is adopted as a framework because it embraces exploration of curriculum development relative to those who partook in the study, and to the time and context of this inquiry. It shares its philosophical position between constructivist and transformative paradigms. Constructivist because the emphasis is on using discourses, through the methodology of discourse analysis, to deconstruct current curriculum development practices with a

view of challenging and questioning them. Transformative as it invokes notions of questioning current practices with a view to change, thus contributing to a greater sense of agency and empowerment for educators' participating in this research. The use of an advisory group further contributes to this notion. The chapter continues by making explicit the research design and process used for this study. By detailing the research design and process in this manner, in conjunction with disclosing my role as researcher and practitioner, I contend that issues of reliability and validity within a qualitative research environment are clearly attended to, thereby offering assurance to readers that the study is robust and credible. Finally, this chapter provides the rationale for and the approach to analysis of data collected within the theoretical and paradigmatic framework, which positions the subsequent chapter of analysis and interpretation.

The penultimate chapter, chapter four, presents data analysis and interpretation. In keeping with discourse analysis ideology the data includes texts across four different discourses – focus group transcripts, interview transcripts, institutional strategy documents and validation panel reports. NVivo was used for initial categorisation of data into pre-assigned codes based on the research questions. The codes were then used to identify and explore narratives across all codes using dated annotations. These narratives were subsequently grouped into related themes of: curriculum development teams, curriculum development and discourse, educators' philosophical beliefs, industry driven curriculum and the regulatory framework. Interpretation of the data analysed under the first theme - curriculum development teams - showed that there is little consistency regarding the number working on a curriculum development team, nor the manner in which the team is convened. Often team leaders choose to work with educators who are committed and willing, ahead of their discipline background and expertise. Other interesting nuggets within this theme include the value of discord as a stimulant when developing curricula, and the fact that some voices go unheard in the process of developing a curriculum. This is also discussed under the second theme - curriculum development discourse - where the analysis shows there was little evidence of vigorous discourse shaping curricula. This is echoed in the literature discussed in chapter two, with concerns that the absence of such discourse is a lost opportunity for creating transformative curricula. Analysis within the next theme - educators' philosophical beliefs - also relates to issues of discourse, because interpretation of the data demonstrates that there were little or no opportunities afforded to educators to

discuss their philosophical beliefs and the impact of these on developing curricula. Interpretation of the data shows that participants would welcome occasion for such discussion because it pertains to concerns they have regarding diminishing academic freedom to nuance curricula accordingly. Again, this finding echoes with concerns voiced by prominent educators as discussed in the literature review. Analysis of data in the theme of industry driven curriculum development exercised participants more than I expected. They are concerned that curricula risks being developed solely for industry and feel that this may be a lost opportunity. This links to discussion in the earlier theme regarding them having academic freedom to shape curricula that is broader than solely for preparing industry-ready graduates. This concern is also addressed at length in the more recent literature and in relation to higher education, as discussed in chapter two. Finally, analysis under the theme of regulatory framework shows participants are very cognisant of the influence of the regulatory framework on curriculum development and are not averse to it, but see it only as a minimum attainment for curriculum being developed. Furthermore, the analysis highlights that there is a role for academic professional development to support and guide curricula development practice and discourse.

The final chapter, chapter five, summarises the research by offering findings and contributions. As part of the contributions, a framework for curriculum development practice and discourse is proposed. This can be used as an early intervention to trigger and stimulate reflection and discourse that goes beyond curricula designed for industry and the economy and driven by the state. The framework proposes three key areas for curriculum development teams to challenge and question current development practice and discourse. The first level of practice is at institutional policy level and pertains to issues regarding senior management commitment and resourcing, pre-determined decision making mechanisms, team composition and rationale, and procedures for modifying the curriculum. At the second level, the team are encouraged to question and challenge their practice of curriculum development by exploring issues concerning the type of programme being designed in relation to the extent to which it facilitates divergent thinking with profound outcomes that are mutually compatibly driven by societal, economical and learner imperatives; and legislatively compliant. The final level is in relation to mechanisms for stimulating curriculum development team discourse within and across disciplines, where educators' philosophical beliefs are

informing the curriculum with an open and challenging development environment. An unexpected finding that is presented in the discourse level of the framework is the potential for academic professional development opportunities to be used as a tool for curricula reflection and discourse. By using this framework for curricula development practice and discourse, I contend that richer curricula will be developed with transformative potential for our learners, society and the economy.

The findings from this research have already started to impact on my work as educational developer in that I have created a handbook for educators involved in curriculum development and have college Academic and Professional Council approval to include use of the handbook and accompanying workshops as part of all curricula development and review processes going forward. The proposed framework emanating from this study will be included as part of the handbook and workshops. Furthermore, I have been invited to present a paper on this research at an upcoming conference in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 2

Curriculum Development Concepts and Context

Introduction

There have been many definitions and interpretations of curriculum offered over time. One that I argue encapsulates much of the debate in the last century is that proffered by Stenhouse (1975). It contains all the necessary ingredients regarding intent and objective; but goes further by stating that curriculum is the basis of a plan for a programme, and on that basis requires deep engagement and consideration.

A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of translation into practice...at a minimum a curriculum should provide a basis for planning a course, studying it empirically and considering the grounds of its justification.

Stenhouse, 1975, p.4-5

The literature reviewed in this chapter explores curriculum development concepts and context over a number of decades in order to frame the research questions used to respond to the aim of this study which is to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education; and objectives of engaging educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminating their philosophical beliefs and influence on curriculum development; irradiating current curriculum development practices, and contributing to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development. The literature presented in this chapter draws primarily from major curriculum theorists during the last century. The rationale for this is that current curricula practice largely emanates from these seminal pieces of work. The existing model of curriculum development in higher education is outcomes based, aligned to a framework of qualifications which requires learner pathway and progression to be clearly articulated; in conjunction with award standards based on three strands of knowledge, know-how and application, and competence (QQI, 2014). In analysing and synthesising the earlier literature these themes permeate much of the ideas and reflections. It is important to in some way acknowledge these early educational theorists by demonstrating how they continue to influence curriculum development practice in higher education today.

The chapter begins with an exploration of curriculum by way of a type of chronological journey, commencing with curriculum as behavioural and objectives orientated; followed by a discussion on curriculum development as divergent in approach; and then looking at the curriculum as domains of knowledge. The chapter continues by exploring issues regarding learner centred curriculum, before a discussion on the current landscape of curriculum in higher education, and followed by probing new ideas in curriculum. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the role of curriculum discourse in informing curriculum development. It is important at this point to note that although there is an effort to present the literature in a chronological manner, there is some overlap. For this reason I suggest the reader to consider the timeline in an abstract way, allowing the discussions to flow and evolve, and to appreciate the natural evolution and overlap of each.

Curriculum as Reductionist

Curriculum influenced by scientific management principles, referred to also as the social efficiency model marks the beginning of the field of curriculum study; in particular the work of Bobbit (Hlebowitsh, 2005). This approach is objectives driven, aimed at providing clarity in terms of tangible and measurable outcomes. Bobbit was concerned that education was vague and imprecise and was drawn to the exactness and particularity being championed by the new age of science at that time. He suggested an approach based on scientific management principles which were enjoying great success at that time in terms of industry and productivity (Kelly, 2009). Scott (2007) posits that Bobbitt's work is an early example of behavioural objectives curriculum. Tyler (1949), an intellectual progeny of Bobbit, supported a means-end model of curriculum whereby achievement of pre-stated objectives was key – commonly referred to as the 'Tyler Rationale' (Hlebowitsh in Tyler, 2013 [1949]). In this way curriculum was viewed as a linear process, commencing with the articulation of clear objectives or goals; content was then decided upon to underpin achievement of the objectives; and measurement of learner behaviour demonstrated the extent to which the objectives had been met (Cullen & Harris, 2012; Scott, 2007; Tyler, 2013 [1949]). Bloom's development of taxonomies of educational objectives contributed to the work of objectives based linear models of education. His taxonomies offered insight into how the use of active verbs aided assessment of learning and the manner in which there

could be a continuum of hierarchical advancement or progression distinguished in the verbs used (Bloom, 1956).

Difficulties of the objectives-based approach were discussed by Popham (1972) who claimed that not all objectives were tangible enough to measure, but often important enough for inclusion e.g. aesthetic appreciation. He argued that most of the objectives should be assessable but recognised that ‘instructors may wish to devote a reasonable proportion of their efforts to the pursuit of important but currently un-assessable objectives’ (1972, p.35). He also encouraged assessment criteria drawn by experts that allowed for various proficiency levels of performance. Similarly, Scott (2007, p.7) discusses his concern regarding the behavioural objectives model in particular the manner in which the model does not recognise or give value to unintended, but relevant, learning outcomes:

The pre-specification of behavioural goals may also encourage an inflexibility of approach within the classroom, and learning outcomes which may incidentally flow from classroom interactions will be deliberately under-exploited...further danger of assuming that if something cannot be measured, then it cannot be assessed and therefore it should not be a part of the learning process...lists of intended behaviours do not adequately represent the way individuals learn, and this is because logical order cannot be conflated with pedagogic process.

From an ideological perspective, a more fundamental disparagement of this view is the reductionist nature of the approach evidenced in the above excerpt from Scott, and in the manner in which curriculum development is reduced to a scientific technicist form of producing learners in a conveyor belt manner, similar to that of industry and product production. Kelly levels his trepidations tersely when saying ‘To adopt this kind of industrial model for education is to assume it is legitimate to mould human beings... without making any allowance for their own individual wishes, desires or interests’ (Kelly, 2009, p. 71).

My concerns regarding this approach rest in the nature and agreement of learning objectives and the basis upon which these are agreed. I share the occupation of many educationalists (e.g. Stenhouse, 1975; Popham, 1972) who have socio-ideological worries about the specificity and granularity of objectives reducing learning opportunities to those stated in the objectives, and not accommodating in any sufficient manner development of the individual. Kelly (2009) describes this approach as content being like the curriculum aim, and the objectives as bite sized chunks or targets to be

achieved. This view is in opposition to curriculum as divergent where development of learner's critical thinking and inquiry skills are nurtured, which is discussed next in this chapter.

Curriculum as Divergent

In rejecting the curriculum as driven by behavioural change or modification towards achievement of pre-designed objectives, Lawton (1984, p.23) posited:

The behavioural objectives view of curriculum is that of a closed system, whereas in a democracy individuals need to become autonomous by means of an open-ended curriculum. One of the purposes of the curriculum is to encourage tolerance of ambiguity rather than knowing the right answers.

In addition, educationalists such as Stenhouse and Eisner objected to the behavioural model on the basis of it being reductionist in its approach, and in the process risked losing some important learning outcomes because they were less tangible than other, perhaps more trivial, outcomes. Stenhouse (1970, p.75-77) used the example of great literary works saying that learners' responses cannot be predetermined through learning outcomes specified as objectives. He said that there are principles or 'canons' which can be used to evaluate understanding from misunderstanding but these principles are not easily analysed as pre-specified behaviour. The learner's treatment of the canons are learning outcomes, but not pre-specified. However, he did accept that transferable skills could be presented as pre-specified learning outcomes or objectives. Stenhouse (1975) reasoned that operational objectives were low-level, easy to measure and state; and higher-level outcomes were neglected because they were not easy to express in tangible form. He argued that educators should be concerned with issues broader than behavioural change, for instance learning requiring critical inquiry and engagement, and uses the example of literary art where a learner's development is in their response to piece of literature, rather than a pre-imposed interpretation transmitted by the educator by way of learning objectives. His interest in curriculum development was knowledge based in disciplines and developed through inquiry learning. He viewed discipline knowledge as a body of knowledge, rather than bite size chunks; and as having a logical and incremental structure. The curriculum, he argued, should encourage divergent learning. Similarly, Eisner (1969) used music and fine art to illustrate the disservice that intended objectives can have on learners

critically engaging in artistic endeavours in a divergent way. Eisner refers to expressive objectives which describe a learning encounter, and rather than the objective being about a measurable outcome it should 'identify the type of [learning] encounter he [the student] is to have' (Eisner, 1969, p.18).

Dewey (1902) is attributed as one of the earliest proponents of inquiry learning. He viewed knowledge as hypothetical and more to do with the learners' experience and interpretation of the knowledge introduced to them and very much to do with the learning environment presented to them. Dewey advocated an inquiry based learning environment. In the process of inquiring into the learning, the learner is not wrong when they come to an incorrect conclusion; they are simply on a discovery route to the correct conclusion. Elliott (1998, p.29) puts it beautifully, to my mind, when he argues that 'If what you want from the child is right answers, then informing them may be a more effective and efficient means of getting there than discovery learning'. Stenhouse (1975) advocated a role for the teacher as one that facilitates discovery through inquiry based pedagogy that encourages discussion and divergence amongst learners. This view, according to Scott (2007) is often described as the hermeneutic circle. Stenhouse argued that all knowledge was in a state of flux and inquiry based learning contributed to this state of movement. For this reason he called for an extended professional who was committed to their own critical questioning and development as an educator, and asked educators to become critical agents of curriculum advancement and change contending that 'teachers must be critics of work in curriculum and not docile agents' (Stenhouse, 1975, p.70).

Curriculum as Knowledge Domains

Foundationalism as a paradigm views discipline knowledge as a domain of knowledge based on a firm and trusted foundation. Scott, (2007, p.51) purported that this foundationalist view of knowledge was one that curriculum theorists found attractive during the 1980s. This movement focused on curriculum structure, and discipline content, and was a reaction against what Schwab (1978, p.288) called a 'moribund' field of study. Schwab cautioned curriculum developers against relying on educational theory to guide the process because education was uncertain and uneasy, and discipline science was built on a body of trusted theory and concepts. This movement was,

according to Pinar et al (1995), pro-discipline, and about curricula for deep knowledge where the discipline experts determined the shape of curricula.

Hirst (1974), a proponent of foundationalism, identified curriculum as an indoctrination into different cognitive structures or knowledge domains. He did not claim these domains have firm divisions but recognised delineations and logical ordering of content within each domain. If we are to follow Hirst's logic we are faced with questions regarding who determines what constitutes a body of knowledge i.e. domain; and on what basis. Kelly (2009) theorised that the knowledge domains are created by various interest groups where the collective supersedes the interests of the individual. Hirst (1972) recognised these problems and discussed them in terms of objectivity surrounding domains of knowledge. He deliberated on how disciplines are developed within a historical struggle between groups of people, based on robust research. Is the ensuing outcome of the struggles a true version of the domain knowledge based on sound foundations? If it is, curriculum becomes collective and universal, whereby instruction within the discipline, by discipline experts, is paramount. Scott (2007, p.45) argued that this foundationalist view of knowledge 'has been dealt a series of epistemological blows to the effect that few now believe that the building of such foundations is possible'. Such challenges came from educational philosophers who saw domains of knowledge as evolving through theorizing, and thus are unable to be theory-independent, foundational absolute knowledge independent of knowers.

Conventionalists provided an alternate logic to foundationalism. They provided a viewpoint rooted in an epistemological view that reality cannot be known in an absolute way. They contend humans can interpret the world in a host of different manners, and interpretation is relative to their experience. Thus discipline knowledge is relative to the historical power struggles mediating that domain. For example, Young (1971) contradicted the absolutist view of discipline and knowledge in favour of a socially constructed viewpoint mediated by power groups relative to their interpretation and experience. More recently Young worked with Moore (2001) to take up the issue of relativism again. For them the curriculum debate is in relation to two opposing traditions - neo-conservative traditionalists; and technical-instrumentalists. In the case of the former, curriculum is viewed as a specific body of knowledge that

must be preserved. The corollary to this – the technical-instrumentalists - is when the power balance sways towards groups influenced by economical imperatives, where they view a successful curriculum as one which contributes to an efficient and successful economy. Scott (2007, p.48) argued that in this case ‘the dispositions that education is meant to nurture are flexibility, entrepreneurship, trainability and a willingness to take part in a market economy’. Moore and Young (2001) contend that in either case the inclusion or exclusion of knowledge in curriculum is arbitrary, and underpinned by a particular interest group’s perspective or belief. In this case, if we do not subscribe to foundational principles underpinning curriculum and knowledge domains, are we then by default subscribing to a relativist approach which is a subjective and arbitrary model of curriculum development? As Scott (2007, p.50) posits:

Either knowledge is unrelated to the social position and intellectual interests of the knower, in which case general theory and universal knowledge are viable, or knowledge is affected by its relation to the knower, in which case relativistic and particularistic knowledge can be the only result. This is a true dilemma because it presents a choice between two equally unpalatable alternatives.

I would argue that there is some degree of buy-in to the notion that elements of knowledge domains have evolved over time through the efforts of many different agent groups. If we accept this as the case, we must examine the role of power in our understanding and development of knowledge domains, and become as Stenhouse (1975) urges, the extended professional committed to critical questioning of knowledge; or as Barnett and Coate (2006) advocate, educators who engage in curriculum discourse across relative cultural systems and evolved discipline domains.

Apple (1982) examined the role of power in curriculum structure. His work focused to a large extent on the power relationship between the state structure or system, and education. He viewed the education system as operating within a wider system that expands beyond economic imperatives, which is often the focus of the state, to include cultural and ideological orientations. However, he saw the state shaping what knowledge is contained in the curriculum and urged educators to exert influence over the state – he called on educators to use our voice. He cautions educators saying that as curriculum development is a social and constructed activity, there will always be

more, and less, powerful voices. Apple (1982, p.50) accepted that education is complex and observes:

Education is at once the result of contradictions and the source of new contradictions. It is an arena of conflict over the production of knowledge, ideology, and employment, a place where social movements try to meet their needs and business attempts to reproduce its hegemony.

Apple called on providers of education to be bodies that struggle for a transformed curriculum rather than reproducing the existing curriculum. In accepting there are different interest bodies competing and conflicting, I argue that discourse is central to a transformed curriculum. Bernstein's classifications offer a tool for such discourse. Construction of curriculum i.e. development, was done so through integration between knowledge domains, and progression within the domains. Bernstein sought to classify approaches to curriculum development as weak or strong in order to better understand and discuss them. A strong classification, according to Bernstein (1990), was a curriculum with solid boundaries between knowledge domains, with the inverse being the case for weakly classified curriculum which he described as integrated. Within the weakly or integrated curriculum, Bernstein maintained the educator and learner have greater control and autonomy over the curriculum content in terms of inclusion, organisation or structure, and pace. For Bernstein, typologies or classifications were only frameworks for curriculum discourse; discourse in relation to power distribution and identity formation. In Bernstein's own words 'How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social norm' (Bernstein, 1971, p.47). More recently Shay (2012) discusses the type of knowledge shaping curricula. She states '...what determines what gets selected, how it is sequenced, paced and evaluated is a broader recontextualising principle or purpose' (Shay, 2012, p.4), and draws on the work of Bernstein (2000) and Maton (2011) regarding their discussions on contextualised and recontextualised knowledge. Shay (2012) advises curricula developers to view knowledge on a continuum of theory in a non-contextual manner to knowledge that is context related. Non-context theory is both discipline specific knowledge, and generic type knowledge. Contextual knowledge is practical and must be firstly decontextualized in order to recontextualise it for the curriculum. This relates to earlier discussions in this section regarding evolving domains of knowledge.

The current national strategy for higher education calls for a learning experience that ‘...should equip graduates with essential generic foundation skills as adaptive, creative, rounded thinkers and citizens – in addition to a comprehensive understanding of their relevant discipline’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.7). The high level committee who designed the strategy recognise that this requires change and improvements to the teaching and learning environment and say this can happen within a broader curriculum. But they emphasise the point that higher education in its broadest sense is key to a successful economy and society (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.5):

Higher education is central to the economic renewal we need to support individual well-being and social development. But it also plays a fundamental role in fostering a spirit of inquiry and a strong sense of the value of learning among students; it is the positive engagement that students have with higher education that stimulates the imagination and makes innovation possible. The quality of their learning experiences and the environment in which students learn will shape the future development of our society.

A learner-centric model was proposed by the Irish government and regulating body as a way of achieving these high level objectives.

Learner Centred Curriculum

Doll (1989) offered a model by way of organizing curricula that informs a learner-centred approach based on richness; recursion; relations and rigor. By richness, Doll advocated a curriculum of openness that is ‘...rich enough in depth and breadth to encourage meaning making’ (Doll, 1989, p.243). It is not, according to Doll, about quantity but more about quality of knowledge. This is reflected in the current national subject benchmark of knowledge -breadth and -depth discussed later in this chapter. To empower learners the curriculum must encourage deep and critical engagement with the learning. Doll’s recursion element refers to a nonlinear curriculum, described also as spiral (Bruner et al, 1976). Recursion requires learners to actively engage in the learning by creating their own examples and learning triggers; learners share and own the learning and teachers are more like facilitators. Again this is attended to in the national benchmarks under the know-how and application strand. Doll’s relations category views curriculum creation or development as a social activity requiring much reflection and discussion. Within this concept is an acceptance that all learning, regardless of whether it is internal or external of the discipline being studied, is

worthwhile for the learner and offers a multiple-perspective lens for the learner to understand and see learning within different contexts, thereby offering multiple frames of reference for the learner. This could be loosely aligned with the competence strand of the national benchmarks where generic competencies such as learning-to-learn, role, and insight, are sought as outcomes of curricula. Finally, within Doll's model, the concept of rigor refers to integrative learning based on problems or issues. This is not a new concept and takes its roots in the work of Dewey (1902) as explored in an earlier part of this chapter where divergent curriculum was discussed. As outlined, Dewey advocated a curriculum of inquiry that combined the needs of the learner, society and content; and viewed the teacher as a facilitator through activity and reinforcement. Dewey's, then transformative model of education, advocated a curriculum with a blended focus where the learner was exposed to broader societal influences, and he was the first to characterise the learner as being at the centre of the learning process (Cullen & Harris, 2012; Ross, 2006). Similarly, and as referred to elsewhere in this chapter, Bernstein (1971, 1996) also proposed an integrated curriculum with less rigid content boundaries that was learner-centred. He was concerned that designing an integrated curriculum within resource-constrained timeframes was challenging because disciplines often viewed themselves as competing for resources and presence, thus the learner is sometimes not central to curriculum development discourse. So in fact, although Doll presented a useful model to explore and develop learner centred curriculum, the foundation for the model rests in the work of previous educational theorists. It is also redolent of the strands and descriptors contained in the national subject benchmarks.

Learner centred curriculum requires, as Stenhouse (1980) advocates, a teacher-as-researcher approach in order to practice evidence based pedagogy that is learner centred. As we know from earlier discussions, Stenhouse (1975) protested against the objective based approach to curriculum development because of its reductionist nature. In addition, Rudduck (1988, 1995) comments that Stenhouse argued the objectives-based curriculum, in many ways, signified a lack of trust in teachers and a mistaken belief that objectives-based curriculum offered a teacher-proof model. Stenhouse suggested that the objectives-based model diminished educator's autonomy and professional judgment in relation to creating a suitable learning environment and called for a teacher as researcher to inform curricula (Stenhouse, 1980, p.40).

Stenhouse's (1983, p.211) primary theme was one of emancipation, both of teacher and student. He held that schooling '...ought to be concerned with empowering students by providing them with access to knowledge and to critique of knowledge'. Indeed he argued that that generalizations of pre-determined knowledge such as behavioural objectives served to shackle rather than liberate learning (Stenhouse, 1985, p.77). Furthermore he said that uncertainty is necessary in quality education. He called for greater discourse amongst educators, in particular in relation to knowledge areas, where he thought that pedagogy and its inextricable links with philosophical and epistemological concerns was most influential. In this regard he advocated a teacher-as-researcher model to curriculum, where greater fluidity and freedom existed to allow the teacher to respond to learners needs as necessary, within the naturally messy teaching and learning environment i.e. learner driven and learner centred curriculum development. He viewed curricula research and development as the task of educators and not academic researchers. At a presentation to Australian curriculum developers he amusingly stated 'Curriculum developers have no direct line to God which will give them wisdom (Stenhouse, n.d. p.11), and as such called on them to engage in research and dialogue among fellow curricula developers who he argued should be teachers 'Books belong to academics, curricula belongs to classrooms and therefore to teachers' (Stenhouse, n.d. p.2).

The literature reviewed so far in this chapter attends primarily to compulsory education, with the exception of the reference to the Irish governmental strategy for higher education. This study explores curriculum development in the context of post-compulsory higher education and so it is necessary to examine the context of higher education also. Whilst there is less theory and research related to how curricula is developed in higher education, the regulations and templates used draw from much of the work discussed above.

Current Landscape of Curriculum in Higher Education

Some argue that tertiary higher education in Europe changed quite significantly in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hyland, 2011; Moore, 2004; OECD, 2006; Toohey, 1999). This was influenced by much of what was happening in higher education systems in Australia and New Zealand, which in turn influenced the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), preceded by the Bologna Process. The

major changes which impacted the student body were wider access, greater internationalization and student mobility to reflect the global economy in which graduates would be operating within, and flexibility of programme provision. As the predecessor to EHEA, the Bologna process commenced in 1999 when Ministers for Education in twenty-nine European Countries signed a declaration stating their intention to work towards the creation of a common European Higher Education Area by 2010. Since then forty-six European countries have joined (www.ehea.info). In an effort to create a more transparent and quality assured driven curriculum, all EHEA members use an outcome-based model, which is reflective of the objective or behavioural model discussed at the outset of this chapter. The outcomes are closely aligned to state concerns of skills based education and the creation of a knowledge economy, although there is scope for wider competency development. This outcome-based model of curriculum development has the effect of creating a curriculum based on subject benchmarks, referred to as subject award standards. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is the EHEA umbrella body representing quality assurance for all EHEA member states. They audit member states, including Ireland's quality assurance body Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), ensuring there is transparency and consistency in provision of higher education. Key components to assuring quality rest on transparent national benchmarks related to a national framework of qualifications. The national framework, and associated benchmarks, has to relate or compute to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (ENQA, 2015).

From the perspective of Ireland, the Government, through the Minister for the Department of Education and Skills, has overall responsibility for Higher Education (HE) in Ireland. In this regard the key government functions are to define a broad strategy for the HE sector, and to ensure the legislative framework is in place to implement the strategy. In terms of strategy, in 2009 the then Tánaiste, and Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan, commissioned a national level group to develop a strategy for the HE sector to 2030. Development of this strategy was influenced by the government's medium term economic framework published in 2008 which stated Ireland's economic growth would be built through a 'smart economy' driven by restructuring the higher education system (Department of Education and Skill, 2011, p.2). . The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (National

Strategy) recognised that the HE system which served the Irish economy and society in the past would not necessarily serve well into the future (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.30). They called for a HE system with more graduates across all levels, and for current graduates to raise their level of HE attainment in accordance with economic requirements, saying that this approach will enable Ireland to compete at a global level. To achieve this, the committee called for a radical change in the system of HE, in particular with regard to structure and governance. This reform has impacted on the HE sector which currently is in a state of flux. Institutions are being forced to consider clustering with a view to consolidating provision of HE in a more focused manner and aligned to economic imperatives. There is little discourse regarding the impact of the National Strategy on curriculum development. The focus of discussion is levelled more on governance and structural changes at senior level in institutions as evidenced in the HEA report designed to shape the HE landscape as recommended by the National Strategy (HEA, 2012). Although the report outlines the national objectives for higher education, the focus of the report is on the systems changes required.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) was strengthened as a result of the National Strategy, allowing them to lead and drive the structural changes outlined in the recommendations. As a statutory body, HEA work at central governmental level to effectively govern and regulate higher education in Ireland, leaving the Department of Education and Skills free to concern itself with strategy and policy development. They are accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills. Their mission statement reflects National Strategy objectives of a HE system that attends to economic development, in addition to social and cultural needs (HEA, 2015). The HE sectoral restructuring changes that HEA are responsible for implementing are ongoing and require institutions to review provision and consider clustering opportunities with collaborations targetting and focusing on alignment of their priorities and strategies with national priorities as identified in the National Strategy. The strategy group state that HE providers ‘...will need to strike a balance between the demands of the market and their academic mission’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.90). Key to this development was a national funding model linked to institutional performance as related to market needs.

The Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) body ensures the quality of HE provision for the State. They work closely with HEA to ensure quality and consistency in standards across the sector, benchmarked against European standards through EHEA membership as discussed above. In the National Strategy the committee recommended amalgamation of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI), Irish Universities Quality Ireland (IUQB), Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), and Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). Legislation was enacted in 2012 ratifying this amalgamation (Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012). The effect ultimately was and is to ensure, from a quality assurance perspective, that all providers of HE are operating in the same transparent and cohesive manner as directed by European practice. To this end QQI are members of ENQA, the European auditing body for the HE sector, discussed above. QQI, reflecting EHEA best practice, use benchmark award standards for curriculum development and validation. All providers of HE are obliged to comply with curricula development using the relevant subject benchmarks (i.e. Award Standards) thus adhering to a policy-led, systematic and standardized approach to curriculum development, which includes programme review and validation. The award standards have three strands and eight sub-strands – knowledge-kind, and knowledge–depth; know-how and application–range, and know-how and application–selectivity; and competence-context, competence-role, and competence–learning to learn (QQI, 2014). In many respects the award standards reflect earlier discussions in this chapter. For example, Shay’s (2012) consideration of non-context related knowledge and this, it could be argued, is attended to in the knowledge-depth and breadth strand; knowledge that is related to the context is practical and is reflective on the know-how and application strand that interestingly contains a sub-strand of context (the other sub-strand being range). Finally it could be contended that generic knowledge referred to by Shay (2012) relates to the competence strand in the awards standards. The awards are progressive and designed in tandem with the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) which is regulated and managed by QQI (QQI, 2015) and maps to the EQF as discussed above. Progression through levels is reflective of taxonomies, in particular the work of Bloom (1956) as discussed earlier in this chapter. Whilst this more robust and standardised approach offers many benefits such as transparency, consistency and in some ways greater collaboration through expert panels; it may also restrict and inhibit creative curriculum

development where the discipline expert has more autonomy. For some this regulatory approach may be viewed as coercive given the sanctions that are applied for non-compliance, for example closure of providers in extreme cases, or non-validation of programme provision in specific cases.

Notwithstanding curriculum development driven by outcomes, it is difficult to separate out notions of curriculum and pedagogy. Bernstein (1971) posits that curriculum is the knowledge or content for inclusion – i.e. the product or outcomes; and pedagogy the valid instruction or transmission of that knowledge or content – i.e. the process. This is not unlike Tyler's rationale for curriculum (2013 [1949]) which was based on four questions: what educational purposes should the school seek to attain; how can the learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives; how can learning experiences be organised for effective instruction; and how can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated. Current curriculum development practices in higher education reflect Tyler's rationale. As discussed above, learning outcomes are designed within subject, as opposed to discipline domains, which are referred to as subject award standards; indicative content and a teaching and learning strategy is designed to underpin achievement of outcomes; an ideal learning environment is specified to nurture achievement of outcomes; and outcomes are evaluated or assessed (HETAC, 2009; QQI, 2010; QQI, 2014).

However, a tension exists within the outcomes model to curriculum development. The tension is between the risks of loss of discipline expertise in favour of a curriculum that is shaped by discrete subject areas organized around benchmarked competencies. The tension is with discipline expertise which infers mastery in one's discipline, a type of socialisation and internalisation of a specialism whereby experts lead and innovate; as opposed to subject experts where the suggestion is an accumulation of knowledge based on external societal and economic imperatives (Barnett and Coate, 2006). Pinar (2006) proposed a curriculum development strategy which is interdisciplinary and broader than a systematic approach. He suggested 'we research interdisciplinary reconfigurations of the intellectual content of the curriculum' and proposed 'curriculum studies scholars research "throughlines" along with subjectivity, society and intellectual content in and across the academic disciplines' (Pinar, 2006, p.2). He urged us to find a new form of contemporary curriculum development that enables

educators to use a ‘conceptual montage’ which will facilitate complex learning conversations within the learning environment; and he calls on us to embrace curriculum development where educators are required to draw on the knowledge that they feel is of most worth for the learners (Pinar, 2006, p.2). In this regard educators’ own epistemological and philosophical beliefs will influence the knowledge they contend is of worth for the learners. This will be best achieved through critical discourse across all team members developing the curriculum.

New ideas for Curriculum in Higher Education

Barbezat and Bush (2014) recently offered a form of contemplative pedagogical practice in higher education as a way of expanding the traditional curriculum where knowledge and analytical abilities are fostered, to one where learners have agency in their learning. They, similar to the critics of the objectives approach discussed earlier in this chapter, objected to curriculum based on outcomes because of its single minded or narrow focus. They argue that this narrow approach based on goals may contribute to a mindless learner, as opposed to a mindful learner. If a learner is mindful they are in the learning and of the moment, as opposed to a mindless learner who is not. Barbezat and Bush (2014), similar to Lawton (1984) and Dewey (1956), fear that learner attention may be drawn to one of success or failure rather than a natural desire for inquiry or exploration when they are mindlessly learning. They offered suggestions regarding the inclusion of contemplative practices and pedagogy that use introspection and reflection interchangeably in a manner that contributes to individual and collective deep internal questioning, connection and insight; thereby creating learner agency in the curriculum. Although the current model of curriculum development advocated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - discussed in previous section in this chapter - includes insight as a sub-strand it falls short of discussion and guidance regarding what this deep level of insight might look like or be achieved. The outcome of a curriculum insight strand is the ability to ‘express a comprehensive internalized, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others’ (QQI, 2014, p.6). This is an abstract high level outcome, and as such one that is difficult to measure or assess. It offers a real example of the difficulties, discussed elsewhere in this chapter, with an objectives driven model and high level outcomes. However, Barbezat and Bush (2014) offer some concrete examples of how one might include pedagogical practices to

develop this outcome in a real and tangible manner. The tangible assessable outcomes relate to problem solving, critical thinking and analytical skills. The challenge remains in bringing this type of pedagogy into discussions about curriculum development at an early stage when the underpinning pedagogy is being agreed by curriculum teams.

Although contemplative pedagogy is relatively new to higher education it is not a new concept. Palmer in 1993 called for education with ‘wholesight’ where ‘the mind and heart unite’. He argued:

...with the mind’s eye we see a world of fact and reason...with the eye of the heart we see a world warmed and transformed by the power of love, a vision of community beyond the mind’s capacity to see.

Palmer (1993, p.xxiii)

This type of education, Palmer argued, is more than teaching and learning facts; ‘it means being drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world of which we are part’ and he argued that ‘we can make no rigid distinction between the knower and the known, that every scientific finding is a mixture of subjective and objective elements’ (Palmer, 1993, p.15 & 27). He challenged educators to facilitate learners as both the knower, and that which is known; thus breaking free from the alienation of both. In this way the teacher is a mediator between the knowledge and the learner interpreting that knowledge with wholesightedness. Palmer refers to this approach as the spiritual journey of education and takes it up again with Zajonc in 2010 in a call for renewing higher education through embedding the concept of wholesightedness (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

Hogan (2010) acknowledged that the development of curricula will always be open to disagreement; primarily as a result of the discipline loyalties within a cultural tradition. However, he called for a more imaginative understanding of education that ‘cultivates humanity’s maturity’ rather than ‘matching the functional requirements of a globalized age’. In doing this he argued the learner will have ‘...a shared awareness that they are active and responsible participants in their own learning’, where ‘...it becomes natural for them to ask more searching questions’ (Hogan, 2010, p.154). This is redolent with Kelly’s (2009) view presented earlier in this chapter where he worries that a reductionist curriculum is about moulding learners to fit a predefined requirement or desired outcome. In determining the desired outcome issues of power come into play

e.g. the state as outlined by Apple (1982). Hogan (2010) says learning environments that ‘cultivate humanity’s maturity’ will be industrious with a unique and self-navigated order of things. This requires, what Barnett (2013) calls for - reimagining the university by finding space and time for reflection and discourse.

Curriculum Discourse

This research seeks to illicit curriculum development discourse among educators in higher education and illuminate current curriculum development practice. Re-crafting a space for this type of conversation, at the outset of curriculum development process, will lead to a richer and more valuable curriculum, because it will include educators’ philosophical beliefs about the purpose of higher education, and discipline expertise and knowledge of related and interdisciplinary subjects, along with an understanding of how these interrelated subjects could, as Pinar (2006) suggested, extend to the learners’ self and society. Pinar (2006) contended that reassertion of our intellectual commitment is of more importance now when education is under attack by politicians to contribute to economic recovery.

Education is a messy business. It is as Apple (1982) suggested, and discussed earlier in this chapter, full of contradictions and struggle between different groups with differing power balance arrangements. Curriculum discourse occurs through the lens of those contributing to the discourse i.e. the educators involved in curriculum development. Barnett (2011) urged universities to ‘create and imagine’ a space and time for intellectual discourse; epistemological considerations; curriculum and pedagogy; and ontology. Curriculum discourse amongst educators is at the heart of curriculum development and delivery; and for the most part is a muted discourse. This research seeks to redress this by enjoining educators to voice their philosophical beliefs about education and to become aware of how these values influence curricula. Barnett (2011) argued that as intellectuals we have an obligation to allow our ideas and opinions to influence practice within universities. He presented this in the context of us striving for a ‘feasible utopia’ in higher education. In carving out a pathway towards a model of higher education that offers a ‘feasible utopia’ he encouraged processes ‘...to make possible rational discourse, systematic rational reflection, argumentative conflict, conversation and dissensus’ (Barnett, 2011, p.70).

Scott (2007, p.7) was concerned that some ‘key moments’ in curriculum history, have been lost and we now have ‘...a false consensus on curriculum, barely agreed and certainly not negotiated’. This, he claimed, has replaced what was once ‘...a vigorous debate about central educational questions’. This research seeks to reopen that ‘vigorous debate’ and reawaken educator’s passion and enthusiasm for curriculum by affording them opportunities to contribute to the curriculum debate. Barnett and Coate (2006) called on educators to take part in the curriculum conversation as they argue this discussion is largely absent. They suggested this was because it is such a complex topic which raises questions around curriculum for development of skills and what types of skills; and the tension between skills as outcomes of higher education, and education as a space for critical thinking and engagement – the social curriculum; or perhaps critical thinking is actually a skill. In the words of Barnett and Coate (2006, p.23):

...in the rare moments where we might see an orientation towards large educational ends, where ideas such as facing complexity and criticality in a world of uncertainty might have had an airing, we find ourselves confined again to a skills/outcomes conception of curriculum.

Rathcliff (1997, p.5) highlighted that educators come to the curriculum development process with varying assumptions about what curriculum is. He said that if a design team or committee ‘...make this leap of faith’, that is to assume all educators are coming from the same place regarding their understanding of curriculum - then it ‘...may lead to unnecessary disputes over nomenclature, and worse, aborted attempts at fundamental change’. Curriculum development is shaped by many, including politics and economic and societal requirements as discussed above. Additionally, Toohey (1999, p.25) posits that educators philosophical beliefs influence curricula saying a curriculum development trigger is when ‘...enough individuals who share a particular philosophy of education want to reshape it [the programme] to fit with their beliefs and values’. With the many different preliminary assumptions, I argue, it is of fundamental importance that educators engage in curriculum discourse as a starting point to the curriculum development process. Barnett and Coate (2006, p.25) say that it is ‘Through curricula, ideas of higher education are put into action... values, beliefs, principles in relation to learning, understanding, knowledge, disciplines, individuality and society are realized’. They suggest that discussion at local level, amongst

educators involved in curriculum development, is limited to content and structure or technical matters. They posit that bigger and what they call ‘first order’ questions are not really tackled. These sentiments and concerns resonate with this research and indeed inspired both the research questions and the methodology of discourse analysis which is discussed in the next chapter.

Summary

The aim of the research was to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this aim were to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate their philosophical beliefs and influence on curriculum development; to irradiate current curriculum development practices; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development. This summary encapsulates how the literature review traversed in this chapter informed the research questions to realise these objectives and aim.

The inquiry sought to uncover educators’ perceptions of the purpose of higher education, with a view to identifying how that purpose is achieved. In order to establish what the curriculum should be it was important to find out what participants in this inquiry view the purpose of higher education as being. Curriculum discourse has been and continues to be called for by many theorists. Curriculum discourse appears to be at the root of all transformation. In this regard it was pertinent to explore participants’ experiences of curriculum development discourse. What gets included in a curriculum is influenced by educators’ philosophical and epistemological beliefs. This study explored educators’ philosophical beliefs that impact on curriculum development. Curricula are developed within a regulated and standardised space using quality assured processes and procedures which includes templates and guides such as the Award Standards (QQI, 2014) and Core Validation Policy (QQI, 2010). Additionally as part of the current regulated environment institutions were required to develop a college strategy. These strategies reflect that current landscape of higher education, including economic and societal requirements. There are many contextual factors that impact on curricula development and so it was relevant to explore

educators' experience of contextual factors that impact curricula development. Loci of power or perceived loci of power permeates much of the literature, in particular the role of the state through legislation and the regulation body of QQI (Department of Education and Skills, 1999; Department of Education and Skills, 2012), and the National Strategy for Higher Education (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In this regard insight into educators' perceived loci of power was considered an important question for this study. The literature led me to consider where or how educators see their sense of agency in curriculum development. As an objective of this study was to contribute to capacity building in relation to curriculum development I argue it was apposite to seek insight into participants' sense of empowerment and agency in developing curricula.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.22) state that all qualitative researchers are philosophers. For this reason it is important that researchers declare the philosophical beliefs and framework guiding their inquiry. This chapter commences by setting out the methodological considerations influencing this study - the theoretical framework of post-structuralism was used to guide the inquiry; within that framework a shared paradigmatic position of constructivist and transformative was the lens used. Discourse analysis was the methodology adopted and the rationale for this is considered below. The chapter continues by presenting the research design which details the research sample, methods, process, and use of an advisory group. Then a discussion of the ethical considerations is offered along with insight into my role as a practitioner and researcher. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the way in which the data in the next chapter was coded and themed.

Methodological Considerations

The perspective guiding the research methodology adopted for this inquiry is influenced by the theoretical lens framing it. This research is situated within a post-structural framework in the postmodern era. The methodology shares its position with both constructivism and transformative paradigms.

Theoretical Framework and Research Paradigm

Post-structuralism as a theoretical framework is part of the postmodern philosophical era. Postmodernism was a mid to late 20th century movement that represented a departure from the modernist philosophy. Both modernists and postmodernists held the human being as central to understanding knowledge relative to activities and events. Modernism challenged the then traditional forms of scientific truths proclaimed during the Age of Enlightenment. Sarup (1993, p.31) summarises the basic features of modernism as ‘...an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain, open-ended nature of reality’ and postmodernism as ‘...the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents...a move to ‘textualize’ everything as many

optional kinds of writing or discourses' (Sarup, 1993, p.132). Postmodernists deconstruct events with a view to opening up possibilities and new ways of seeing things. They argue that to subscribe to a universal truth implies acceptance. Walshaw (2007, p.4) commented that as an approach postmodernism '...became a dominant structure of feeling for many intellectuals across the world' and by the 1980s had become a new, and often controversial, emergent attitude or mood. Philosophers of the day were considered radical and innovative for the way they urged people to question what they considered to be true in particular if that perceived truth challenged them. (Best and Kellner, 1994; Rorty, 1979). It conjures up images of social change and major transformation, of questioning and challenging; where the narrative knowledge, as opposed to the scientific knowledge of the age of enlightenment, is valued. Research and knowledge, within postmodernism, is largely about the narrative and its relationship to practice. In this regard it can be liberating because all truths as we know them, for example in relation to curriculum development, are open to challenge and change.

If postmodernism is viewed as a mood change, then post-structuralism can be perceived as theorising that mood and is best understood as part of postmodern critical theory. As a critical theory it is driven by the premise that there are no grand narratives or truths: that all research findings must be taken in the context of the event or activity being researched, in the time that the event is being researched and as such is open to questioning and change. Structuralism precedes post-structuralism. Post-structuralist philosophers levied criticism against structuralists for their notion of a universal reality: the belief that practice or behaviour was influenced by structures. As a theoretical framework, structuralism held that human activity was best understood in terms of the interaction and behaviour of individuals within structures as part of a system. For some prominent theorists operating within a structuralist framework, behaviour and kinship were examined within the system and structure of linguistics (Scott and Morrison, 2007, p.227-228). For these philosophers, members of society lived in a world of meaning. Post-structuralism emerged around the mid-1960s as a reaction against many of the principles of structuralism, it favoured instead, as Best and Kellner (1994, p.20) say

...a thoroughly historical view which sees different forms of consciousness, identities, signification, and so on as historically produced and therefore varying in different historical periods.

This echoes earlier discussions of postmodernism where notions of the research being positioned within a particular timeframe were introduced. Activities are relative and have different meanings to different people in different contexts. In this way post-structuralism elucidates an event relative to the person or persons experiencing that event or activity. For example, in this study the activity being elucidated is curriculum development practice, relative to educators within four higher education during 2012-2014. This research illuminates the bricoleur nature of curriculum development through edifying conversations in this time and context. The symbiotic relationship between conversations and practice was of particular importance. Post-structuralists view language as ‘...constituting social reality rather than reflecting an already given reality’ (Walshaw, 2007, p.5). Rorty (1979) called for edifying conversations, within a post-structural social science environment, rather than epistemological truths. Post-structuralists ‘...deny that knowing is an outcome of different interpretations...instead reality is a constant process of construction’ (Walshaw, 2007, p.5). Edifying conversations are the essence of this research and indeed emanating considerations that flow from analysis of these conversations will, I contend, stimulate ongoing intellectual conversations and discourse with regard to curriculum development, and in this way shape ongoing and future practice; thereby contributing to the curriculum development conversation. The research methodology adopted had to make possible the opportunity to explore different types of conversations to help illuminate the practice of curriculum development. For this reason discourse analysis was considered appropriate and is discussed in greater detail next in this chapter.

In the context of this inquiry, the research framework of post-structuralism is influenced by Foucauldian thinking. Although it is difficult to assign a theoretical framework to Foucault because he resisted prescription and categorisation in favour of questioning and challenging theoretical concepts, theorists and writers have aligned his work with that of post-structuralism since it demonstrates much of the same characteristics (Best and Kellner, 1994; Sarup, 1993; Walshaw, 2007). In a 1984 interview, Foucault described himself as being less concerned about whom his philosophising aligned with and more interested in encouraging new ways of thinking

(Foucault, 1998, p.383). Foucault advised questioning what we have become familiar with and urges us to question ‘...distinctions in our own world of discourse’ (Foucault, 2010, p.22). The challenge being to avoid making judgments based on the ideal, rather to uncover or illuminate collective ideals and practices (Allen, 2012; Graham, 2005). This inquiry sought to emulate this thinking by not seeking to provide truths or judgements, but using discourse to question current practices with a view to building capacity and agency among educators involved in curriculum development. Foucault was less about truth finding and more in favour of exploring and illuminating practice and theory (Sarup, 1993). In Foucault’s own words (1980, p.132) ‘...particular conceptions of truth about the condition of the world are seen to prevail over competing versions because of the peculiarities of time, space and social conditions that provide the rules that specify truth’.

In other words, and in the context of this research, my standpoint is that there are no universal truths regarding curriculum development. Instead there are snapshots of practice in particular times and spaces and relative to those experiencing it. Knight et al (2012) proposed that such an argument undermines assumptions of certainty and thus practices based on said certainty, because the certainty is built upon conventions and facts produced by these conventions at a particular point in time. They also questioned policies based on representing ‘...the world in factual terms so that certain kinds of practices flow naturally from them’ (Knight et al, 2012, p.133). The challenge is to question truths or theories that restrict or inhibit practice. As Ball (1995, p.268) posits:

Theory can [also] work to provide comforting and apparently stable identities for beleaguered academics...too often in educational studies theory becomes no more than a mantric reaffirmation of belief rather than a tool for exploration and for thinking otherwise. Such mantric uses of theory typically involve little more than a naming of spaces.

This research provided an opportunity to question curriculum development practices in higher education and explore the mantric stable identities that influence the practice through critical discourse. It offered educators the opportunity explore and discuss the practice of curriculum development in relation to the influence or impact of curriculum development theory and policy. Discourse analysis was used as both a methodological approach and an analysis tool. The inquiry draws from multiple discourses or

conversations which help situate the current context of curriculum development for educators.

Walshaw (2007, p.18) says of discourses, in relation to Foucault's work, that they '...are more than ways of giving meaning to the world; they imply forms of social organization and social practices, at different historical times'. This study illuminates how curriculum development discourse or conversations construct the practice. Educators are both a function of curriculum development and engaged in the process of curriculum development. They are central to both theory and practice. Curriculum development is complex and uncertain. Decisions regarding what way to structure the curriculum, what content to include, and how to deliver it, are complex questions with no certain answers. For this reason post-structuralism frames the research well. This research respects and acknowledges the uncertain, complex and reflexive environment in which educators develop curricula. It investigated the practice of curriculum development by questioning it as discursive formation, in order to make transparent the symbiotic relationship between both educators and curriculum development, whilst also exploring the role of discourse in the practice of curriculum development. According to Wetherall (2001, p.384) research within a post-structuralism framework is '... always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint'. In this regard the research sought to discursively engage with curriculum development theory and practice from an educator's perspective. It is subjective with the researcher sharing the frame of reference. The criticality of a philosophical meta-awareness of educators in curriculum development is of paramount focus in the context of this research, and it is hoped this will help create a self-sustaining nuclear reaction for curriculum development going forward. Ball (1995, p.26) reminds us that it is not simply a matter of being critical about theory - in this milieu the theory of curriculum development - but to '...engage in struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices'. Throughout the research I am mindful of Allen's advice (2012, p.4) that '...educational researchers who seek to adopt Foucault's theoretical framework are [therefore] challenged to avoid making judgments that are based on an implicit ideal of what education is or should be for'. He argues that this 'anti-normative injunction will enable [the researcher] to interrogate educational concerns with greater caution and critical insight'.

Mertens proposes a taxonomy of four major educational research paradigms – postpostivist; constructivist - which she claims grew out of the German philosopher's study of interpretivism whereby researchers were attempting to interpret the meaning of something from a particular standpoint; transformative - Mertens chooses to label critical theory as 'transformative' as she views a theory such as critical theory as more limited in scope than paradigms, and as such, in her view, critical theory falls under the umbrella of transformative paradigm; and the pragmatic paradigm which she proffers as a philosophical basis for researchers engaging in mixed methods research (Mertens, 2010, p.8-10). She suggests that participatory research is a methodology applicable to all paradigms if the beliefs of the researcher are influenced by participatory beliefs and practice; and as such she does not include it in her taxonomy of major research paradigms. As researchers, we are advised to be mindful that the boundaries between paradigms are shifting and becoming more blurred (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p.197). This research shares its philosophical foundation with both constructivist and transformative research paradigms. Constructivism is often combined with the interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2010) which assumes that reality is socially constructed through subjective meanings based on shared experiences of those active in the research process. The meanings are, as Creswell states (2013, p.8), '...varied and multiple leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories'. Constructivists, as the term implies, construct a shared meaning through discussion and social construction of multiple realities. It is created, as Guba and Lincoln state (2005, p.204) as a result of a '...community narrative, itself subject to the temporal and historical conditions that gave rise to the community' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research questions were broad to allow meanings to be constructed through discussion and interaction, and relied heavily on the participants' view of the situation being studied – curriculum development. Crotty (1998) identifies the following assumptions attributable to constructivism as a research paradigm; meanings are constructed by those engaging with, and interpreting the situation; researchers make sense of the world or situation based on their own biographical journeys; and interpretation arises from engagement and interaction with a social community – again consistent with the theoretical framework discussed above. Rorty (1979) calls for constructivist community discourses to be situated within participatory and moral

boundaries, which implies that research situated within a constructivist paradigm should take place in a participatory manner. In this context the research is informed by the transformative methodology in addition to the constructivist. The transformative paradigm, as a framework engages members of a community with a view to building capacity and influencing change. Of most interest in relation to this inquiries positioning within transformative paradigm, is the notion that research ‘...assumes that the inquirer will proceed collaboratively...in this sense the participants may help design questions, collect data, analyse information’ and in this way ‘...the voice for the participants becomes a united voice for reform and change’ (Creswell, 2013, p.10). The advisory group used as part of this inquiry, discussed later in this chapter, contributed to attainment of this notion of collaborative inquiry. Kemmis & Wilkinson (1988) discuss how research conducted within a transformative paradigm means the research is conducted with, rather than on or to the participants. With regard to this research and its position within the transformative paradigm, the research process in and of itself helped raise the consciousness of the educators participating in it, in relation to curriculum development, and in this way facilitated a move towards advancing the curriculum development process through changing the educator’s mind-set and sense of engagement and agency around curriculum development. This was done both through the process of data collection and use of the advisory group discussed later in this chapter.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis, according to Philips and Hardy (2002, p.6), is about the ‘...construction of a broader social reality... and concern with how that social reality came into existence through the constructive effects of various discourse and associated texts’. Curriculum development has a long history of research. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) advocate that researchers examining previously studied phenomenon avoid using similar research methods in an effort to provide different insights. For this reason, and in an attempt to provide further insight into the field, this research adopted a discourse analysis methodology. The discourses analysed in this inquiry are representative of the practice of curriculum development at a particular point in time, 2012 - 2014. In the case of this inquiry, the dominant discourses mediating curriculum development practice came from educators, providers, and policy in higher education

in Ireland. A representative discourse sample from educators in this study is in the form of focus groups and interviews. From a provider and policy perspective the inquiry draws on institutional formal texts - ‘found documents’ as Taylor (2014) refers to them - such as strategy documents and curriculum validation panel reports.

I acknowledge there are other pertinent curricula discourses in the domain. For example industry discourse, and this is attended to in part through use of institutional strategies. However, while specific industry curricula discourse could provide very different findings, they would not necessarily be findings associated with the present research aim and objectives. Equally prominent discourses include those of learners and graduates, but again this was not apposite in relation to the research aim and objectives. A key discourse is that which occurs during the process of developing a curriculum to QQI Award Standards. This conversation is, in part, captured through inclusion of validation panel reports because these reports are a general critique of the curriculum as presented for validation, and the process of developing same. I argue that inclusion of the strategy and policy documents were apposite in the context of this research because of the prominent and influencing role of the State on curricula development evidenced through the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, and the roles of the governing and regulating bodies of QQI and the HEA, (as discussed in chapter two). Finally, as a key objective of this research was to build capacity and contribute to curricula discourse it was fitting that two different discourses were included in this regard – discourse from those leading curricula development; and from those working as part of a team developing curriculum.

It is the interpretation and analysis of groups of related statements across all of the texts within the four discourses that provide awareness of current curriculum development practice. In the context of this research, discourse analysis is reflective of meso- or macro-level, rather than micro-level which consist of syntax and conversation analysis (Taylor, 2014). My interest is analysis of discourses at the meso to macro level where conversations and statements are examined across and within texts. Gee refers to macro discourse formations, such as the ones being analysed in this study, as discourse analysis with a capital d i.e. D/discourse analysis. The key difference between discourse analysis and other qualitative analysis approaches is that discourse analysis sees discourse as constitutive of the social world. Taylor (2012)

discusses her application of discourse analysis as being socially shaped by shared resources, the situation or context, and a social practice. It is this application of discourse analysis that influences the study. For this reason the use of found documents illuminates a different context of discourse that contributes to the manner in which curriculum development is organised. Other qualitative methodologies seek to understand or interpret the social reality, as it exists. Habermas (1970) argues that discourses or conversations are never simply sentences that are disembodied from the context in which they were uttered. This inquiry applies Habermas' concept of the ideal speech situation, which assumes that those entering the discourse are free to do so, are subjected to equality of contribution (i.e. their voices being heard), and are free from domination (Cohen et al, 2010).

As discussed above, central to the analysis is the influence of the theoretical framework of post-structuralism and Foucauldian thinking. The discourses analysed were used to highlight curriculum development practice at a particular point in time relative to those contributing to the inquiry. This is an important point, because the research does not seek universal truths through triangulation, as would be required with other qualitative research methodologies. Instead, it uses multi-modal discourses across all four institutions involved in the study to provide greater insight and depth in order to elucidate curriculum development practices. Furthermore, this approach is reflective of Foucauldian thinking in that discourse is part of a social system. The social system being explored in this inquiry is curriculum development in higher education in Ireland. So the language of educators is layered with the discourse of the system (e.g. strategy documents and validation panel reports). This study is not about individuals, or any one institution or curriculum. It is, in keeping with post-structuralism and Foucauldian thinking, a sample of what is happening in the curriculum development at this point in time.

The literature points to '...discourse analysis as being labour-intensive and time-consuming' (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p.11). I acknowledge these challenges, and recognise that a limitation of the research was in not having sufficient time to access and use further discourses. For example if I had been able to access minutes from curriculum development team meetings they may have added great value.

Research Questions

As discussed in chapter one, the purpose of the study was to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse in the context of higher education. The key objectives in this regard were to:

- Engage educators in curriculum development discourse;
- Illuminate educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development;
- Irradiate current curriculum development practices; and
- Contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development.

Silverman (2007, p.80) advises that in order to avoid research being doomed to fail, researchers need 'some perspective, or at the very least, a set of animating questions' to explore. Whilst the research aim and objectives were clear from the outset, the research questions were not. Engagement in relevant literature concerning curriculum development context and concepts, in chapter two, facilitated design of the research questions below. In developing the research questions I was influenced by my theoretical framework of post-structuralism and discourse analysis methodology, as discussed above. This had the effect of the research questions being broad enough for open discussions to facilitate deconstruction of current curriculum development practice and discourse. It was not about finding and quantifying truths but more about enlightenment and insight into practice.

Insight into educators' views regarding the purpose of higher education was considered important because their perception nuances curriculum development, particularly content and design. Theorists like Hirst (1972) and Schwab (1978) argued curriculum was about indoctrination into the discipline and as such should be developed by discipline experts. Whereas other theorist, for example Pinar (2006) and Stenhouse (1975), were concerned about a broader curriculum that extended the learners' selves and society and prepared them for the ambiguous and uncertain world they were living in. Similarly, the national landscape for higher education calls for a higher educational experience that broadens the mind and equips graduates to effectively contribute to both the economy and society they are part of (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). Issues regarding education's place in broadening the mind

in a divergent way (Eisner 1969, Lawton 1984), or developing learners that can meet the pre-specified objectives (Bobbit 1918, Tyler, 1949) were analysed from discourse guided by this question.

Research Question 1: What do educators see the purpose of education as being?

Curriculum discourse was fundamental to this inquiry, both in terms of exploring it as a practice, and using it as a tool to build capacity and agency in curriculum development. The literature pointed towards curriculum discourse contributing to development of richer curricula through challenging existing curriculum practices (Barnett and Coate, 2006), and reducing the risk of blindly reproducing existing curricula (Apple, 1982). In addition, the literature demonstrated how discourse can help develop a shared consensus of the curriculum being developed (Scott, 2007). Barnett (2011) calls for educators to find a space for intellectual discourse, in particular in relation to curriculum and pedagogy.

Research Question 2: What are educators' experiences of curriculum development discourse?

A key objective of this inquiry was to illuminate educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development. Moore and Young (2001) contend that decisions regarding what content gets included in curricula are often arbitrary and based on the beliefs of those designing the curriculum. What gets included in a curriculum is influenced by the philosophical beliefs educators' hold dear (Pinar, 2006). For this reason it is pertinent to investigate how their philosophical beliefs influence curriculum development decisions and practice.

Research Question 3: Are educators' philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?

Higher education in Ireland is currently influenced by developments in Europe. The Bologna Process and subsequent consolidation into the EHEA (ENQA, 2015) has the effect of curricula being developed in a regulated manner, compliant with national legislation and auditing bodies (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Additionally, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 calls for economic recovery through higher education, not surprisingly curricula development is influenced by this (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In particular the use

of discourse analysis and inclusion of other contextual texts such as validation panel reports and institutional strategy documents help explore this question in a deeper manner.

Research Question 4: What contextual factors do educators see influencing the practice of curriculum development?

Notwithstanding issues regarding compliance and regulation of curricula development discussed above, the literature points to concerns regarding power balance and the impact on curriculum development. Apple (1982) argues that the state shape curricula, particularly the type of knowledge that needs to be included. Hirst (1972) contends that knowledge is about relative power struggles regarding universal truths enshrined in doctrinal disciplines. Issues of power permeate much of the literature in the area and for that reason it is important that this question be included as part of the research design.

Research Question 5: Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?

Pinar (2006) calls on educators to reassert their intellectual commitment and fight for a curriculum that extends the learners' self and society. Apple (1982) asks educators to exercise their voice and contribute to the struggle and contradictions that permeate curricula in particular with the state. Stenhouse (1983) is concerned that the objectives based approach may diminish educators' autonomy, and Barnett and Coate (2006) discuss the tension that exists between discipline and subject expertise. In this uncertain and messy space of education and curriculum development it is fitting to explore how educators feel empowered, or can be re-energised and invigorated around curriculum development.

Research Question 6: How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?

The following table presents the research questions in full. Appendix 2 shows how these questions are aligned with the literature and codes used for analysis, discussed later in this chapter.

Table 1: Research Questions

1. What do educators see the purpose of education as being?
2. What are educators' experiences of curriculum development discourse?
3. Are educators' philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?
4. What contextual factors do educators see influencing the practice of curriculum development?
5. Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?
6. How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?

Research Design

Cohen et al (2007) remind us that it is not possible to completely remove all threats to validity and reliability in research. Our aim as researchers is to lessen the threats through attention and intention. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) argue that the term reliability is not appropriate in qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln have difficulty using the terms reliability and validity with qualitative research and suggest 'credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.24). Silverman (2007) maintain that reliability and validity is challenging in the natural and social environment because it is always in a state of flux. Notwithstanding these views, by making every effort to carry out systematic and methodical research we can attend to issues of reliability and validity in an intentional way, to create more trustworthy and dependable data collection, analysis and interpretation. The research design, discussed in this section, demonstrates the methodical and structured manner in which this data was collected and analysed. Additionally, the use of an advisory group is discussed and will, I argue, attend to concerns of dependability and trustworthiness of data collection and interpretation in this study. Also, using the advisory group to validate coding added to the credibility of analysis. The use of the advisory group was crucial in my mind, most particularly because of the use of discourse analysis as a methodology whereby the analysis was less about quantifying contributions and more about illumination of practice.

Sample

Access to participants can sometimes be difficult (Denscombe, 2007; Newby, 2010). Selection of participants was purposive, based on their recent or current involvement in curriculum development thus having recent knowledge and experience of same, and on their availability to partake in the research. It is essential that a valid framework be used for choosing groups. In the case of this research the framework is one of, what Newby (2010, p.350) refers to as 'uniform status'. The participants used in this research were uniform in that they are all educators and were all involved in recent curriculum development processes. However, there was also some heterogeneity in that they were from diverse disciplines, had different curriculum development experiences, and worked in four different colleges. Cohen et al (2007) recommend that 'where there is heterogeneity in the population, then a larger sample must be selected on some basis that respects heterogeneity' (Cohen et al, 2007, p.105). In discussing the size Cohen et al (2007) use an example of six within a homogenous group. This study had thirty-five participants in all. In affirmation of the sample size, Scott and Morrison (2007) say that the sample used for researchers employing interviews is usually small and purposively chosen. Newby (2010) advises of the trade-off involved regarding the potential richness of data provided through a small number of in-depth interviews and large-scale surveys. The cost in terms of time and money of interviewing vast numbers of people is almost prohibitive. Indeed if the study did engage in wide-ranging in-depth interviews over prolonged time the world or social context of curriculum development may potentially vary significantly from those interviewed at the earlier part of the cycle to those interviewed towards the end. This would be contrary to the theoretical framework of post-structuralism, which frames this inquiry. As deliberated above, this research is situated within a post-structural theoretical framework - offering insight into values and beliefs about curriculum development in a narrow context, higher education across four providers, and pertains to a particular snapshot in time; and so it is appropriate to use a reasonably small number of participants for the interviews and focus groups.

Four colleges took part in the study, two from the private and two from the Institute of Technology (IOT) sectors. The private sector was included because that is where I work and as such is my primary area of interest in terms of curriculum development practice. Inclusion of two colleges from the IOT sector was to bring objectivity and

breadth to the study, and the additional private college was included for balance. The Universities could have been included but I do not have the same access opportunities there as in the private and IOT areas. Cohen et al (2007) remind us that access to the sample must be practicable and permitted. The selection of colleges to participate in the study was non-probable, meaning that I targeted the colleges deliberately. Cohen et al (2007) acknowledge that non-probability samples are ‘frequently the case in small-scale research...because despite the disadvantages that arise from their non-representativeness, they are far less complicated...and adequate where researchers do not intend to generalize their finding beyond the sample in question’ (Cohen et al, 2007, p.113). Over the last eight years I have been invited to present academic workshops in various IOT and private colleges across Ireland. As I had a history of collaborating and providing academic development workshops to the colleges in the study I felt confident of their support. I spoke to my counterpart in each college – that is educational developers – by phone initially to gauge their interest, then followed up more formally with the invitation and consent forms via email. Each college secured academic approval for the study. (See appendix 1.1 for invitation email and academic approval consent form).

As with the sample colleges participating in this research, participant sample within each college was non-probable. The instructions given to educational developers convening the interviews and focus groups is in appendix 1.1. Essentially they were asked to invite about six educators who had been involved in curriculum development between 2012-14 for a focus group, and two educators who led curriculum development teams in the same time period for in-depth interviews. Participant’s discipline background and curriculum development experience varied significantly, both within and across colleges. This was anticipated, and welcomed, because the diversity stimulated discussion, contributed to capacity building and agency around curriculum development, and illuminated a host of different experiences and viewpoints.

Reciprocal arrangements were negotiated with some of the institutions by way of access, and thanks. The reciprocal relationship was one whereby the researcher provided bespoke workshops on curriculum development issues to two of the providers. In one case this was provided on the day of an interview, and in the other

case it was negotiated for a date three months down the line. Additionally all colleges participating in the research requested the findings and recommendations be presented to the college in order to inform future curriculum development practices in each institution.

As discussed above, the discourse from educators was used as one layer of data. In keeping with discourse analysis other discourses were used. These included what Taylor (2012) refers to as found documents - strategy documents from three out of the four colleges, the fourth college was in the process of designing a new strategy and the old strategy was not current enough for inclusion; and discourse from validation panels who examined new curricula submissions, offered input and guidance, and ultimately recommended to the awarding body, QQI, that the curriculum be validated. There were seven of such reports used all between 2012 – 2014 time periods. The following table (table 2) provides an overview of texts/discourses used.

Table 2: Texts and Discourses

	College A	College B	College C	College D
Focus Group	√	√	√	√
Interview 1	√	√	√	√
Interview 2	√	√	√	√
Interview 3	X	X	√	X
Strategy Document	√	X	√	√
Validation Panel Report 1	√	√	√	√
Validation Panel Report 2	√	√	√	X

As can be seen there were twenty-three different texts analysed and interpreted in total, across four different discourses – four focus group transcripts with educators’ working as part of a curriculum development team, nine interview transcripts with curriculum development team leaders, three strategy documents, and seven validation panel reports; and from four different colleges – two from the private sector, and two from the IOT sector.

Methods

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the paradigmatic influences underpinning this inquiry are constructivist and transformative. Research methods that offer opportunities to construct multiple realities through interacting with educators in the social world of curriculum development were appropriate. Denscombe (2007) argues that the potential for interviews ‘...is better exploited when they are applied to the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena’. It was the subtleties regarding the influences of educators’ philosophical and discipline knowledge and beliefs on curriculum development that were of pertinence to this study, therefore interviews and focus groups were used as methods of inquiry. In support of this, Scott and Morison (2006, p.133) state that the most common of all methods used in education are interviews, with face-to-face used more frequently as it facilitates building of relationships and rapport with the interviewee. Relationship building was crucial in this inquiry in terms of building trust and confidence, to enable educators to engage with, and frankly share curriculum development practices.

Newby (2010) suggests three types of interviews - in-depth, cognitive, and collective. Cognitive interviews were not apposite in this research as their focus is on problem solving. However a combination of one to one in-depth interviews and collective focus groups were appropriate. The rationale being that they provided the opportunity for deep exploration of feelings and beliefs, enabling a rich understanding of curriculum development practice. Semi-structured interviews allowed for collection of data through using prompts and indicators relating to the research questions (Newby, 2010). Appendix 2.1 provides a tabulated alignment of research questions, codes, interview, context setting and prompts. It shows how the relevant curriculum development concepts and context, explored in chapter two, are aligned with the research questions and provide the context behind the prompts used. In planning the questions used to illicit and guide contributions for data collection, Newby (2010) recommends using simple vocabulary that avoids prejudice, ambiguity and imprecision. In addition he cautions against use of leading, double-barrelled, speculative or sensitive questions. The questions used should be open-ended to enable elicitation of views and opinion of the interviewees (Cohen et al, 2007; Creswell, 2013). The use of an advisory group during phase one (see figure 1 below in research process) facilitated reviewing the semi-structured questions and prompts to ensure they were more reflective of Newby’s

recommendations. The research semi-structure went through many iterations before final use, and even at the final point was only provided as a guide and discussions often deviated from the initial format. This flexibility through a semi-structured approach offered fluidity and flexibility, thereby enabling deeper exploration and probing to help clarify people's beliefs and views (Newby, 2010). My role as moderator, according to Newby (2010) was to be passive but not dull, yet to stimulate and maintain interest and engagement whilst at the same time to remain neutral.

A total of nine in-depth interviews were conducted – two each in three of the colleges; one college received three positive responses from curriculum development leaders and so I conducted interviews with all three. Four focus groups were conducted in total. There were eight participants in the first focus group, seven in the second, five in the next and six in the final focus group conducted – giving a total of twenty-six educators who were involved in curriculum development during 2012-14. For the purpose of this research, it was not necessary for all participants in a focus group to have been involved in the same curriculum developmental process, because in keeping with discourse analysis the inquiry was not about any one group, individual or institution. The variety of experiences within each focus group worked well because contributions shared triggered further discussion of different experiences. Again, this is a feature of discourse analysis and allowed participants and myself to de-construct and challenge existing practices in light of other experiences shared. In addition, bringing a mixed group together stimulated greater discussion thereby reducing risk of groupthink. Newby (2010) suggests the strength of the focus group is that the structure is not limiting and allows the discussions to evolve to some extent, but within a structure reflecting research objectives. The aim of the focus group is to ‘...yield a collective rather than individual view...hence the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer’ (Cohen et al, 2007, p.376). The use of focus groups in this research facilitated interaction and thus often moved the discourse into directions that had not initially been considered. Again, this is reflective of discourse analysis principles, and added to the richness of the findings as discussed in chapter four.

Advisory Group

Advisory groups are used in circumstances where capacity building is important, and when the researcher is closely intertwined with the research and participants. The research design adopted for this inquiry used an advisory group to reflect inclusive practices, and practices of capacity building, in addition to acting as a sounding board as suggested by Porter et al (2006, p.11). The advisory group did not inform the research aim and objectives. They were convened to help bring greater objectivity and robustness to the methodology and analysis. For this reason I argue that it is acceptable that they did not inform the research objective and questions. However, this must be acknowledged as a limitation, and is discussed as such in the concluding chapter.

Convenience sampling, also referred to as accidental or opportunity sampling, was used to draw the advisory group of six work colleagues together. They were chosen for their central role in curriculum development, and their willingness and availability to consult in this manner. Cohen et al (2007, p.114) say a sample chosen in this way does not claim to represent any group ‘apart from itself’. As such, generalizations about the wider population cannot be drawn; which fits with the purpose and brief of the advisory group in this context. The advisory group were not part of the sample and were never used as such. The dual role of the advisory group for this research was to contribute to (i) capacity building in the curriculum development processes; and (ii) the validity and reliability of the research by bringing greater objectivity and reducing reliance on researcher reflexivity. This is reflective of Porter et al (2006, p.12) who suggest that the use of advisory groups as part of a participatory approach is not just to redress imbalances, but also to contribute to quality research.

As discussed above, the first consultation with the advisory group was during phase one (see figure 1 below for research process) where they were asked to advise on the semi-structured design for interviews and focus groups. In particular the focus was on the questions or prompts used to illicit participant discourse and contribution, and issues of language, sequence and possible areas or topics of inclusion and exclusion. Through three advisory group meetings over a two week period, several iterations were made to the initial semi-structure for focus groups and interviews. The effect was to develop a more concise and clear set of questions and prompts that were more accessible by participants. The advisory group drove this process by challenging the

underlying meaning of questions and prompts being suggested; asking what I expected to glean from participants as a result of using such prompts. In many cases the advisory group argued the initial language was too jargonistic and relied on participants having more in-depth knowledge of curriculum development concepts and history. In addition, members of the advisory group attempted to answer some of the questions. This facilitated identification of questions that were not specific enough in terms of addressing the research objectives and questions, and so re-wording was in order. This full process proved invaluable at the data collection phase. See appendix two for final semi-structured approach used to guide both in-depth interviews and focus groups.

During phase two, a different member of the advisory group sat in on each focus group as an observer, and took feedback notes. This required quite a commitment from each member, especially in cases where long journeys and overnight stays were necessary which was the situation in two out of the four colleges. In these situations I aligned the advisor with some collaborative opportunity in the participating college. For example, one member met with the head of a similar faculty to discuss possible discipline specific collaborative projects between both institutions. The other advisor met with a colleague who had presented at a conference on a topic that was of interest to her. In both cases I sought to find the added value and create an opportunity for the advisors by way of recognising the effort required on each of their behalf. Following each of the four focus groups a debriefing session was conducted with the advisor and learnings from these sessions informed future focus groups and interviews. Two different devices were used for recording the interviews and focus groups. One was an iPhone and the other was an iPad smart recorder app. The smart recorder software facilitated tagging notes and feedback at certain points of the recording of the interview or focus group. This proved beneficial in terms of annotating initial thoughts and advisor feedback during debriefing sessions. In addition, advisors emailed me in-depth notes they took during the sessions, these assisted in interpreting the analysis. It is fair to say that I did not envisage the advisory group element of the research to be as valuable and insightful as it was. It is a process, as a researcher, I will endeavour to always adopt. After deliberation and consultation with my supervisor and the advisory group, it was decided that an advisor should not sit in on the in-depth interviews as it might disrupt the natural one-to-one dynamic and rapport building.

The advisory group also inputted in two different ways during the final analysis and interpretation phase of the research. This was of particular benefit, most especially because four members of the advisory group assisted in collecting the data and as such were well positioned to help interpret and nuance same in an informed way, and the two remaining members were relatively removed from the data and so were in a position to objectively advise me on coding. The four advisors who sat in on each focus group read the initial analysis and interpretation chapter and provided feedback. They were asked to read through the chapter in general terms and let me know whether it was broadly reflective of their memory of the focus group; and to consider whether there was any element of the chapter that glaringly contradicted with their recall of the focus group session. It is acknowledged that this was quite a subjective activity because the chapter was only provided to the four advisors almost a year later, and it must be remembered that each member only sat in on one focus group whereas the chapter was an analysis and interpretation of all discourses used in the research. However, it was a useful process because in most cases – three out of four – the advisors came back with questions which caused me to refine the chapter and offer greater clarity around some of the discussions. The fourth advisor was happy with the chapter. A concluding role for the advisory group during the final phase was to check the coding. Initially I had not considered this a requirement. However, when I was immersed in the data in an effort to code it, it became apparent that some objectivity was required. This is referred to in greater detail later in the chapter under coding the data section. However, it is pertinent to discuss it in this context as reassurance in terms of increased validity and reliability of the findings through use of an advisory group.

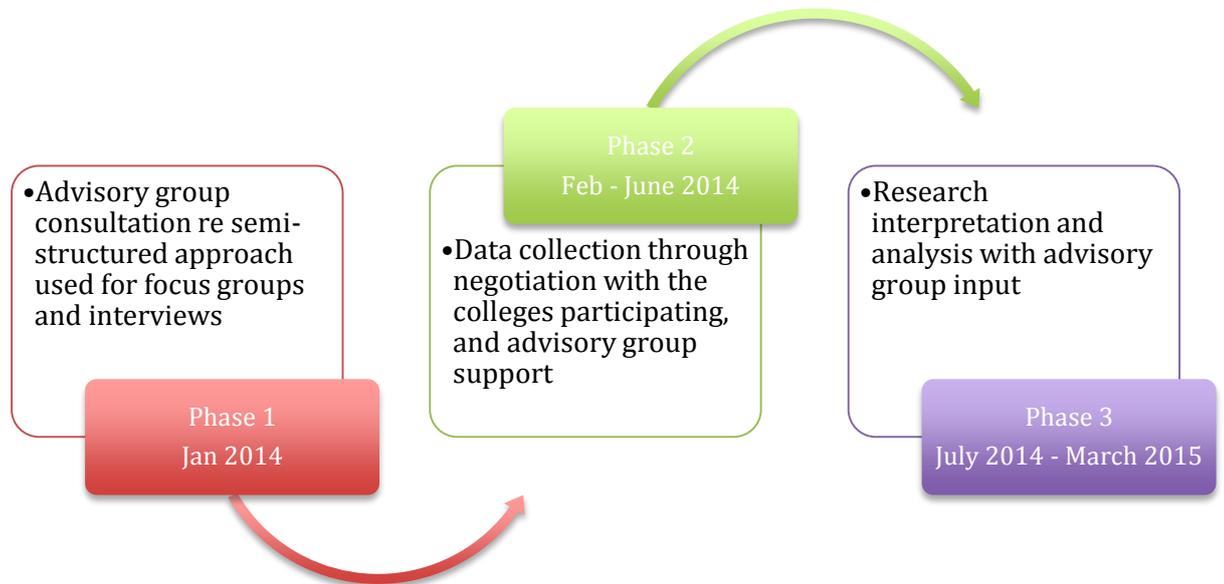
Process

Following QUB ethical approval in December 2013 (see appendix 3, and discussion below on research ethics) a three-phased research process commenced, see process flowchart in figure 1 below:

- Phase 1: Advisory group was formed and used to inform research design. Information sheets and consent forms for the advisory group are in appendix 1.2.
- Phase 2: Nine in-depth interviews and four focus groups were conducted across four providers of higher education. Information sheets and consent forms used during this phase can be found in appendix 1.3.

- Phase 3: Researcher analysed and interpreted the research with input from the advisory group.

Figure 1: Research Process



As discussed above, the advisory group were convened to bring greater validity and reliability, and to contribute to capacity building and educator agency in curriculum development. Initial consultation with the advisory group took a month whereby we met on three different occasions to inform and advance the tools being used to gather data in the focus groups and interviews. There were six members of the advisory group and they each had to sign confidentiality forms (see appendix 1.1).

With regard to the focus groups, I conducted all four and, as discussed above, a member of the advisory group sat in on each as an observer. Each focus group lasted between seventy and ninety minutes. I sought permission to record the full discussion and had these recordings professional transcribed. Participants received an information letter in advance of the focus group although the reality was that most had not read it beforehand. In any event, by way of relaxing participants into the focus group I discussed the research using the letter as a guide. In doing this I introduced myself and outlined my background and motivation for the study. This was followed by a brief description of the inquiry and their role in it, in particular the use of a focus group to

help build curriculum discourse capacity. I also shared with them the manner in which I would manage data confidentially and report it anonymously explaining that this was a key feature of using an advisory group. Following an opportunity for questions and answers, they were each invited to sign a consent form. This introductory process took about fifteen minutes. Once all participants signed the consent forms I then provided a very short description of the structure for the focus groups (see first paragraph in focus group structure appendix 2.2). Although the structure was useful it was always used in a flexible manner. Within the structure, on the advice of the advisory group, I used one or two sentences to help contextualise the discussion before leading into the broad questions (see appendix 2.2). For the most part focus group discussions deviated towards an area I had targeted for later discussion but in order to work with the flow I allowed the conversation to evolve. The structure was used more a type of check list to ensure I had sought discussion on all topics. Indeed frequently during the focus groups I would seek participants pardon while I checked with the structure to ensure I had addressed everything I wanted to. Transcripts from each were significantly different reflecting the fluid and dynamic flow of each unique focus group. There is a sample extract from one of the focus group transcripts in appendix 2.3 which demonstrates the departure from script and structure thereby offering greater fluidity to contributions and discussion. This flexibility was an essential component of the focus group dynamics because one of key objectives in this study was capacity building through affording educators an opportunity to freely engage in curricula discourse. The practice of facilitating each focus group was iterative and evolving. From my perspective the experience of conducting focus groups was one of learning by doing and was most definitely a baptism of fire. I was concerned that the flexibility that I allowed in the focus group discussions might have the effect of having different data sets. However, this is a recognised reality with social research in particular where focus groups are used.

Data collection took place over five months. As discussed above, in two cases the data was collected over a day and half. This was to accommodate the geographical locations. Whilst this was efficient it was difficult on both the advisor and myself. We had to take leave from work, travel long distances, and stay overnight. Scheduling the more local interviews and focus groups was challenging in terms of syncing diaries and surprisingly took more time than I expected. For example one interview or focus

group required a half day's leave from work. I had employed a remote transcriber who agreed to transcribe within 1 -2 weeks of each session. This had the effect of reducing the time required for transcription in one lot at the end of the data collection phase, so when I completed the final interview I was almost ready to commence coding.

The data analysis and interpretation period was nine months. The first four months were exclusively devoted to coding the data. The subsequent five months involved analysing and interpreting the codes through dated annotations as recommended by Cohen et al (2007). This phase is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. The reality is that as a method, discourse analysts are '...faced with the prospects of learning by doing as [we] employ a particular analytical technique, interpreting meaning as [we] go along and giving voice to multiple meanings' (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p.11). I have found this to be very true. In my experience much of my learning was through doing. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this research is reflective of Taylor's (2012, p.268) practice of discourse analysis which is '...the idea of discourse as consisting of groups of related statements which cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world'. It was about building a picture of curriculum development discourse and practice that was representative of current practice, 2012-2014.

Research Ethics

Hammersley & Traianou (2012) discuss moral and ethical dilemmas researchers face. The issues pertinent to this study include how ethical judgments were made in terms of evaluating the data, and how I attended to the political concern of value-commitments. Regarding ethical judgements and evaluation, I argue that the explicit presentation of my research methodology, process, and analysis, in this chapter and the next chapter, assures attention to ethical judgments vis-à-vis evaluation of data collected. The issue of value-commitments relates to the consequences for some institutions, in particular my own, as a result of the findings. The contribution to curriculum development that this piece of research offers have already begun to impact on my day job. This is discussed in more detail in the final chapter. For this reason it is important that analysis and interpretation be carried out as objectively as possible, notwithstanding researcher reflexivity, discussed next in this chapter. The use of an

advisory group helped to mitigate against the risk of value-commitments motivating the interpretation, and subsequent findings. Furthermore, following certain rules or codes assisted in safeguarding contributions through confidentiality and anonymity. Hammersley and Traianou (2012, p.20) claim the two most influential views of ethics are deontological and consequentialist. Consequentialists view studies as being about achieving the best possible outcome when all things are considered. Whereas deontologists allow rules regarding duties and rights to guide the study, as was the case with this research. The rules or codes used were the QUB Code of Conduct and Integrity in Research (QUB, 2014) and the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011). The BERA code places responsibility to participants as a central ethical duty. I argue that this study complies with said duty through the use of voluntary informed consent, by letting the participants know about their right to withdraw, and my commitment to keeping the data confidential and reporting it anonymously. These issues are addressed in the information letter and consent forms issued to all participants (see appendix 1.3). Additionally, all participants received an email just before the research was complete and disseminated, reminding them about the anonymous element of participation in the focus group (see appendix 1.4). I did not think it reasonable to ask them to keep the focus group discussion confidential because this would be contradictory to capacity building principles discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Additionally this inquiry complies with the principles of good research practice as presented in the QUB code (QUB, 2014, p.3). In the same way that BERA does, the QUB code requires the researcher to demonstrate a care of duty to participants. This requires my storing the data safely and securely for five years, ensuring analysis and findings are presented anonymously, that I carried out the research with integrity and openness, and secured QUB ethical approval, which was granted on 12th December 2013 - see appendix 4.

Practitioner as Researcher

As a practitioner I am embedded in curriculum development, and work closely with many of the educators who participated in the inquiry. For this reason it was important that I consider the concept of reflexivity, in particular the influence of personal reflexivity on this research. Scott and Morrison (2007, p.201) define reflexivity as ‘...the process by which the researcher comes to understand how they are positioned

in relation to the knowledge they are producing' and continue by saying that reflexivity is characteristic of research '...where the [research] subject and object are not clearly separated' (Scott and Morrison, 2007, p.203). Personal reflexivity refers to '...the personal context in which the research is positioned' (Scott and Morrison, 2007, p.202). A characteristic of discourse analysis is that 'discourse analytic methods are unavoidably reflexive because the strong social constructivist epistemology that forms its foundation applies equally to the work of academic researchers' (Philips and Hardy, 2002, p.10). My personal context significantly impacts this inquiry, even if it is on a subconscious level. It is important that this declaration is made with particular reference to the possible influence or impact my personal autobiography has on both the collection and interpretation of the data. This is not to imply a solipsistic viewpoint; rather the intention is to make explicit my biographical journey in order to allow readers discern its possible impact. The issue of personal reflexivity may impact on some people's beliefs around the validity of the research. Guba and Lincoln (2005, p.205) state that one of the issues around validity is '...the conflation between method and interpretation'. Within a personal reflexivity context this issue may be more disquieting, and can impact on buy-in to the research findings, particularly from policy makers who may feel the rigor of the research is questionable. Notwithstanding the fact that the use of an advisory group, discussed above, helped to mitigate against this concern, my role as a practitioner and researcher is a limitation and is discussed as such in the final chapter.

Data Analysis: Codes and Themes

Coding for analysis was assigned at design stage based on theoretical codes related to research questions informed by the literature review, as discussed above and in chapter two. This is consistent with some qualitative research practice - '...a major feature of qualitative research is that analysis often begins early on in the data collection process' (Cohen et al, 2007, p.462). MacMillan (2005) draws on the work of Porter and Wetherell (1987) in her discussion on evaluating discourse analysis, and says that coding in the early stages of analysis facilitates a broad overview of the data, and is acceptable practice in this manner, but only if the coding directly relates to the research questions, as is the case with this study. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) suggest that coding at an early stage is common in discourse analysis because it facilitates the

researcher in discovering broad areas and patterns within the discourse. The codes used for analysis, and related research questions guiding this inquiry, were:

1. Purpose of higher education
What do educators see the purpose of higher education as being?
2. Practice(s) of curriculum development discourse
What are educators' experiences of curriculum development discourse?
3. Educators' philosophical beliefs
Are educators' philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?
4. Context and landscape of higher education
What contextual factors do educators see influencing the practice of curriculum development?
5. Loci, or perceived loci, of power
Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?
6. Empowerment and agency
How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?

As discussed earlier in this chapter (see table 2 above), there were twenty-three texts coded, across four curriculum development discourses, within four different providers of higher education. These texts signal something to the world of curriculum development. As a discourse analyst I attempted to construe the context of the discourse across texts used in this space. This poses, as Philips and Hardy (2002) suggest, major challenges in the selection of and allocation of excerpts to the codes, and manageability of same. Firstly, transcripts and recordings from a total of nine in-depth interviews with leaders of curriculum development teams in four separate providers of higher education, were coded. The second discourse used came from transcripts and recordings from four focus groups, one in each of the institutions involved in the study. Where available, current strategy documents were used as a third form of discourse for analysis. This was available in three out of the four institutions. The fourth institution was working on a new strategy document and I felt the previous document was not current enough to be used in a meaningful way in the context of this inquiry. The final discourse came in the form of curriculum development validation panel reports. The panels consisted of members of the external community of discipline and teaching experts. They work in compliance with regulations outlined by

QQI, the accrediting body for higher education programmes in Ireland (QQI, 2010). There were a total of seven recent panel reports across all four institutions analysed. As discussed above, the validation panel reports and strategy documents are what Taylor (2012) refers to as found documents and Gee (2014) as conversations with a capital c.

Coding of texts took four months. This involved presenting the data sets – four different discourses - by code, as recommended by Cohen et al (2007). In keeping with discourse analysis, coding ran across all four discourses and did not seek to categorise based on any individual, group, or institution. NVivo was used as a tool to manage the coding process. It was not used for analysis. MacMillan (2005) provided practical evidence of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as NVivo and Atlas.ti, for discourse analysis. Despite Gibbs et al (2002) saying there are some qualitative approaches that have little use of CAQDAS, one being discourse analysis; and Hardt-Mautner (1995) arguing that anything which facilitates distance between the texts and coding is not to be promoted, MacMillan (2005) and Taylor (2014) both support the use of CAQDAS to help organize data i.e. code the data, but not analyse it. They are quite particular about CAQDAS not being used to quantify use of language or statements in texts as this would be contrary to discourse analysis principles. This study does not seek to quantify findings in any way. In fact the adverse is true. NVivo was used to manage the coding process by assigning excerpts from the texts to the pre-allocated codes. It facilitated, what MacMillan (2005) refers to as searching and retrieving segments of data in the context of the text. NVivo also has the capacity to import voice recordings, but unfortunately not with Mac applications, which was used for this part of the analysis. However, the manner in which NVivo filed the texts allowed for easy reference to recordings and other supporting texts when required. Additionally NVivo permitted use of pdf documents which meant pdf strategy and validation report documents were able to be coded. Once the data was coded, a review process was initiated involving both myself and a member of the advisory group. In some instances this involved re-coding. A member of the advisory group reviewed sample texts and codes. She was one of the remaining two advisors who was not involved in observing any of the focus groups. I felt it was important to bring a completely new and objective eye to the coding process. The approach was one of blind review whereby the advisor was given three ‘virgin’ texts

and the set of six codes – interview and focus group transcripts, and a validation panel report, each from a different institution. She was asked to use comment boxes to signify excerpts and codes of her choosing. This required exploratory discussions with the advisor to consult why coding was assigned, in particular when it was not something that I picked up on during my coding. This process was useful in terms of validating the coding, but it was very time-consuming.

Coding the data by research question had the advantage of organising and collating the data in a way that I had thought might answer the research questions. However, it quickly became apparent that this was not going to work. As I commenced analysis and interpretation by comparing and analysing codes it became clear that there were a number of unexpected narratives emerging, and in an effort to remain true to discourse analysis I had to find some way of acknowledging and reporting these narratives. Additionally, there were many overlapping narratives across the codes. This interpretation was a reflexive and reactive interaction between the data and I, and is an acceptable tactic during analysis and interpretation process (Cohen et al, 2007, p.469). Consequently, for the subsequent five of the nine month analysis and interpretation phase (phase three of the research process – see figure 1 above) I immersed myself in the coded data by annotating and dating my comments and reflections by way of memos. Cohen et al (2007, p.469) discuss this process as more data, or secondary data to further help with analysis and interpretation. The dated memos were linked across codes to provide common narratives or patterns. These narratives were then grouped into five themes – curriculum development teams; curriculum development discourse; educators’ philosophical beliefs; industry driven curriculum; and regulatory framework. There was some overlap and similarity between codes and themes. Appendix 4 shows the codes and number of assigned excerpts from the different discourses, along with the themes identified within each code by way of demonstrating strength of codes across themes, but not to quantify or prove findings.

Summary

My aim in this chapter was to reassure readers that the research was conducted robustly and ethically with care and integrity. This is often more onerous for qualitative researchers than quantitative researchers which is no harm because in setting out the process for conducting the research in such a detailed and explicit manner, concerns

are allayed regarding dependability and credibility of findings which are presented in the next chapter. I argue that the theoretical framework of post-structuralism fits well with the methodology of discourse analysis. Post-structuralism is about deconstructing social activities with a view to seeing things in a new way, and is done so within each unique setting and time. I deem discourse analysis as an appropriate methodology within this framework because it is not about universal truths, but rather about exploring theory and practice through discourse and allowing varied discourses illuminate the social activity of curriculum development in the context of this inquiry.

The research questions resulted from the concepts and context of curriculum development traversed in the previous chapter and corresponding codes allowed for initial coding using NVivo to help manage the data. The data was collected using in-depth interviews and focus groups across four different providers of higher education. Additionally, found documents such as institutional strategies and validation panel reports were used as further discourses for coding. The use of an advisory group during phases one to three of the research process contributed to the credibility of the findings and interpretation discussed in the next chapter

CHAPTER 4

Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

In this chapter analysis and interpretation of the data is presented. The fundamental aim of the research was to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice, and discourse in the context of higher education. Having opportunities to engage in this type of conversation is rare for educators today. This research is novel because the methodology offers educators such an opportunity, whilst simultaneously and just as importantly, the inquiry explores current curriculum development practices. In this way the research methodology is part of the practice of curriculum development in that the opportunity it offers for such critical discourse will in and of itself inform curriculum development practices, which is congruent with discourse analysis. Discourse analysis poses occasion for a multi-layered and contextual approach to analysis of data. Analysis of different discourses in this manner presents a broader context to frame the discussion. Gee (2014) argues that discourse analysis is not simply about talking the talk, but also about the way in which the talk influences the walk. The use of found documents helps to explore in what way the talk is being walked. Contributions, in the context of discourse analysis, are a bid by participants for recognition and identity. Their collective recognition and identities construct a snapshot of current curriculum development practices. Equally, it is about socially constructed realities and for this reason not about quantifying any findings or proving anything conclusively in relation to curriculum development practice. However it is important to position the findings in a way that is reflective of current curriculum development discourse and practice. In keeping with discourse analysis, consistent patterns and variations are presented as narratives and related narratives are grouped together and organised as themes. At all times the analysis was cognisant of the way in which the discourses create the social reality. Of equal concern was the need to be true to all voices and not just the voices or opinions that had widespread agreement. The analysis was not about providing quantifiable answers to the research questions i.e. counting distribution of answers across texts in order to make an inference. It was about the conservation or conversations that are sometimes

lost or overlooked through counting qualitative contributions. As outlined in the previous chapter, five themes emerged from the data – curriculum development teams; curriculum development discourse; the impact of educators’ philosophical beliefs on curriculum development; industry driven curriculum development; and influence of the regulatory framework.

Curriculum Development Teams

This first theme illuminated unexpected narratives regarding the basis for team composition including curriculum development team size. This was not necessarily exposed in the literature review, or a view that I had considered in advance of the research. Frequently in my role I am exposed to anecdotal feedback regarding the practice of curriculum development, the actual mechanisms used for composition of the team developing curricula was not one I had come across in advance of the research. Other narratives included in this theme are issues regarding discord and engagement of team members involved in curriculum development, and the impact of power balance and decision making within teams. The final narrative explored within this theme is one of shared vision or absence of same for curricula being developed. The unexpected narrative of team composition could unlock some of the challenges espoused in developing a shared vision for programmes.

Team Composition

The data threw up inconsistencies regarding the basis for team size and team composition. Team size varied significantly both within and across participating colleges. For example one interviewee (CollegeC) cited the following experience:

We had a very big steering group of 30 to 40 people. We divided up the tasks – some looked for content and ideas from the sector in the programme field and discipline, others went to industry, and some looked at the international experience...you'd have to read around a lot. Then we would try to distil down what the course is about and go about designing it (CollegeC_Interview1).

There were many inconsistencies regarding team size, indeed participants within the same college had a different experience regarding the number engaged in developing curricula:

Industry came to us with a requirement and a few of us sat down with industry and teased out how the programme might look (College C_FocusGroup)

Notwithstanding the issue regarding team size, it is interesting to see the process that teams adopt in terms of seeking content for inclusion. In many cases it appears to be a negotiated experience within what Bernstein (1971) refers to as an integrated or weakly classified approach as discussed in chapter two.

The experience of working with large teams was not widespread. The data shows the general practice being of smaller teams with some examples of discipline groups developing streams across a programme or 'throughlines' in an interdisciplinary manner as Pinar (2006) advocates, discussed in chapter two. In fact all of the colleges experienced some form of discipline or cross-discipline discourse taking place. Some experiences were in relation to streams across programmes for discussion of content overlap and inclusion throughout delivery of the programme, others to integrate assessment strategies, with some using discipline teams for curriculum development, for example:

So I mean typically what would happen is if you are developing a new programme, you might have a number of formal meetings where everyone's together and working through it, but there'll be lots of site meetings taking place as well. So the sociologists would go off, three or four of them, and they would talk about their modules and how they're doing, how the psychologists were doing. So there's lots of deals done and ideas thrashed about, which people come back with and say, 'We're going to do this because of this. (CollegeD_FocusGroup)

This is reflective of some of the earlier literature discussed in chapter two in the area regarding indoctrination of learners into a discipline for example Hirst (1974) and Pinar et al (1995); and Stenhouse's (1975) call for curriculum knowledge based within disciplines where learning is through inquiring into the discipline. There appears to be a type of negotiation and navigation through the development process illustrating the tension that Barnett and Coate (2006) discuss in relation to discipline expertise and subject expertise. Interestingly in the excerpt above is the notion of 'deals' being struck, this resonates with issues regarding the curriculum debate in relation to two opposing traditions - neo-conservative traditionalists; and technical-instrumentalists Moore and Young (2001).

The optimal size of a curriculum development team or steering group was not fully addressed in either the literature or the data. It is an interesting question, and certainly one that could be probed further in some future piece of research. Regardless of optimum number, the practice of convening groups in and of itself is interesting.

Mechanisms and approaches for convening teams was, again, largely absent from the literature, with the exception of discussions regarding discipline or interdisciplinary groups. Literature in the area (Barnett and Coate, 2006; Pinar, 2006) recommends an interdisciplinary strategy across academic disciplines which facilitates what Pinar (2006, p.2) refers to as a 'conceptual montage' of inputs to curriculum. Notwithstanding the literature, the data showed the manner in which teams were convened is inconsistent. In the main, the data analysed across all four colleges showed that assembling curriculum development teams was largely based on willing and motivated workers, and not always, as one might expect, on discipline or subject expertise, for example:

As a leader I choose people who I can work with...you need ones who want the programme to succeed ...if you just pick anybody the programme may not have the X factor” (CollegeC_Interview1);

My philosophy has always been we work with the people we can work with initially on the development team. They need to be passionate because there is a huge amount of work involved, on top of their existing workload (CollegeD_Interview1).

Indeed, working with an engaged and passionate team was found to be either of equal, or more importance to expertise in most colleges, evidenced in the following:

If you're putting together a team, you need people who are experts in their field and passionate about teaching. Both are equally important (participant A)...

...Although sometimes passion is more important. You could be an absolute expert in something, but if you have no passion for it, it's not going to transfer, is it? (participant C, CollegeD_FocusGroup).

The discussions regarding convening teams based on willingness and motivation to work received a lot of attention and input, and in many ways appeared to validate continuation of such practices evident in the widespread acceptance for such an approach evidenced in the lack of concern for this approach. In some cases, the data showed that development teams were convened entirely based on availability of members. For example where module electives were not running in a semester or year, or where lecturers were returning from maternity leave mid-semester and had no teaching load, they were asked to lead or work on a new programme. This speaks to challenges uncovered in the data regarding availability of resources, in particular appropriate expertise; and the influence of this when convening a curriculum development team. Some colleges enjoyed the freedom to recruit part-time lecturing staff to plug discipline or knowledge expert gaps, for example:

We noticed early on in the design phase that we had a knowledge gap within our team, so we brought in someone who was actually teaching it around and she became part of the team even though she wasn't even on the staff (participant A)...

...when we had the new xxx course coming, we realised we'd need more specialists so as part of the course being ratified, we were going to get new staff members in (participant B, College D_FocusGroup).

This was not the experience of all colleges who participated in the research. In particular one college's experience of recruitment embargos resulted in them having to draw on existing modules running elsewhere in the college to fill new programmes, with the emphasis on looking for a close fit rather than best fit, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

There are constraints and limitations when you are developing programmes (participant A)...

We have ended up borrowing or sharing subjects with a couple of programmes (participant B)...

We have to try and make a problem work with existing resources (participant C, CollegeC_FocusGroup).

Or in the same institution this challenge was addressed by motivated passionate internal staff bringing themselves up to speed. But the obvious ramifications of this approach was the lack of subject and discipline experience in some cases; and in other cases settling for inclusion of a subject that was already on offer in the institution and it being of close fit, but not best fit. The experience of resource restrictions is not new or uncommon. As discussed in chapter two, Toohey (1999) presents her synopsis of the current landscape of higher education, as one of reduced resources and additional challenges, and Bernstein (1996) also cited resource constraints as a challenge for learner centred curriculum development foci. This is a recurrent theme in the history of curriculum development as more recently Barnett (2011, 2013) addressed the problem of restricted resources. Interestingly, in weaving the validation panel reports through the analysis, concern regarding team composition was not uncovered.

Discord and Engagement

An outlying narrative that was not widespread in the data, but is of interest in terms of developing transformative curriculum and was widespread in the literature reviewed in chapter two, was one of curriculum development team discord. Discourse analysis as a methodology allows us to explore outliers of this nature because we are seeking to include all voices. Some participants viewed discord positively because it facilitated building constructive relationships conducive to curriculum development. In particular

one institution appeared to encourage and embrace what they called disruptive questioning, in order to challenge the curriculum with a view to reforming or transforming it, for example:

We experienced disruption among the group. In hindsight a disruptive force is important to challenge and question the programme being developed (participant A)...

...the discord and ensuing discussions led to a sense of my belonging to the process of curriculum development and ownership (participant B, CollegeB_FocusGroup).

This disruptive force speaks to Apple's (1982) notion of transformed curriculum through struggle and navigation through contradictions, as outlined in chapter two. Also, again deliberated in chapter two, Barnett (2011, p.70) encourages educators to find mechanisms for processes '...to make possible rational discourse, systematic rational reflection, argumentative conflict, conversation and dissensus'; and Hogan (2010) states that curricula are open to disagreement because of discipline loyalties. In any event, disagreement or discord can act as a stimulant for discourse and ultimately contribute to a transformed curriculum. Discord may serve to create what Hogan (2010) refers to as humanity's maturity through transformed curricula rather than reproducing graduates to meet functional requirements. Aside from the view that discord is productive, there were concerns that some voices, disruptive or otherwise, do not get heard because they are disengaged. This speaks to notions discussed earlier in this theme, of curriculum development team leaders working with people who will work with them because otherwise they end up working with disengaged team members exemplified in the following quote:

...if you have water carriers you just end up going back to them again and again because they are dependable, and are fully engaged and interested in helping you design the programme (CollegeA_Interview1).

Notwithstanding this practice, the reality of disengaged voices or unheard voices presented a real concern across all institutions, and is presented starkly in the following excerpt from one focus group:

The final call is pure luck. It's just whoever's interested enough to come that day, which isn't right...

...Core people participated, non-core people by and large did not (CollegeD_FocusGroup)

Curiously, and perhaps slightly worrying, is the sense that participants did not focus too much attention on how to engage the disengaged, there was a sense of acceptance or perhaps apathy regarding those who disengaged. Analysis of the validation reports showed that in many cases there was an absence of shared vision. This malaise may in

part be attributable to not all voices contributing to the vision. There was selected evidence of some deliberation in being forced to contribute or engage through incentives and penalties. This is linked to the discussion earlier regarding limited resources. Some participants, particularly those who were advocating on behalf of, or who were themselves part-time lecturers, argued that some financial recompense could assist. Many discussed the volume of work involved in fully and deeply engaging in the process of curriculum development, and posited how they cannot economically allocate required time unless they are financially remunerated. The following extract from one focus group typifies many of the contributions:

I think that in terms of developing a new programme or curriculum development, it's asking a lot for people who are not full-time people to be available, to put the work in and to have that level of commitment (participant A)

People need to be paid for their time. If you're sitting in front of your computer at home, things don't come out of the air. And I think management have to value their part-timers and if they do extra, that they're monetarily rewarded (participant B)

It is a lot of work. It takes time, and like you, I'm involved in three other centres where I work and really I have limited time to give to it (participant C, CollegeB_FocusGroup).

This conversation continued beyond the financial considerations required into one whereby educator's contributions to curriculum development should be acknowledged and valued, for example:

The amount of work is one thing, but for me, that issue of part-timers is more to do with commitment and engagement. It's more of a psychological emotional kind of connection with the college. If I didn't feel say valued, I wouldn't bother my arse (participant D, CollegeB_FocusGroup).

The data showed this view of respect and acknowledgement was shared by other participants in the inquiry, for example:

My views and contributions were respected. I knew, and didn't expect to have the final call, but having my contributions heard was important to me (CollegeC_FocusGroup).

Indeed some participants went further to say that if there were senior management commitment to curriculum development then engagement to the process was stronger because they sensed high level respect for the process. High level commitment was viewed primarily in terms of time afforded to the process, again linking back to resource availability or restrictions. Of interest is the fact that institutional strategy documents state programme development as being a priority – particularly in relation to economic and industry requirements as discussed later in this chapter – however this high level commitment did not necessarily transfer to the teams developing

curricula. This was most pronounced in one focus group where the discussion was quite lengthy. The following excerpt from that discussion illustrates this observation succinctly:

Buy in from management is crucial if the programme development is to be successful (participant A)...

I agree, management need to respect your effort and input (participant B)...

...but more than respecting our input, they need to respect the time required to carry out the project and that is not always the case. We often find we are developing programmes on the fringe of an already very busy workload which is not conducive to transformative programme design (participant A, CollegeA_FocusGroup).

Again, as can be seen in chapter two, this speaks to notions of resource restrictions as espoused in the literature over the decades (Barnett, 2011, 2013; Bernstein, 1996; Toohey, 1999).

Power and Decision Making

A third narrative within this theme was curriculum development influenced by power, and approaches to decision making. For example, in one institution the approach to curriculum development was quite autocratic and driven by the programme leader:

On the Master's programme [name] redesigned it without the lecturers because they couldn't agree (CollegeA_FocusGroup);

Separately, but within the same institution, a curriculum development leader said:

You have to make the call, otherwise it gets out of control. It's like a beast (CollegeA_Interview2).

This view was not confined to this one institution. Others argued that in order to progress the curriculum development process in an efficient way, sometimes decision making was confined to small groups, exemplified in the following two examples:

It's a top-down process developed by a small core team. In this way we can work through the process quickly. We don't have enough lead time to do otherwise (CollegeD_Interview1); and

There are four of us in a room and then we told other people what modules they needed to design.

This worked within our timeframe and resources (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

Interestingly participants were largely accepting of the need for a decision maker on the team, although it was mooted on more than one occasion that the leader must be prepared to listen and compromise, for example:

There were some things included that maybe I hadn't agreed with...I have to accept that I won't always get everything I want...I think you have to subsume sort of personal egotistical demands...and have a coordinator taking things from the different strands (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

This attends to discussions earlier in this chapter regarding respecting input. In other examples, the data showed decision making was by consensus or compromise, and as discussed above under this theme, the dissidence or discord was productive.

Whenever people said ‘oh the plan is not going to work because of X, Y and Z’, we took the view that ok well what do you think will work; instead of saying ‘well I don’t agree with you’. So there was dissidence but it was productive and I think at the end of it the people who were engaged in the process probably feel that they have made a huge contribution (CollegeA_Interview1).

Notwithstanding issues surrounding legitimate power and decision making, there was a view that sometimes some members of the design team simply commanded more attention and had a natural way of having their voice heard, for example:

We have one person who does not lecture on the programme a lot...but is very experienced and capable. When he gets to the table it is hard not to hear him. He is a really nice person. His people skills are top notch. He is academically capable and presents his opinion in a professional way. He kind of subtly says ‘oh I don’t think we should do that’, and others kind of go ‘ok’ (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

This is an example of the converse to the discussion above regarding disengaged voices being omitted. It raises alarm bells regarding what gets included and excluded on a curriculum and on what basis and is reminiscent of Scott’s (2007, p.7) observation where he argues that what we have currently is ‘...a false consensus on curriculum, barely agreed and certainly not negotiated’ as presented in chapter two. On the other hand there was a view that sometimes there is too much pandering and accommodating of some people’s contributions, perhaps giving some voices greater weight depending on who is contributing rather than on the validity of the contribution, again reinforcing concerns regarding the arbitrary nature of decisions shaping curriculum as argued by Moore and Young (2001) in chapter two. For example:

I think it is wonderful for people’s voices to be heard. But there is a lot of pandering to people and not wanting to offend them, not wanting to leave them out. The word that springs to mind regarding curriculum development is tiptoeing – just constantly tiptoeing around people, trying not to offend anyone (CollegeD_FocusGroup).

There was also a view that some discipline individuals are proprietary about their modules, whereas others were altruistic and tried to remain true to the vision of the programme being developed exemplified in the following quote:

There was a nobility issue about certain modules and discipline content in that they [lecturers] didn’t want their discipline to be watered down. It is not clear if this was purely for altruistic reasons or not (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

This is reflective of Young's (1971) work as discussed in chapter two, where he contended curricula content was socially constructed and mediated by power groups relative to their experience and lens. Hogan (2010), and Moore and Young (2001) advanced this contention with a view that curriculum content inclusion or exclusion is arbitrary and open to disagreement based on discipline loyalties and historic power struggles. Conversely, again in chapter two, Schwab (1978) called on discipline experts to shape the curriculum because discipline science is a tried and trusted theory and educational theory is not in his view.

In keeping with the ethos of discourse analysis, whereby context and power relations influence discourse and practice thereby constructing social reality, it is worth remarking on focus group dynamics. Within some of the focus groups the power balance dynamic at play was very real and tangible. This was discussed individually and at length during the debriefing sessions with the advisor group member observing each of the focus groups. In one focus group a minority number of voices dominated the discussion, in another one member dominated by either leading or closing many of the contributions. The individual(s) with power or perceived locus of power were clearly apparent in each focus group conducted. The power balance dynamics evidenced by the researcher and members of the advisory group observing focus groups, is reflective of much of the data findings regarding decision making, and voices that get heard. This experience leads me to deduce that those with power to have their contributions and voices heard are the ones shaping curriculum.

Shared Vision

The three main narratives discussed above under the theme of curriculum development teams all culminate with the presence or absence of a shared vision for the curriculum being developed. As discussed above, curriculum development leaders or managers frequently appear to be the ones shaping the vision or objective. This may be a power issue whereby those with power in the curriculum development process are often the ones to articulate a vision at the outset of the development process, for example:

The programme leaders literally went into a bubble in [a] room...it was tough going and it was very intense...we had a lot of documents [resources]...we were in that bubble for a period of a few weeks and then the mailshot went out after every meeting...we were immersed in it (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

The data showed that this vision was not always shared by the team, or at times not even known by the development team. Certainly the analysis of the data points to lack of clarity regarding the purpose of the curriculum and in this way exhibits some confusion as to how curriculum should be designed and what outcome or experience there should be for the graduate. Wider team discourse regarding the purpose of the programme being developed was requested, for example:

There needs to be a lot of talk about the actual identity of the course. Questions like what is the purpose of the course? What are we trying to do to provide (participant A)...
...the idea of knowledge for knowledge's sake needs to be explored, what are students doing with the knowledge? (participant B, CollegeA_FocusGroup)

Whilst shared vision was not always viewed as necessitating high level philosophical vision, the data showed agreement that some collective sense of purpose for the programme is important in offering direction to those contributing to development:

I agree we need to consider the purpose of the programme as a group, but I think the broader philosophical questions tend to complicate things. You should start off with pragmatic questions, like what do the students need to know, what do industry want. You don't think about what staff know or want to teach (CollegeC_FocusGroup).

The absence of shared vision or purpose for the curriculum was echoed across the validation panel reports where panel recommendations for greater clarity vis-à-vis a collective development team philosophy or vision and values for the programme was evident, for example:

The programme team need to define the philosophy, vision and values of the programme in terms of the professional identity of the graduate (CollegeC_ValidationReport1).

Separately another panel recommended that they [the team] “...need to articulate a shared vision” (CollegeD_ValidationReport1). The absence of a shared vision is associated with issues of decision making processes, and power relationships within the team developing the curriculum, as discussed earlier in this theme. A contributing factor to the shared vision narrative is a view that participants did not feel a sense of agency or empowerment regarding the curriculum and their contribution, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

I think what is crucial is that there's a shared ownership of the programme, of the learning. So I remember when I first started here, one of the older lecturers said to me, 'This is your programme.' I said, 'That's not my programme. It's our programme. And he said, 'I suppose.' So there was a tradition of saying, 'Management responsibility' (CollegeD_Interview1).

Rathcliff (1997) highlights this challenge regarding curriculum development as being one of varying starting points or assumptions that each educator brings to the process

of curriculum development and sees non-attention to varied starting suppositions as a barrier to fundamental curriculum change. Making explicit, through consensus or autocratic dictation, the vision of the programme may in some way help create a more level playing pitch whereby all involved share a set of assumptions regarding the vision for the curriculum.

In summary, this theme reveals how composition of the team influences the curriculum in terms of emphasis and vision. A key concern for curriculum development teams, in terms of a shared vision, is how to mitigate for inclusion of all relevant voices and navigate a complex environment where limited resources, power balances, and inconsistent team convening practices play prominent roles. Interesting questions arise from this theme include issues of optimal team number; what is the basis for selecting team members; and what mechanisms can be adopted to ensure all team members' contributions are heard and valued. In answering these questions we may find ourselves closer to creating a shared vision and sense of ownership or agency in the curriculum developed.

Curriculum Development Discourse

This theme is core to the research, as a key objective of the research was to engage educators in curriculum development discourse. A central narrative explored within this theme is the practice of curriculum development discourse. This is also attended to, in part, in the next theme in terms of disclosing the absence of philosophical discourse regarding curriculum. But this theme demonstrates the parsimonious practice of curriculum discourse in relation to curriculum development and practice and not just pertaining to philosophical type conversations. Other narratives explored under this theme include the challenge of finding time and space to engage in reflective curriculum discourse; and an unexpected narrative of academic professional development opportunities being used to facilitate and stimulate curriculum discourse.

The Practice of Curriculum Development Discourse

Supporting Barnett and Coate's (2006) observation that curriculum discourse is largely absent in higher education; and Stenhouse's (1983) call for greater discourse, this data identified that little has changed. There was scant evidence of edifying conversation

informing curriculum development. In addition where it did occur there was significant disparity regarding experiences both within institutions, and across institutions. In limited cases discourse was formally orchestrated to drive curriculum development illustrated in the following sample quote:

We would have a lot of blue skies type meetings where we would sit down and kind of look at the overall idea. Looking at the design and how the programme is working or not working, trying to look at your modules and kind of see how they are working together in terms of content and from the learner's perspective (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

In other cases informal discourse occurred throughout the academic year and became formal and iterative part of curriculum development processes, for example:

There's not a formal forum there for it, but I'm just thinking back. As a team, we'd have got together regularly and reviewed curriculum and then decided from there. Often it was over coffee breaks or in the corridor walking from one class to another (CollegeD_FocusGroup).

More often than not, where discourse was evident it was reflective of what Barnett and Coate (2006) refer to as localised discussion regarding structure and technical matter, as deliberated in chapter two, and did not involve deep engagement with philosophical discussions. In general, deep engagement with the difficult questions was minimal, evidenced by the lack of reference and discussion of same across all texts with some evidence that often the discussion ends after a programme is validated and does not take place again until the review five years later, exemplified in the following excerpt:

And like then it's gone [curriculum validation] and they [the programme team] may not talk about it till another five years, except for the end of year review, which is actually quite brief and everybody's sort of tired at that stage. But I always thought that there should be more of maybe a broad canvas type of thing where everybody sits down and talks about their experience of how the course is going, how their module has actually gone and how it fits in with everybody else, what they did well, what they did wrong and stuff like that (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

Again this echoes concerns shared by Barnett and Coate (2006) who argued curriculum discourse is absent because it is a complex conversation. This is not, I would argue, sufficient reason for not having these conversations. Indeed, discussion in the next theme illustrates this research was received very favourably by participants because of the opportunity it offered them to engage in curriculum discourse. This parsimonious practice of curriculum discourse negatively impacts upon capacity building. Where there was evidence of early and shared discourse, with all contributions welcomed; there was also evidence of a shared vision and a sense of individual and team agency in the curriculum. When asked in focus groups for suggestions for curriculum development reform participants offered widespread support for more respect and

recognition of their input in terms of time and expertise, with one participant stating simply:

Contributing to a programme design team is all about good old fashioned respect. If your input is heard in a respectful way on the basis of your discipline and industry expertise, then you are more inclined to continue engaging, and you feel more involved and a greater sense of ownership of the programme you are designing together (CollegeA_FocusGroup)

This view was validated elsewhere when the participant compared a recent curriculum development experience with a prior bad encounter of the same process illustrated in the following excerpt:

I suppose my input was respected and I appreciate that, and that was a new experience for me. We had a bad previous experience of programme design where we were all terrified we were doing it wrong and that had the effect of silencing us all I think (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

It is not surprising that respect for the individual and their expertise goes a long way in terms of encouraging and stimulating curriculum discourse. What is startling however is that the data indicates respect is not always a given.

Of concern, and despite the limited trend of selected engagement in curriculum discourse being reiterated across the conversations, some of the data exposed that at times curriculum was developed by one person. For example, in one institution they discussed recent good practice regarding a cohesive team approach with capacity building potential, but said that way was a first for them and perhaps a model they could aspire to as evidenced in the following excerpt:

That's probably a first for us [the cohesive, team approach], to be honest with you. That was our best, I think (participantA)...

It was best practice at its best. I mean I was amazed (participantB)...

Well, it hasn't been that until then, however that came to be, but that may be a model to look at for sure (participantA).

I think so (participantB)...

It hasn't been there before. I've done programmes all on my own and that's it. I just take my chances within it and just hope for the best (participantC)

I know that when you have experience, the more you have a team, it is better and it's less pressure on the one person... (participantA, CollegeD_FocusGroup)

Although not the experience of all, this sentiment was echoed across other focus groups, whereby curriculum is designed primarily by one person, with outsourcing design of certain modules; only after they had conceived of the programme as a whole themselves. Findings such as this should raise alarm bells and do not contribute to

shared discourse with capacity building potential and collective vision or understanding of the curriculum.

Time and Space for Curriculum Development Discourse

Opportunities to carve out space for curriculum development conversations are called for from analysis of the data, with confirmation that early discussions about the bigger picture and vision for the programme positively impact on the end result, illustrated in the following excerpt:

So what we actually thought about at the beginning has been totally transformed, through the process of engaging with other people. Yes, we are agents in the sense that we have kind of steered it, but, if we hadn't got buy in from staff, we wouldn't have been able to develop it and it looks quite different to what I had initially envisaged (CollegeA_Interview1).

The data showed that finding space and time for reflective curriculum review and discourse is challenging. As explored in chapter two, Barnett (2011) refers to four types of space and time that universities should carve out for academic reflection – one of which is a pedagogical and curricular space. In separating out both pedagogical and curricular, he said the curricular space is for course teams to initiate new curriculum and courses. When teams do not invest the time up front for curriculum development discourse it is a lost opportunity to challenge current practices and content or knowledge for inclusion. The analysis shows that non-engagement in discourse causes problems:

Time invested during the design stage is well spent. Often the fact that we haven't put enough thought and discussion into our modules at development stage has come back and bitten us (CollegeC_FocusGroup);

Lead times for curriculum development were viewed as problematic which have a knock-on effect in terms of finding the time for meaningful curriculum development discourse and reflection:

I think our lead times [for curriculum development] are poor...For me the process of programme design was a total baptism of fire (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

A view across all colleges involved was that discussions at review stage are almost too late and often reactionary, for example:

Every few years, we have the big bang, the programmatic review (participantA)...

It is almost too late then to have that discussion about the programme then but usually it is the only time we discuss the programme (participantB)...

It's more reactionary. Certainly the last one was reactionary, more than anything else (participantC).

Five years is too long (participantB)...

But then we are all too busy during the academic year to have such discussions (participantD)...

And to be fair they are not widely encouraged in terms of allocating time and resources to them (participantB, CollegeD_FocusGroup).

In addition some participants argued that formal review and discussion mechanisms are often focused on finding problems which can be restrictive in itself and not necessarily in the true body of capacity building:

My reticence about reviews is that we're looking for faults and a problem. Can we not acknowledge when programmes actually work? And say, 'Listen, this worked well, but tweak it a bit here, tweak it a bit there. It works for me because I'm a man. It won't work for Sarah because she's a woman.' Is it something as simple as that? (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

For those where curriculum discourse was found to be an informal and dynamic process throughout development and delivery of the curriculum, the experience was positive, typified in the following quote:

For us curriculum development is a live process, it becomes instinctively part of what we do as professionals. We have a very flat structure here...there's no programme coordinators. There's no year heads. And so those things kind of evolved in a sense organically (CollegeD_Interview1).

QQI advocate such an approach saying a programme should not be a 'static entity, frozen in time' (QQI, 2010, p.1). Although the data did show that there were some formal procedures that contributed to curriculum discourse, these were more mindful of what Barnett and Coate (2006) referred to as local and discipline level discussions and procedures that were limited to content and structure exemplified in the following excerpt:

I think the module evaluation forms are great...they allow us to see what we should take out or add to the curriculum on a yearly basis (participantA)

...the review forms allow for an action rolling plan (participantB, CollegeA_FocusGroup).

Despite QQI's call for programmes not to be static, and some evidence of annual curriculum review, the data uncovered participants' feelings of frustration regarding the regulated procedures one must go through to modify programmes in any significant way, the effect being in some cases that change or modifications were not addressed regardless of whether they were justified or not. These concerns are explored in greater detail under the final theme in this chapter, the regulatory framework.

Curriculum Discourse through Academic Professional Development (APD)

Finally, within this theme there was a less prominent narrative, but one that resonates with new and emerging development in higher education in Ireland. Recently the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning issued a call for consultation in relation to building a national professional development framework for those teaching in higher education (National Forum, 2015). The data analysed in this inquiry argues for curriculum professional development and support, with some citing professional teaching qualifications as important in this context. Others call for some type of in-house training which involves critical discourse regarding the practice and process of curriculum development within the regulatory framework and also within the philosophical and discipline space. The requirement is not in relation to professional support regarding discipline expertise, but in relation to curriculum development specifically:

What is necessary is some kind of concomitant or contemporaneous staff development...around change [in the curriculum you are developing]...if we had this expertise [curriculum development] anywhere in the house to sit down with us for a couple of hours in a workshop...some coaching or mentoring to encourage us to think and talk about it [curriculum development] before we put a stamp on it (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

Some colleges have lecturer support and training units but the data did not show that these units were used specifically to drive curriculum development or critical reflection through discourse. Perhaps this is a lost opportunity and one that could be adopted across institutions to help carve out the space and time for this practice. In fact one college discussed how their educational development unit has been closed, only temporarily, but nonetheless it was not in operation at the time of this research as evidenced in the following excerpt:

Well, we used to have an educational development unit here until it got closed down. We had one of the first ones in the country, in fact, and we used to have a number of people and xxxx is the only one left (participantA).

For the moment (participantB) [*implying the unit will reopen*]

I think every educational institution needs a group of people who are looking at these questions and supporting staff and saying, 'Look, here's new ways of assessing' or 'Here's new ways of developing a programme.' Because staff are busier and busier (participantA, CollegeC_FocusGroup).

What was of particular interest was the contribution from one participant in a focus group who discussed how the process of curriculum development had the effect on him of feeling a greater sense of belonging and agency within the College and to the

curriculum. He recommended academic development opportunities to both assist in the process of curriculum development, but also to help integrate staff more by allowing them opportunities to gather and discuss their curriculum and learners:

I would feel much more a part of what goes on here now than I did when this process [curriculum development] started...staff development could help me feel a greater sense of embeddedness in the College because I would be meeting my colleagues in a structured way, and getting some training around current issues also (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

This participant offered three words when invited to propose suggestions for curriculum development reform, and these were “*CPD, leadership, and openness*”. This resonates with Stenhouse’s call (1975) for educators’ critical agency and commitment to the concept of the extended professional.

In conclusion for this theme, inconsistent curriculum development discourse practices were evident both within, and across institutions. The data exposed a desire for more opportunities to engage in curriculum discourse and reflection. The challenge in doing so rests in trying to find the time and space for such practice. Some suggestions were proposed to redress the problem and these include greater curriculum development lead time and using academic professional development opportunities to leverage such discourse, reflection and capacity building.

Educators’ Philosophical Beliefs

This theme explored educators’ philosophical beliefs and influence on curriculum development, in particular how those beliefs influence the direction of curricula. Narratives explored within this theme include academic freedom regarding philosophical beliefs; and the role or existence of philosophical curriculum development discourse.

Philosophical Beliefs Informing Curricula

Issues regarding philosophical beliefs permeated the data analysed across all four colleges. Many participants prefaced much of their discussion with statements like ‘philosophically I believe’.

A recurrent narrative informing curriculum development across almost all of the data was one where educators philosophically viewed curriculum as a vehicle to empower

learners and help them develop critical thinking skills. Respondents interviewed were of the philosophical view that education is to empower learners, and in many respects imbue them with a love of learning, exemplified in the following excerpt:

I have to declare that I come from the perspective that I have always been a person who loves to learn. I love facts...I just love reading and I absorb things at unspecified times...because I love to learn...so in that sense the purpose of education has to be about enlightenment, it has to be more. It has to be about broadening their horizons (CollegeA_Interview1)

The 'more' referred to in this quote relates to industry-ready graduates as that was the context of the conversation at the time. This view prevailed through much of the data, in particular with curriculum development leaders who philosophically felt driven by the need to create a curriculum that nurtured development of critical thinking skills to equip graduates entering the world beyond education in an informed and confident way and in a way that might contribute to their sense of agency in the world they inhabit. They acknowledged the central role of discipline knowledge but presented that as a 'given' or minimum and argued for a curriculum with more, exemplified in the following:

When we design a course, we kind of have the practical things and then the liberal arts things as well that develop them as a person and more critical and analytical as well. Philosophically I would like to think we are creating more analytical and critical graduates instead of just having everyone prepared for a skill-based society. We need people who are thinking about the bigger picture and how things can work better for society (CollegeA_Interview2)

This is redolent of considerations in chapter two regarding views of Lawton (1984) who advocated an open ended curriculum, and Stenhouse (1970) and Doll (1984) who called for a curriculum that facilitates divergent learning where critical enquiry and engagement were of paramount importance. Additionally Bernstein (1971) advanced the call from Dewey (1902) and supported models of curricula and pedagogy that facilitated learner inquiry and progression where learners develop a sense of agency. These ideas are further explored in the penultimate theme discussed below.

However, although the data analysed supported the literature showing how ideologically and philosophically curricula ought to be developed to expand and empower learners, there was an underlying fear or concern that curriculum is learner or market driven, and not necessarily driven by ideological concerns. A common view contributed by participants was that learners influenced by market requirements drive curriculum development towards a perceived valued output i.e. certification in a

manner that offers graduates some sense of value or measurement. The following excerpt from an interview summarises the view of many educators across all providers researched:

Well, I see a shift, I'll be honest. I see a shift, I suppose, over the last three years, maybe even more, that they are [i.e. the learners] actually not interested so much in the outcome as they are in getting a Level 8 certificate. And I don't think that's a good thing. I think we have developed not learners for the want of learning, but learners for the need of a certificate, and I think that is a sad state of affairs. They are more interested in the outcome than they are in the long-term gain (CollegeB_Interview2).

The long-term gain meant by this contributor was one underpinned by ideological beliefs based on the wider good of society and indeed the economy; but not purely for egocentric gains. Stenhouse (1983) calls on educators to influence curriculum and fight for their philosophical beliefs to inform curriculum in a way that allows for a curriculum of emancipation. As proposed by Toohey (1999) and discussed in chapter two, the data demonstrates the identity of a curriculum as being tied up in the philosophical beliefs of educators' designing the curricula, for example:

I think philosophically education is about development of the person. It is about accessing new experiences...that is how you learn... I think a lot of the educators' own philosophical thinking ends up being evident in the curriculum (CollegeB_Interview1).

This presents a paradox when related to views expressed above where power dynamics shape curriculum. The inference in correlating both views is that those whose voices are loudest or most powerful are the ones who philosophically influence curricula and nuance it in a way that is aligned with their own philosophical beliefs. Additionally, institutional strategy discourse influences curriculum development in a way that supports commodification of education to advance graduates careers. This is further supported in analysis of validation panel reports where panels seek justification of development of the new programme through market demand, and is explored in greater detail in the next theme – industry driven curriculum. Notwithstanding this concern, the data showed a call for academic freedom to nuance and inform curriculum as discussed next.

Despite the passion and influence of educators' philosophical beliefs guiding curriculum development, and apart from the participants' experience in this inquiry, there was a noted absence of such philosophical discourse within their colleges. This is connected to earlier discussions in the chapter regarding curriculum discourse and

shared vision. Without such philosophical discussions it is difficult to conceive a shared vision for a curriculum. In keeping with discourse analysis and the notion of being aware of what discourses are missing, the absence of such discussion in the focus groups is in itself telling. Although interestingly, at the end of the formal focus group discussions, two different groups offered some insight into the value of such discourse. One group discussion after the focus group, exclaimed how this (the focus group experience) was the first occasion in many years where they openly discussed philosophical issues pertaining to education; another group professed how they enjoyed such philosophical discussions and how it is difficult to find the time and space to engage in these types of reflections in the current busy educational environment. Although these discussions were not formally recorded, the researcher explored and validated these conversations with the two advisor group members observing each of the focus groups. This reflects Barnett and Coate's (2006) assertion that curriculum discourse is limited to a localized model of technical matters such as content and structure, and Scott's (2007) call for the curriculum debate to be reopened in a vigorous way. This economic practice of curriculum discourse could be interpreted from data as relating to workload and resource restrictions, as discussed earlier in this chapter and supports Barnett's (2011) call for institutions to carve out a space for such reflection and discourse.

Issues of Academic Freedom

A related narrative within this theme, and one where the data demonstrated much consensus, was the need for academic freedom and autonomy when developing curriculum. Academic freedom in this context relates to the educators' philosophical beliefs and discipline expertise informing the curriculum. For some there was a sense that there may be a risk of diminished freedom demonstrated in the following excerpt:

I think there should be much more of a role for academics within the system to input and take ownerships of programmes they are involved in...this is a danger and we should not allow it happen (CollegeD_Interview1).

The data showed that some educators philosophically subscribe to a type of collective knowledge impacting curriculum development. Although they do not refer to it as collective, many echo earlier discussion in chapter two where Schwab (1978) and Pinar et al (1995) advocated curriculum development by discipline experts, for example:

We don't want our discipline to be watered down (participant A)

We defended inclusion of our discipline in a positive way during discussions (participant B, CollegeA_FocusGroup).

This view was echoed in many different ways, with the respondents identifying some curriculum development teams breaking into discipline groups to explore the knowledge for inclusion and exclusion, and presenting their rationale back to the full team. This was discussed earlier in the chapter.

There were mixed views within focus groups across institutions regarding the extent of academic freedom experienced, for example:

I would like to see more devolution (CollegeD_Interview2); and

Perhaps we could have more autonomy over our programmes with improved quality assurance...more transparent, much more reflective, much more evidence based curriculum development practices (CollegeD_Interview1).

With a definite call for continued and/or greater autonomy:

What is required is more flexibility and perhaps autonomy for the professional to say 'we are the experts and we are working within a quality assured structure, and working for the benefit of the programme' (CollegeC_FocusGroup).

The current regulated environment of higher education is discussed later in this chapter, but in the context of this theme and narrative the data showed some concern that academic freedom may be diminished within the existing regulated environment:

The Bologna process was very much the strongest driver in the past ten years. As a driver there is almost a very mechanistic assessment of outcomes, and that's something that has to be avoided. That doesn't mean you can't develop learning outcomes to guide the learning, I think you can, but I still think the lecturer needs to retain autonomy on how to teach them, how to assess them (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

This resonates with some of the thinking explored in chapter two, where objectives based curriculum may encourage convergent rather than divergent outcomes (Eisner, 1969; Stenhouse, 1983); within a closed curriculum system rather than one that is open and tolerant of ambiguity (Lawton, 1984). Although some respondents suggested experiencing prescription, they did not necessarily perceive it as overly restrictive and still felt enabled to allow their philosophical beliefs to influence curriculum development, evidenced in the final part of this excerpt:

If you don't have a standardized approach what do you have in a sense. I don't think a standardized approach limits us. I think what a standardized approach says is 'this is the least we might do, but what is the most we could do (CollegeC_Interview1).

This is in keeping with the call from many theoretical and philosophical educators, for educators to draw on their expertise and voice to inform curricula, in particular the work of Stenhouse (1985) who urged educators to become critical agents of curriculum and to allow their discipline expertise to influence curriculum. Pinar (2006) refers to this as reassertion of educators' intellectual commitment to curriculum. Moreover, there is an implication that academic freedom goes beyond the development phase and into the teaching and learning space. Within Doll's model discussed earlier, and presented in chapter two, this element is a rigorous curriculum with heuristic pedagogy based on integrated learning based on problems and issues. This is what the critical theorists and those concerned with learner-centred education are urging educators to campaign for. Nevertheless, I contend academic freedom and pedagogical decisions must go hand in hand with what Stenhouse (1985) recommends, which is a call for the teacher to be a researcher thereby ensuring practice is evidence based.

There is significant overlap with this narrative and those deliberated in the final two sections of this chapter regarding the influence of regulatory frameworks and industry. However, it is pertinent to also consider the narrative here because it is of philosophical concern to educators that they retain academic freedom in order to inform curriculum coming from a place of discipline expert.

In summary, this theme considers narratives regarding educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development. Issues of academic freedom were explored from a philosophical standpoint. What is of most interest was the lack of opportunity for such philosophical reflections or discussions in curriculum development, perhaps influencing the lack of shared curriculum vision. Reassuringly, there was a lot of passion for education and for learners, in particular for a curriculum that empowers learners and helps them develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. Some questions arising from the data analysed under this theme include the level of autonomy educators have in terms of their philosophical beliefs informing curricula, and how more opportunities for philosophical discussions regarding education could be accommodated. This final question is further addressed in the last theme.

Industry Driven Curriculum Development

A prominent theme to emerge from the data was one of industry driven curricula. Participants were aware of the economic imperatives of higher education in addition to the influence and need for industry input to curricula. Despite the anecdotal evidence to the contrary, the data showed participants were more exercised regarding industry driven curricula, than by the influence of regulatory bodies on curriculum development. Narratives emerging from the data within this theme include an awareness and respect for industry input that is influenced and driven by the state and institutional strategic objectives; a concern for development of graduates that are not only industry ready but ready for future economic and societal requirements; and recognition for a type of divergent curricula that will support development and transformation of graduates who are more widely prepared for society than just at an economic level.

Institutional-fit Curricula

Each institution prepares its own organisational strategy to realise the College's vision and mission, as directed by QQI (QQI, 2010). These are informed and influenced by state directives issued through national strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), and funding opportunities driven by economic necessities, evidenced in the following excerpts from two institutional strategy documents:

The College's philosophy is to provide career choice and progression into the professions for its learners, breaking down barriers to access. It is committed to effective programme delivery, which is responsive to learner needs and focused on learner based output measures of quality appropriate to their chosen profession and relevant to emerging industry needs and opportunities (CollegeD_Strategy); and

The College is keen to advance the employability of its graduates through a variety of work-study arrangements and partnerships with indigenous and multinational companies. Future course proposals and programmatic reviews will actively consider the inclusion of work experience stages with industry partners either within or after the taught programme (CollegeA_Strategy).

Not surprisingly, the data showed that curricula teams follow suit and develop institutional-fit curricula for example:

We did further research into what industry were looking for and we knew there were lots of opportunities. It was a matter of trying to come up with something which would feed into those opportunities, and deliver the correct student at the end (CollegeD_Interview2).

This view is corroborated in the literature traversed in chapter two where Moore and Young (2001) consider the tension between developing curricula within a technical-instrumentalist tradition with curricula developed and influenced by economical imperatives, and the neo-conservative tradition where curriculum is a body of discipline knowledge. This is redolent of the view of Apple (1982) who claims curriculum is fraught with contradictions. Understandably those engaged in curriculum development are slightly at sea because of the multiple and varied lenses which bring ambiguities and inconsistencies. Education is burdened with contradictions and inconsistencies which make the need for greater reflection and discourse regarding curriculum development all the more critical and essential, as discussed above in this chapter. Also, and again discussed in chapter two, the national strategy for higher education requires institutions to align their strategy with national vision outlined in the strategy to 2030 and to ‘equip them [graduates] with the skills to play a strong part on the world stage’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.6). The data showed a real sense of participants recognising the central role of the state in curriculum development:

The government tell us it’s jobs only. That’s what we are here for... I mean we get outside help in to make sure we have everything included in the programme that the industry demands...So it’d be very much driven by the market, I would say more so than within the college itself... I think it’s industry driven (CollegeD_FocusGroup).

The influencing role of the state was further evident in participants’ opinion that destination surveys are viewed by both the state and the college as a driver of higher education, particularly in the manner in which they are often used as a criteria for marketing and evaluating the success of a programme or institution, for example:

They advertise the courses now by student satisfaction statistics and how many get a job out of doing the course (CollegeA_Interview2); and

We are measured by graduate destination...which puts pressure on you to make sure they are ready (CollegeD_Interview2)

This thinking reflects neo-liberal views of the entrepreneurial university posited by Barnett (2011) in chapter two, where the institution is about producing a service and product that customers are interested in paying for i.e. commodification of higher education, and of Apple’s (1982) call for educators to exert their professional influence on the state in an effort to redress any potential imbalance that may exist as a result of the state’s power.

Future Ready Graduates

While recognising the influence of industry, educators participating in the study expressed a sense of dis-ease with a possible mono-view of curriculum, exemplified in the following sample excerpt:

My personal opinion is we should be doing more of the pastoral than we actually are, but I think realistically the focus is on the academic and preparing them for the workforce (participantA)
Yes. I'd say in reality, that's how it is, but I think a lot of us may not teach that way sometimes (participantB, CollegeD_FocusGroup).

Additionally, the data showed a concern that state bodies are not entirely clear about what the purpose of higher education is, and whether it is about producing industry ready graduates, or something more:

I think it's very timely at the moment to be having that kind of discourse [curriculum]. I think that the discussion should be around preparing people for work and what that means, and I would have a completely different view to say turning out apprentices. And I think the governments struggling to get its head around that difference (CollegeC_FocusGroup).

This relates to discussions elsewhere in this chapter regarding developing graduates with wider competencies than skill-based ones; with competencies to include the ability to problem solve and think critically; and also the need to create a shared vision for the curriculum being developed. Whilst acknowledging the purpose of education may well be to prepare graduates for employment, the data showed participants have difficulty with the notion of education being solely about preparing industry ready graduates and not future-industry ready graduates, exemplified in the sample following excerpt:

We need to make sure that our courses are encompassing what employers would need in the future (CollgeD_Interview2).

Curriculum development teams are often designing curricula and content for societal and industry problems that have not yet been encountered or identified, and the data showed that participants take a broader view to developing curricula than just industry requirements, for example:

I don't think it is necessarily right to create a course which is exactly what employer's want...I think there may be a lot of problems going down that line. To be fair the Award Standards do challenge us to design programmes across both skill and competencies. I think we need to focus on competency development to give graduates the advantage (CollegeB_Interview2).

This is suggestive of Kelly's (2009) fear that objective based education risks moulding individuals in a uniform way without concern for uniqueness or individuality, as considered in chapter two. However, the reference to competency is attended to in the

Awards Standards and some far sighted educationalists offer insight into what competency and insight might look like in a curriculum, for example the work of Barbezat and Bush (2014) who call for the mindful learner – as deliberated in chapter two. Participants in this study hold a similar concern and philosophically see their role as more than homogenously moulding all graduates as Hogan (2010) refers to it. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the data showed that participants do have a sense of moral obligation and conscience around developing a broader graduate than one solely ready for industry, the only reservation is in that this concern is not ‘negotiated’ as Scott (2009, p.7) recommends. In particular participants are keen that learners develop a sense of their own identity and agency, which is illustrated in the following quote:

You don’t want someone just doing a degree for the sake of doing their degree and they may come up with a 70, which is fantastic and may help them get a good job, but that shouldn’t be the only focus. You want them to think deeper (CollegeB_FocusGroup).

The literature alludes to the fact that the personal success conception of higher education is at risk of being diminished in the face of graduate cohorts becoming more job-orientated. However, the data demonstrates that participants of this study are still attending to the personal success conception of learners exemplified in the following excerpt:

Education is so much more than just having the skills to complete a job. It is more about ability to solve problems, critical thinking and confidence, the number one thing that students get when they get to third level (CollegeD_Interview1).

This is redolent of much of the discussion in chapter two, in particular the view of Hogan (2010) who calls on educators to resist developing curriculum to match functional requirements, and instead to look towards developing curriculum that cultivates a broader way of graduate thinking and being. Palmer (1993, p.15) refers to this as a whole-sighted graduate whose spirit, head and heart unite whereby graduates have ‘personal responsiveness and accountability...to the world we [they] are part of’.

Participants contend that industry cannot absolve themselves of the responsibility for training and developing graduates, and that the purpose of higher education is to give graduates the transferrable skills required to advance the learning curve more expediently:

I think industry needs to accept that graduates aren’t industry-ready, that there is a training and learning curve between graduates coming out [of college] and going into a company...higher

education is about giving them the transferrable skills to advance professionally and personally (CollegeD_Interview1).

This is reflective of Barnett's (2011, p.70) position whereby he urges curricula developers to take issue with market led programme provision for fear of what he calls the commodification of knowledge 'as a force for production'. He calls on intellectuals to challenge and question current practices with a view to create a more 'feasible utopia' for universities.

The Divergent Curricula

As deliberated in chapter two, Doll (1989) and Stenhouse (1975) commend a curriculum that is divergent in nature thereby facilitating transformational learning. Doll (1989) offers a four-fold approach to curriculum development whereby learning is divergent through quality knowledge, inquiry based learning that is not always pre-specified in a linear manner, with opportunities for social activity and exploration. The data demonstrated that participants are acutely aware of the need for the transformed learner who can engage in the complex world they inhabit in a more prepared way, whilst being cognisant of economic, social and political imperatives. Reassuringly, the data showed that economic demands are not necessarily incompatible with development of a more liberated learner:

But I suppose the question around the purpose of higher education is trying to develop that love of learning in a learner so that they are faced with a broader spectrum of lifestyle choices and freedoms and progression in life, which I suppose is the economic argument. So I think you can sell it through economics, if they go to college to get a better job, but when they go to college hopefully they get a love of learning which creates freedom of choices. So it's kind of a dreamer attitude and a practical attitude, but I think they're exactly the same thing. Education does facilitate progression through life and in a word it increases your choices in life and your ability to deal with complicated situations (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

Using multiple conversations in a layered way allowed the data to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship discussed above as existing in broader strategy documents. In some examples this is a light touch inference, but in other like the example below, it is explicitly stated that the college is committed to developing a broader graduate than one solely ready for industry:

We will develop programmes that are industry relevant, professionally accredited (where appropriate) and deliver the generic skills necessary for effective engagement in society (CollegeC_Strategy).

This is suggestive of Apple's (1982) view of an education system being part of a wider system which includes economic, cultural and ideological orientations. As discussed earlier, the current model of curriculum development in higher education in Ireland is one that is largely rooted in the behavioural model and is redolent of the approach posited by Bobbit (1918) and Tyler (1949) in chapter two. The behaviours that are pre-specified are related to the economy and wider society. The liberal or wider societal outcomes can be accommodated through the QQI 'competence' strand where the competences of context, role, learning to learn, and insight are key (QQI, 2014). Though we do need to be mindful of the concerns raised by Eisner (1969), again postulated in chapter two, where he preferred objectives that are expressive rather than measurable outcomes. This is perhaps more apposite in discussions regarding pedagogy which although an essential element of curriculum development, are not the focus of this study. He argues for value being on the type of learning encounter experienced rather than the outcome. The National Strategy for Higher Education (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) calls for graduates who are critical thinkers, engaged in society and have discipline knowledge. Recent and innovative thinking in pedagogy pay much attention to the transformational learner, and more pertinently the type of curricula that can facilitate this. For example, and as discussed above and in chapter two, current key educators engaging in contemplative pedagogy call for learner transformation through integrative and explorative practice which comes from within through individual inquiry and integrity. (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Hogan, 2009, Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). Critics of the behavioural model, such as Eisner (1969), Kelly (2009), Lawton (1984), Popham (1972) and Stenhouse (1970) argue that reducing the curriculum to a set of outcomes risks the loss of some important and non-intended outcomes i.e. convergent learning as opposed to divergent and as such may be a lost opportunity for transformational learning. The competence strand with associated sub-strands as defined by QQI is attempting to redress this issue. Additionally, current QQI language refers to profound outcomes that have transformative characteristics that do not date, as opposed to transient outcomes which can quickly become obsolete (QQI, 2014).

In summary of this theme, the general consensus is that curriculum should not be designed purely to fit the needs of industry because, first, there is a wider system which should be considered when preparing graduates for the world after higher education;

and second, industry do not know what graduates will be required to know in the future. Thus, preparing them for current industry needs is doing the learner, society and industry a serious dis-service. There is evidence that economic and social or ideological deliverables within a curriculum are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that perhaps there is room for all in the curriculum objectives. This resonates with the strands or standards of achievement outlined by QQI (QQI, 2014); and with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 who seek a curriculum that will produce ‘...creative, rounded thinkers and citizens.... in addition to a comprehensive understanding of their relevant discipline’; and see the purpose of higher education as facilitating economic growth in addition to support what they call ‘...individual well-being and social development’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.5-7)

Regulatory Framework

The final theme, regulatory framework, was found to have significant impact on educators’ experience of curriculum development. This is not surprising given the current national and international landscape of higher education which requires compliancy to ensure consistency and transparency in curriculum development nationally and internationally. Narratives covered in this theme include; the impact of the regulatory framework on curriculum development practices, where interestingly participants involved in the study were not averse to a standardized approach but do feel that curriculum change within the current model is challenging; and the influence of expert panels on the final programme designed, in particular where examples of inconsistent practices prevail. The final narrative discussed within this theme is a call for professional development training and support in developing curricula within the current framework.

Influence of Regulatory Framework

Analysis of data showed that many participants are of the view that the current regulatory environment is “...*very much the strongest driver in the past ten years*” (CollegeA_FocusGroup). The influence of the regulatory environment was a consistent theme, particularly and not surprisingly, within validation panel reports, for example:

The proposal demonstrates how the strands (of knowledge, skill and competence), determined by QQI (HETAC) for the named award to which the programme proposes to lead, evolves throughout the programme as a whole (CollegB_ValidationReport1).

The strands referred to here are standards developed by the awarding and regulatory body within an outcomes based model (QQI, 2014), in compliance with EHEA (ENQA, 2015) directives as discussed above and deliberated in chapter two. Where there was not an awareness of the regulatory environment, there was acknowledgement that others had such knowledge, thereby recognising the prominent role of same on curriculum development as evidenced in the following:

I knew 'well this is what I want to teach'. This theory might support that and so on, what I should do. I knew about the learning outcomes. And knew about assessing them. So I was kind of designing the module, but she [the programme leader] was putting the regulatory framework to it (CollegeD_Interview2).

In the literature, chapter two, Pinar (2006) points to this concern where a standardized approach to curriculum development takes precedence over the voice of discipline or knowledge experts and he urges educators to reassert their intellectual commitment and make their voice heard. This point was reflected in analysis across institutions, for example:

I am aware of the regulatory emphasis in a way that I wouldn't have been maybe ten years ago when I started lecturing. But I hate to think that quality assurance would end up leading to this stifling of academic development or academic, I don't know, what's the word, progression, I would hate to think that that will happen to me. It's about improving your offering in terms of making it [the curriculum] robust intellectually rather than from a regulatory perspective (CollegeA_Interview1)

Despite concerns about potential or real loss of autonomy, there was widespread support amongst participants in focus groups, for a regulated higher education environment, on the provision that it did not take precedence over the academic content or vision for the curriculum. In particular there was agreement that standards offer international assurance and quality, for example:

I use those [QQI Award] standards all the time when we're talking about the curriculum review or design process because people identified so strongly with them. The whole European response to higher education and requirements are that we do have learners from Ireland who are of the standard of those from England, or France, or Spain, or from wherever it is (CollegeD_FocusGroups)

Many were of the view that using the standards and guidelines provided by QQI such as the Award Standards (QQI, 2014) and Core Validation Policy (QQI, 2010) provided a useful template:

I was lucky enough to come in [to higher education as an educator] when Bologna had happened and so I have always had a framework to work with so I have come into this [curriculum development] with a structure...I was educated when there was no structure and I think the way I teach and plan is probably a reaction against that...I was never guided (CollegeB_FocusGroup). Although, interestingly there was a perception that the university sector is less regulated:

In the university you're completely autonomous in terms of curriculum development or new programme initiatives (CollegeD_Interview1).

However, as discussed in chapter two, in an effort to streamline all providers of higher education, recent legislation passed in Ireland saw the amalgamation of the Irish University Quality Board (IUQB) with the other national agencies auditing higher education (Department of Education and Skills, 2012) in Ireland. It was designed to bring all providers of higher education in Ireland under the one regulating and auditing body, the QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland), thereby ensuring all are working to the same standardized and compliant approach. The impact of this, in the medium to long term, will be that universities will enjoy the same autonomy, or lack of autonomy, as all other providers of higher education. However interestingly the data showed that the legacy perception of university autonomy persists among many educators today.

Notwithstanding the support for some kind of regulation from a quality assurance and enhancement perspective, there were concerns that the current regulated model and templates are restrictive in terms of affecting or encouraging ongoing modifications to curricula. In particular the five year review cycle, and mechanisms for requesting interim changes were viewed as restrictive. Although this is discussed above in the theme curriculum practice and discourse, it is pertinent at this point to reinforce some of the earlier observations coming from the data in the context of the regulatory framework influences. Many viewed the five year review cycle as too long, evidenced in the repeat of some of the excerpt from above as an example:

And like then it's gone [curriculum validation] and they [the programme team] may not talk about it till another five years, except for the end of year review, which is actually quite brief and everybody's sort of tired at that stage (CollegeA_FocusGroup).

With further examples from the data where curriculum discourse or reflection did not occur for another five years because it was so painful in the first place. This view was

widespread and is evidenced in the following sample excerpt from a programme development leader:

The [validation] process was harrowing. The result was a good programme and for that I am glad. But once the process was over I had no appetite to revisit it until I had to. And I would be confident that was the view of the others working with me developing the programme (CollegeB_Interview2).

Despite the fact that the data showed that some colleges use programme review reports, the data uncovered the presence of barriers to ongoing programme change and modifications, to the point, sometimes, where curriculum teams did not feel inclined to disturb the validated programme, exemplified in the following sample quote:

The annual programme review process tends to focus on what we have some power over. So you look at things you can change and tend to avoid dealing with the bigger issues until programme review stage. We do keep note of them and will use them when we review the programme (CollegeA_Interview2).

This is cause for concern as it is difficult to conceive of a situation, in a world that is constantly changing, where a curriculum could remain static for five years. Yet, in analysis of validation reports, the recommendations and conditions in some cases were many, demanding, and onerous. It is clear to see why they were in place but understandable that a development team would not be in a hurry to revisit that space. Review mechanisms could benefit from revision in order to facilitate a more seamless and naturally evolving programme that is responsive to the needs of learners, society and the economy as it changes and evolves. Perhaps with more realistic annual review mechanisms that reduce modification barriers, the five year programme review might not be so arduous.

Validation Panel Influence

QQI require a validation panel to recommend approval of a new curriculum, or re-approval of a reviewed curriculum (QQI, 2010). The data showed evidence of inconsistent approaches and interfacing by curriculum development teams with panels. For example, in some cases curriculum development teams were confident they had a strong and robust programme and sensed perhaps the panel had an agenda. Other experiences were less extreme whereby the experience with the panel was more open to frank and honest exchanges regarding curriculum content and design.

The panel work to a set of policies outlined by QQI as outlined in chapter two (QQI, 2010). The aim being to ensure consistency in approach. The data showed that these policies were applied, for example:

The programme design is consistent with HETAC's Assessment and Standards 2009 as adopted by QQI. The programme has an underlying unifying theme and the modules are bonded by linkages which are either implicit or explicit. It was also clear how the standards of knowledge, skill and competence, determined by the Council for the named award to which the programme proposes to lead, evolve throughout the programme as a whole (CollegeB_ValidationReport2)

Additionally, the data evidenced that panels have significant power in relation to influencing curriculum in terms of outcomes and structure of the curriculum designed. For example the following selection of conditions outlined in different validation panel reports:

Re-examine the programme learning outcomes to reflect the distinctive nature of the programme and to incorporate the focus on xxx.....that fundamental concepts such as xxx be covered in one of the xxx modules as part of the introductory lectures (CollegeA_ValidationReport1);

The articulation of these characteristics [panel feedback] should be reflected in the modules (CollegeC_ValidationReport2);

The panel advised that the programme learning outcomes be reviewed and mapped directly to the National Qualifications Framework for Level 8 and this should be consistent throughout the document (CollegeB_ValidationReport2).

According to QQI, the expert panel is tasked with assessing the programme and the provider, to ensure the programme meets validation criteria as specified in the Core Validation Policy and Criteria (QQI, 2010). As outlined in chapter two, the current model of curriculum development is an outcomes based model, founded on international benchmarks. Panels use this model to assess the curriculum across strands (QQI, 2014), and in accordance with the National Framework for Qualifications (QQI, 2015). Learning outcomes inform the curriculum using strands of knowledge, know-how and application, and competence. Integration across disciplines is encouraged, similar to views advocated by Bernstein (1971) and Pinar (2006); and curriculum is designed in a progressive manner offering learners logical pathways for development which has echoes of Bruner's (1976) spiral curriculum and Blooms (1956) taxonomy. Panels are selected on the basis of their expertise and experience in teaching and learning, the relevant discipline domain, and in validation and review processes. Notwithstanding, the panels' brief power relations seem to play an important part in the panel/team relationship. Many participants disclosed feelings of fear and anxiety when preparing for validation panels, for example:

There is an awful fear around pressing the button [i.e. seeking validation approval]. I think it's because they [teams] are so unsure. I mean it is complex and then you are trying to second guess validation panels and there is a whole sense of fail, if you don't get it through validation panel, rather than I'm going to tweak it and it's going to be a better programme... And you can never tell. Because even if you are choosing a couple of people on that panel yourself, you never know, it's all down to what happens on the day. Peoples moods, you never know where people are coming from (CollegeB_Interview1).

Participant input to this inquiry points towards concern about the panels' motivations and their loci of control over the curriculum. Some participants questioned panel members' motivation exemplified in the following extracts:

The other problem is the panel on the day. You spend all this time developing the programme...but you don't realize that this person [panel member] has come in with an agenda...he was leading the charge and just basically didn't want to validate the programme (CollegeB_Interview1)

Sometimes when panels come you get the sense of 'this is what happens in our institution and therefore this is what should happen in your institution' (CollegeD_Interview1)

Despite the perception of validation power balance, the data also uncovered that experience of panel discourse and confidence of knowing the current model and system of curriculum development and compliance in some cases allowed participants to re-empower themselves and take the lead, thereby critically engaging with the panels' observations:

We actually stood up to the panel and said, 'No' to what they were advising. We said, 'That didn't work and this is why we went back more confident...

...And assertive in the process that we had engaged in because the process had brought us to where we were and believing in our programme (CollegeB_FocusGroup)

This reinforces notions of power balance, respect for contributions, and professional development opportunities, discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Notwithstanding some of the concerns and inconsistencies concerning panel experiences, the findings across all focus groups illuminate the potential that validation panels have to build capacity amongst educators engaging in curriculum development, typified in the following contributions:

We have the validation panel to go through, so there's a good checking mechanism. You've six people in front of you, all experts in the field, and they're able to tell you what's right and what's wrong, the feedback was so useful (participantA)

The panel is very important. We were really pleased with the panel. (participantB)

I think panels in general are improving. There's not that sort of sense of, you know the word that used to be used so often, 'I have to defend my programme.' I think that's leaving our vocabulary. I hope it is. And we're recognising that panels are colleagues who can come in and help inform this programme and make it the best kind of programme it can be. And you're right. I mean they're a group of experts and you're not even having to pay for them. They're just coming in and it's fabulous, yes (participantC, CollegeD_FocusGroup).

This view is corroborated or supported through recommendations found in panel reports. Panel contributions frequently commended the development team in terms of passion and approach. The potential for the panel to add value and build capacity may currently be under tapped according to this inquiry. In working within a post-structural theoretical framework, and adopting discourse analysis principles, it is hoped that the process of this inquiry will further contribute to capacity building and agency around curriculum development.

Academic Professional Development

Echoing earlier opinion regarding academic professional development to facilitate and advance curriculum discourse, a narrative within this theme was for greater curriculum development support or training to ameliorate curriculum development practice within the current regulated framework, for example:

I think we need programme design training and doing it in a compliant way. Because the way I learned was from others doing the same thing, but who is to say they know what is expected from a regulatory perspective. I know my subject. I know teaching and learning. But nobody has ever given me any formal training about programme development (CollegeD_FocusGroup).

Redolent of comments above, in the context of curriculum development within the regulatory framework, it was acknowledged that the newly established National Forum of the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, and the support of institutional teaching and learning support units, may well offer such support and resources. Again, this echoes recommendations of Bernstein's (1990) call for the retrospective professional, and Stenhouse's (1975) plea for the extended professional.

In summary of this theme, the key narratives to emerge from the data are issues regarding the practice of developing curricula within a regulated environment. Although the findings show that participants are aware of the current regulated environment driving curricula development, practices are inconsistent, particularly

regarding panel input. Some teams argued the exchange and interaction was very positive, and informed the curriculum in a constructive way. For others the experience was the exact opposite. Notwithstanding this, there was widespread agreement that panels can present a valuable input into curriculum development, demonstrating future potential to build upon this opportunity. Further narratives to emerge were two discussed in the previous themes, but in different contexts. They concern issues regarding curricula review and development within the current regulated framework in particular difficulties with annual modifications and the five year review process; and the potential to use professional development training to advance the practice of curriculum development.

Summary

The analysis of data presents many interesting narratives. Narratives overlap, although the focus is nuanced differently within themes. Discussion within themes is not meant to delineate narratives, rather to illuminate the plurality of ways in which the findings have emerged.

Curriculum development discourse and practice varies considerably both within, and across institutions. There does not appear to be any one model or approach advocated or used, apart from the regulated policy and criteria required by QQI (QQI, 2010). But these policies provide only a template and a minimum set of requirements from a QA perspective. They do not provide a charter or structure for pre-development reflection and discussions. No frameworks or best practice models emerged regarding timing and approach for early educational philosophical discussions regarding the vision for the curriculum, despite the fact that the literature has been calling for such interventions for the last decade at least. However, the findings do show that early curriculum development discourse and reflection is necessary.

Other emerging issues relate to the consensus that discord and dissensus are productive tools for transforming curriculum, because they are useful for stimulating and engaging curriculum development discourse. Despite evidence that there are many educators wishing to contribute more within a respected and valued curriculum development environment, there is also evidence that some voices remain unheard

because of disengagement through apathy and because of restricted resources, and in some cases power relations.

The absence of deliberations concerning the optimal number of educators required for developing a curriculum, and the basis upon which the development teams should be convened, permeated much of the data. There were vast differences both across and within institutions, with some curious mechanisms for team appropriation. This has knock-on ramifications for the shape of curricula in terms of what should be included and excluded and on what basis. Encouragingly, the data demonstrated that educators have passionate and informed philosophical views and beliefs regarding education and the curricula they develop and teach to. They have what I am calling a positive educational philosophical compass that can be tapped into in order to develop rich curricula. This is heartening and something that perhaps could be drawn upon through timely curriculum development discourse opportunities.

Industry ready graduates were viewed as an important outcome of curricula in higher education, but this was regarded as only one among many important outcomes. Many saw developing a broader graduate with key competencies that could be transferred to the needs of the wider society, and future economic challenges, as being a more profound outcome of curricula. Reassuringly the data showed that both of these requirements are not necessarily viewed as mutually exclusive and can equally be accommodated within a curriculum. To reiterate earlier concluding remarks, curriculum development discourse and reflection can help to accommodate these outcomes effectively. Also QQI offer insight into inclusion of same through their Award Standards (QQI, 2014). Of concern, in the context of curricula outcomes, were the rigid and sometimes restrictive procedures for modifying curricula within the current legislated five year review process. This is perhaps something that needs to be taken up with at policy level, but before doing so requires further investigation.

Validation panels were viewed conflictingly as both something to be feared and perhaps coming with alternative agendas; and also as valuable resources which at best offer capacity building opportunities, and at worst can offer an added depth and richness to the programme. In any event, they do appear currently as an untapped resource.

Finally, the data analysis points towards opportunities afforded through academic and professional development mechanisms. Participants expressed views of development opportunities to support and inform curriculum development teams by providing space and expertise for discourse. The additional benefit of such an approach is that they also offer occasions for building capacity in regard of curriculum development. This is an unexpected narrative. Whilst most educators engage in some type of academic and professional development, and the literature calls for this practice, the notion of such customs contributing to capacity building and educator empowerment was not one considered in advance of this inquiry. This speaks to discussions above regarding the extended professional who is emancipated and empowered to effect curriculum advancements through change.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and Contribution

Introduction

This chapter presents findings and contributions to the field of curriculum development in higher education emanating from this research. The inquiry set out to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education in Ireland. As stated from the outset, the key objectives in realising this were to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development; to irradiate current curriculum development practices; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development. The research was conducted within a post-structural framework where curriculum development practices were deconstructed through discourse in order to question practice where educators are both a function and part of the process of curriculum development. Discourse analysis was used as a methodology to explore the dominant discourses of educators, institutions, and the national regulatory body.

The chapter commences by considering each of the research questions that this study set out to answer by way of findings, followed by a set of considerations that contribute to the field of curriculum development including a proposed framework for practice and discourse. The chapter continues with a discussion of initial implications for curriculum development which have emerged as a result of this research. As with all studies, there are limitations and these are laid out in the final section of this chapter.

Findings

The following section draws on the analysis and interpretation carried out in the previous chapter to present the findings. Each of the research questions the study set out to explore are used to present the findings below in a manner that illuminates the practice of curriculum development and discourse within the context of this investigation.

Research Question 1: What do educators see the purpose of education as being?

Educators who took part in this study viewed the purpose of higher education as being to empower learners and better equip them for the wider society they are entering. They questioned the risk of higher education becoming commodified and worried about a mono-view of curriculum development, in particular one driven solely by industry. Whilst they recognised departure from the traditional ideological purpose of university, and acknowledge the influence of economic imperatives, they stressed the need for broader curricula. This echoes views discussed in chapter two for an open-system curriculum that encourages divergent thinking and critical inquiry (Stenhouse, 1975), and a curriculum that ‘cultivates humanity’s maturity’ (Hogan, 2010, p.154). As presented in chapter four, the findings show that curriculum development teams should resist designing curricula that are merely functional in relation to the perceived needs of stakeholders such as the state and industry; and design curricula that go beyond, to produce graduates who have achieved profound outcomes that stand testament to them and society in the widest sense. This view mirrors the government’s national strategy for higher education where they state a curriculum experience ‘...should equip graduates with essential generic foundation skills as adaptive, creative, rounded thinkers and citizens – in addition to a comprehensive understanding of their relevant discipline’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.7). Economic, cultural and ideological orientations within a curriculum were found to be mutually inclusive and indeed there was evidence to suggest they are compatible in many ways. This speaks to notions of curricula developed as Pinar (2006) suggests ‘throughlines along with subjectivity, society and intellectual content in and across the academic disciplines’ (Pinar, 2006, p.2). Participants conceded that the current framework, whereby benchmarks are proffered by way of standards across three knowledge domains – cognitive or knowledge domain, psychomotor or know-how and skill, and affective or competence - is helpful. Nevertheless, they contested that these standards are a minimum requirement and philosophically see their role as educators and curriculum developers being about aiming for more with the learners. As critics of the objective-based approach advocated by Bobbit (1918) and Tyler (1949), Lawton (1984) and Stenhouse (1975) called for such divergent curricula. The findings show that these educators are passionate about teaching and learning and wish to stimulate a love of learning and sense of agency in their learners. Dolls (1995) model of curricula

development advocates a curriculum that is rich in quality knowledge integrated across disciplines, with opportunities for inquiry based learning and social activity. The findings reaffirm this as an approach to curriculum development.

Research Question 2: What are educators' experiences of curriculum development discourse?

Despite largescale agreement about the importance of, and a desire for, curriculum development discourse, the findings show that curriculum discourse, in general and specifically, is largely absent in higher education today. This reflects the concerns of many other educationalists, as discussed in chapter two (Barnett and Coate, 2006; Barnett, 2011; Scott, 2007). Participants explored the challenges associated with the quest for carving out the time for curriculum development discourse and reflection. As presented in the previous chapter, the findings demonstrate that whilst participants were eager to engage in such discourse, and keen to vigorously debate and challenge current curricula development practices as advocated by Barnett (2011) and Scott (2007), such discourse requires significant investment in terms of time and space, largely in addition to the daily teaching and learning commitments. There was concern that curriculum is often developed or reviewed on top of an already very heavy workload, and to the QQI templates which specify only the minimum required. The findings show there is a necessity for greater lead time to engage in meaningful curriculum reflection, discourse and debate. If institutions are not investing in this practice it may be a lost opportunity for creating and initiating new types of curricula with transformative potential. This reiterates much of the discussion in chapter two where Apple (1982) urges educators to engage in the struggle for transformed curricula, and Barnett (2011) says that in striving for a feasible utopia institutions need to invest in finding time and space for such practice. Leading by example is essential. The analysis shows that senior management respect and value for curricula development and related reflection and discourse is important evidenced in management acknowledgment and regard for the time and effort required in engaging in same. These challenges are not new, as discussed in chapter two where resource constraints were considered a barrier to transformed curricula (Barnett, 2011; Toohey, 1999). Notwithstanding difficulties regarding finding the time and space, and accepting that this is attended to, the type of discourse experienced is deliberated in the previous chapter, showing that early curriculum development discourse can assist

a team in scoping out the project within a shared space whereby all voices are valid and heard. In this way educator agency and ownership of curricula can be enabled. The findings demonstrate that conversations of this manner help to understand and develop a shared set of assumptions about the curriculum, echoing a fear that Rathcliff (1997) elucidates in chapter two, whereby a team may come to the curriculum development process with different assumptions about what the curriculum should be. If these varied assumptions are not critically explored, it may, Rathcliff claims, act as a barrier to fundamental change, thereby presenting a lost opportunity for developing transformative curriculum. Through discourse, individual assumptions regarding philosophical and pragmatic imperatives for the curriculum can be navigated and in some way collectively agreed and owned from the outset. Also, the findings point to a concerning revelation that at times curriculum was developed primarily by one person with acknowledgement that this is not best practice and does not contribute to a curriculum that is rich in content and design. Despite this concern, the research uncovered an opportunity to stimulate curricula discourse can be afforded through academic development. Academic professional development workshops were suggested to assist, by setting out the process for curriculum development and demonstrating how it relies on full engagement from all involved in order for truly transformative curricula to be designed.

Research Question 3: Are educators' philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?

As traversed in the previous chapter, interpretation of the data indicates that participants have strong philosophical beliefs regarding the purpose of higher education, and teaching and learning. They have a positive moral compass which influences and inspires their practice, evident in the manner in which they challenge themselves to give more to the curriculum development process than those legally required per QQI (QQI, 2014). Philosophically, educators see curricula as a mechanism to nurture and empower learners. However, as discussed above, the findings show that there was not much curriculum discourse, particularly in relation to educators' philosophical beliefs and how these beliefs can and do influence curricula. Educators who participated in this study enjoyed the opportunity it afforded them to have this type of philosophical dialog. They expressed a desire for more of this sort of discourse, and disappointment that in some cases this was the only such occasion for

discussion of this nature. The findings show they are keen to explore the philosophical objectives and purpose for the curricula being designed, and point to lack of time as being a reason for this parsimonious practice. This attends to issues discussed above and in chapter two regarding resource constraints (Barnett, 2011; Toohey, 1999), and Bernstein (1996) who was concerned about the negative implications of reduced resources on developing learner centered curricula. The lack of discourse may contribute to the finding that curriculum vision is not being sufficiently deliberated or shaped collectively by the team, again presenting a lost opportunity for transformative curricula and for learners. In chapter two, Toohey (1999) argues that curriculum is shaped by educators' philosophical beliefs, and Barnett and Coate (2006) call for discourse beyond structure and technical matters. Educators who engaged in this research expressed a desire to develop curricula that facilitates transformational learning, demonstrated in the manner in which the graduate is prepared to engage in the complex world they enter. This echoes the plea of many educationalists discussed in chapter two, for example Apple (1982), Hogan (2010), Kelly (2009) and Lawton (1984), to resist designing curriculum that moulds individuals to satisfy functional requirements rather than transformative ones. Critical discourse regarding the philosophical purpose of the curriculum has the potential to positively shape curricula to better meet the ever changing and complex environment graduates are entering.

Research Question 4: What contextual factors do educators see influencing the practice of curriculum development?

The findings show that focussed consideration needs to be afforded to the composition of the team tasked with curriculum development. A balanced and integrated team across all relevant disciplines is necessary, as called for in the literature (Bernstein, 1996; Doll, 1989; Pinar, 2006), but equally, this research highlights that team members need to be passionate about education and their discipline. This is not something traversed in the literature and perhaps warrants further investigation. Interpretation of the data identifies curious mechanisms for development team appropriation, again this is not prevalent in the literature and could benefit from more exploration. For example, curriculum development team leaders often choose to work with willing, motivated and passionate educators in the first instance, and not necessarily discipline experts as one might expect. Equally interesting was the finding that curriculum development teams were sometimes composed of people who had some spare capacity from a work

load perspective, and again not because they were the right person for the job. Slightly perturbing was the sense that participants did not appear unduly concerned about this approach to team composition. It raises concerns regarding curriculum development in terms of whether teams convened for the purpose of developing a particular programme are a best fit or convenience fit; which in turn adds a further layer of complexity to decisions regarding the arbitrary nature of content for inclusion as discussed by Moore and Young (2001). This notion of close fit teams is related to another finding discussed earlier in this chapter which was that of limited resources. The findings show that the team need to be rewarded and recognised for their work in developing the curriculum. Again, this needs to be formally considered and made explicit from the beginning with an open and honest expectation that all invited to be involved in the process will contribute fully because they are resourced and privileged to do so. Additionally, interpretation of the data showed that team members need to respect all inputs, and feel their contributions are valued, whilst recognising that discord is good, but consensus needs also to be reached. Reflections regarding optimal numbers for inclusion was deliberated with no clear sense of optimal number. However, the data shows practice of large teams having representative steering committees, which offers an effective and efficient way of managing the process. Echoing views of pro-discipline supporters such as Hirst (1974) and Pinar et al (1995), discipline sub-groups worked together to weave their content for inclusion across the curriculum, but this is only recommended after, as the findings demonstrate, the wider group agree a shared vision. Finally, whilst the findings showed that participants respect and acknowledge the impact of economic imperatives evidenced in industry input and guided by institutional strategy, they were concerned that curricula risked being designed solely for preparing industry ready graduates.

Research Question 5: Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?

The loci of power were found to reside primarily in two places – power within teams, and power through QQI, the state regulatory body. In the first instance, the findings showed that decision making mechanisms varied across the data but what was consistent was a view that they need to be formalised from the outset of the curriculum development process. Interpretation of the data illustrated widespread acceptance for formalised decision making. Imbued in these mechanisms should be a culture of valuing and challenging all contributions within a respectful environment. As

discussed above, decision makers should remember discord among team members was viewed as constructive offering transformative opportunities for the curriculum. Harmony sometimes can be mistaken for apathy. Team dissonance can shake things up and help create an exciting and innovative curriculum. This echoes views presented in chapter two where Barnett and Coate (2006) and Scott (2007) call for vigorous curricula debate. However, the findings also indicated there are voices that are more, and less, powerful than others – in other words all contributions are not equally received. This relates to a point discussed earlier and raised in the literature about the sometimes arbitrary nature of content assigned to curricula (Moore and Young, 2001). Some suggestions found in analysis of the data to help engage the disengaged include: financial recompense, high level commitment evidenced in time being afforded to the process, and respectful recognition for contributions. Interpretation of analysis illustrated that clear vision for the curriculum being developed combined with formal decision making mechanisms may assist in deciphering what contributions are valid. Ultimately, application of mechanisms that facilitate the hearing of input from all voices will help mitigate against arbitrary assignment of content and material based on the old adage of he who shouts loudest gets heard.

The other locus of power identified in the analysis was one that is regularly traversed in the literature, that of power or influence of the state on curricula. In the context of this study, the regulatory body for higher education in Ireland is QQI and is a legislated state agency. As discussed in chapter two, QQI nominates expert validation panels to recommend approval and review of curricula (QQI, 2010). Analysis of the data showed these validation panels to be viewed with trepidation in some cases, but more frequently they were found to be a critical friend. In either case, the findings evidenced that they do wield power. In support of Apple's (1982) call for educators to exert influence over the state, participants in this study frequently challenged the panel. A concern identified in the findings with regard to the regulated environment, is the process of programme modification within the current regulatory framework. It is viewed as overly restrictive and prescriptive with the effect that often curricula are not being reviewed during the five year programme life cycle. This is concerning because of the pace of change in the economy and society. Finally, in regard to this question, analysis shows suggestions that the development of further academic professional development opportunities will assist in both challenging panels and externs and in

contributing to team discussions as a result of knowing more about the process and associated jargon. This is discussed further in presenting findings for the final research question next.

Research Question 6: How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?

How educators can be empowered in relation to curriculum development was not as explicitly addressed as the other questions were. However, I would argue that it is implicit in much of the discussion across all of the findings. Furthermore, the methodology and theoretical framework used to guide this study, discussed in chapter three, contributed to greater participant empowerment and capacity building. Discourse analysis as a methodology views related discourses and the activity as being interwoven. In the words of Philips and Hardy (2002, p.6) discourse analysis is concerned with ‘...how that social reality came into existence through the constructive effects of various discourse and associated texts’. I contend that the opportunities participants had to engage in discussions as part of this study were empowering in and of themselves. Post-structuralists view language as ‘...constituting social reality rather than reflecting an already given reality’ (Walshaw, 2007, p.5) and by engaging in discussion regarding their practice of curriculum development, participants of this study felt a greater sense of ownership and agency in the curriculum in general. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the experience of developing a curriculum in itself empowers educators. This is not something that is deliberated in any detail in the literature pertaining to curriculum development. Analysis demonstrates that often participants’ initial experience of curriculum development or review was very daunting. The technical jargon or language associated with the current regulated framework in some ways had the effect of disempowering educators because they were not prepared or experienced in this space. There was a sense of educators feeling very confident about their own discipline, but they were less so about the language and templates used as part of the regulated environment guiding curriculum development, and they felt that in some ways this disempowered them. Where participants were familiar with the regulated environment, including the role of the validation panel, they were more inclined to contribute and debate the curriculum vigorously. As discussed above, the research shows that participants want greater preparation in terms of professional development support, and contend that this may empower them earlier in

the process. Notwithstanding this, participants were also of a mind that validation panels, when used well where critical discourse was encouraged, could contribute to greater empowerment and capacity building. Conversely the opposite was also found to be true.

In summary of the findings, the following ten contributions to emanate from the research are presented, and inform the framework for curriculum development as proposed in the next section:

1. Curriculum development with profound outcomes driven by mutually compatible economic, ideological and societal requirements is required. Development of curricula driven primarily by any one imperative is to be resisted.
2. Curricula developed as an open system where divergent thinking is stimulated, and learners are encouraged to tolerate ambiguity is called for. Learning outcomes (per QQI benchmarked standards) should be used as the minimum attainment required.
3. Curricula have transformative potential where educators' philosophical beliefs inform curriculum development. This can be facilitated through discourse across, and within disciplines, regarding what should and should not be included in the curriculum, and on what basis.
4. Curriculum development discourse requires sufficient lead time and needs to be in addition to the current development timescale. Significant time is required to deliberate and carve out a shared philosophical and pedagogical vision for curricula.
5. Curriculum development teams need to be convened with purpose. The net needs to be widely cast and justification for team composition should be presented to the validation panel.
6. Curriculum developed by a team, with team discourse used to guide and shape the curriculum in an informed manner will provide richer and more valuable outcomes. There should never be occasion where one person develops a curriculum. Validation panels can be used as a critical friends to stimulate discourse.

7. Mechanisms for decision making during the process of developing curricula need to be made explicit from the outset with recognition that team discord is to be valued as a tool for challenging and questioning the curricula as it is being developed.
8. Senior management must acknowledge and value the practice of curricula development by resourcing and rewarding educators for their role in curriculum development.
9. Policies for modifying curriculum during the five year lifecycle need to be reviewed to allow for more regular modification in an environment that welcomes such change where justifiable and reasonable.
10. Professional development opportunities can be used to empower educators in relation to curriculum development, by equipping them to develop curricula within open, challenging and compliant environments.

Contribution to Curriculum Development

The findings presented above contribute to the conversation of curriculum development practice and related discourse in three inter-related ways – policy at institutional level; practice at developmental level; and discourse guiding practice. As deliberated above, some of the findings reinforce on-going discussions in the literature. Others add some new dimensions to the discourse and potential for further investigation. The three areas are discussed below, followed by a proposed framework which teams can use to embed some of the key findings from this research into the practice of curriculum development.

Consideration at institutional level is required regarding curriculum development teams and the manner in which they should be convened with purpose. The net should be widely cast to ensure inclusion of passionate subject experts. Justification for team composition can be further debated with the validation panel by way of critical discourse. Senior management recognition and value for the practice of curricula development, evidenced through resourcing and rewarding educators for their role in curriculum development, is key. As part of senior management resource commitment, sufficient lead time for curriculum development discourse beyond the current

development timescale, should be accommodated. This is required to deliberate and carve out a shared philosophical and pedagogical vision across disciplines for curricula. Furthermore, mechanisms for decision making during the process of developing curricula need to be made explicit from the outset with recognition that team discord is to be valued as a tool for challenging and questioning the curricula as it is being developed. Finally, policies for modifying curriculum during the five year lifecycle need to be reviewed to facilitate more regular modification in an environment that welcomes such change where justifiable and reasonable.

Curriculum development practice in higher education in Ireland calls for curricula with profound outcomes driven by mutually compatible economic, ideological and societal requirements. Development of curricula driven primarily by any one imperative is to be resisted. In addition, curricula developed as an open system where divergent thinking is stimulated, and learners are encouraged to tolerate ambiguity, is advocated. Learning outcomes (per QQI benchmarked standards) should be used as the minimum attainment required. There is potential to utilise the ‘insight’ sub-strand within the competence strand, in a more advanced way. This can attend to the finding regarding participants desire to create a curriculum that facilitates development of learners’ critical thinking and inquiry in its broadest sense. Barbazet and Bush (2014), and Hogan (2010) advocate curricula that contributes to development of a mindful learner that is not solely driven by failure or success but by a sense of connection, agency and accountability. Finally, curriculum developed by a team, with team discourse used to guide and shape the curriculum in a shared and informed manner, will provide richer and more valuable outcomes. There should never be occasion where one person develops a curriculum.

Curricula discourse to drive practice is crucial. Curricula has transformative potential where educators’ philosophical beliefs and discipline expertise inform curriculum development through a ‘conceptual montage’ as Pinar (2006) refers to it. The discourse should be integrated across, and within disciplines, regarding what knowledge, content and pedagogy should drive the curriculum and on what basis, thereby reducing the arbitrary nature of such decisions. As discussed above, discord is to be welcomed as a discourse stimulant. Professional development opportunities can be used advantageously in two ways; firstly as a tool for curriculum discourse, and secondly

to empower educators in relation to curriculum development by equipping them to develop curricula within open, challenging and compliant environments. Finally validation panels offer a hitherto under-tapped potential for critical curricula discourse if the panels are viewed as critical friends.

The following framework draws together the key findings in the context of this study and is offered to curriculum development teams for consideration at the early stage of developing curricula.

Figure 2: Framework for Curriculum Development Practice and Discourse



This framework offers a new contribution to curriculum development in higher education. As a framework it can be used to question and challenge current curriculum development practices across three key areas. Many findings contained in the framework reinforce much of the literature in the area thus serving to re-focus attention on these elements lest there be a perception that these concerns are currently being fully addressed. More original findings contained in the framework relate to the rationale for team composition and appropriation, and the use of professional development opportunities to build capacity and empower educators to have their voices heard. Additionally, the use of discourse analysis and advisory group as a methodology presented a novel approach. As a methodology it offered both the opportunity to collect data across different discourses, thereby providing greater depth and reliability to the study, and the occasion to build curriculum development capacity as a result of the discourses which took place as part of this inquiry.

Implications for Curriculum Development Practice

There is much ongoing work at the moment in higher education in Ireland regarding development of a professional development framework (National Forum, 2015). But, the extent to which curriculum development is included as essential professional development, either within the national framework of professional development or internal teaching and learning support mechanisms, as part of continued professional development, is still unclear. Outside of this study, I was recently commissioned to write a response for the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA¹) to a call for consultation regarding development of the national professional development framework. The response report was approved by all sixteen colleges represented by HECA, and submitted to the National Forum in June 2015. Recommendations for including curriculum development training and support in terms of both continued professional development, and as part of a professional teaching qualification, were included in the response to the National Forum. Additionally, my own institution recently approved a new procedure in relation to curriculum development and review. As a result of this research, I recommended to Academic Professional Council (APC) that the findings, along with a handbook that was produced and influenced by this research, be workshopped in advance of any team reviewing or developing curricula. This recommendation was approved at APC on 3rd July 2015 and is now part of the process of programme design and review. The three other colleges who participated in this inquiry are also keen to have the findings shared with their educators. There may be potential to share the handbook and workshop format with these colleges once it has been launched in my own institution.

Furthermore, I have been invited to present a paper on these findings at a conference in UCSI University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 20th – 21st November 2015. The conference title is ‘International Conference on Innovations, Shifts and Challenge (ICISC) in Teaching and Learning’, and my own college are funding this for which I am grateful.

¹ The researcher is a member of the HECA Teaching and Learning Committee – see www.heca.ie for more information

Finally, in terms of further implications for practice, the Director for the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning has expressed interest in exploring the findings from the study. She is of a similar view to me that curriculum development offers transformative opportunities through embedding key innovations to advance both the economy and society in general.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the choice of colleges used for the research, the primary focus on curriculum development and not review processes, using discourse analysis as a methodology including the manner in which the advisory group contributed to the research, the power dynamics at play in focus groups, and my personal reflexivity within the study.

There were four colleges used in the research and these were purposively chosen because of the relationships I had with them. They are representative of the Institutes of Technology (IOT) and private sector in Ireland, but not the university sector. As discussed in chapter two, although recent legislation enacting QQI as the over-arching quality assurance body is to ensure all providers are operating to the same standards within a transparent and regulated environment regulated by QQI, there remains a legacy perception whereby Universities are still operating autonomously. Including Universities in the study may have provided broader insight into the influence of philosophical beliefs on curriculum development, in particular with regard to discipline domains. However I did not have the same access potential in the university sector as I had in the other two areas. This I acknowledge as a limitation of the inquiry.

Another limitation of the study was its focus primarily on curriculum development. Some of the participants involved used curriculum review as their frame of reference. This inquiry does not differentiate between curriculum development and review, and it has to be recognised that there are subtle differences between both, despite the fact that QQI now refer to review as re-validation implying that it is a new development and validation process. But in reality a review has different characteristics than a development process. The main difference is that a review has a pre-existing programme to use as a starting point for discussion. Also, the review process tends to

have a historic team in situ and does not necessarily start with a new development team. This can have the effect of legacy power relations. Nonetheless, the framework proposed in this research will also serve a review team well because it offers the team an opportunity to review the curriculum with fresh eyes in a more reflective and structured manner.

The methodology is a limitation in itself. As a methodology, discourse analysis is known to be labour intensive and time consuming. Although use of discourse analysis is viewed as a strength of the research, it is also a limitation because of the time required to analyse the different types of texts. Additionally, there were four layers of discourse used as data for analysis. Arguably many other discourses could have been included and may have offered different insight and context to the practice of curriculum development. For example minutes from curriculum development team meetings could possibly provide more granular awareness of curriculum development practices. But, these documents are more subject to privacy and difficult to access. A further limitation is that the advisory group did not inform the research aim and objectives, as is the case with other research using advisory groups, for example, rights based research, and community based research. Notwithstanding this limitation, it is important to acknowledge that the dual purpose of using an advisory group was to facilitate capacity building with educators involved in curriculum development, and to contribute to the validity and reliability of the research; not to advise on the aim or objectives.

A further limitation of the methodology relates to power dynamics at play in focus groups and the possible impact this may have had on the findings. Use of an advisor in the focus groups had the effect of the advisor being able to observe power play during the focus groups that I as researcher and practitioner may not have picked up. This was particularly prevalent and noticeable in one focus group where the advisor noticed one dominant member of the focus group opened and closed most discussions. Furthermore, the advisor commented that he observed other members within the group constantly making eye contact with that dominant member during their contributions. But the scope of the research did not permit further investigation into this dynamic. It is, however, to my mind, an area worthy of further investigation.

A final limitation, and one that is common within qualitative studies based using discourse analysis, is that of personal reflexivity. It is important to declare that my personal context and professional biography will have had an influence on my analysis and interpretation of the data. My working relationship with many of the participants contributing to the enquiry is a limitation as I was personally positioned within the research. There is not a clear separation between the subject and object of the research, nor the method and interpretation. This had the effect of my being very close to the data as it was collected, analysed and interpreted. The use of an advisory group helped to redress this by bringing an element of external objectivity to the process. Although this is a limitation, it is also a characteristic of discourse analysis where the research is conducted with, rather than on participants.

Summary

This dissertation set out to elucidate the practice of both curriculum development and curriculum development discourse in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this purpose were to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate educators' philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development; to irradiate current curriculum development practices; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development. I argue that discourse analysis enabled achievement of all four objectives. As a method, discourse analysis engaged educators in curriculum development discourse thereby building capacity around the activity, and as an approach, it illuminated the impact of educators' philosophical beliefs on curriculum development, whilst also informing ongoing curriculum development practices. The study was conducted with, rather than on the participants with the aim of prompting educators to engage more robustly in curricula development processes. The findings and resultant framework, I argue, will enable educators to contribute to curriculum development in a more considered and reflective manner. Discourse analysis uses various discourses and associated texts to explore a social reality. In the case of this research the discourses used were focus groups and interviews with educators across four providers of higher education in addition to strategy documents and validation reports from the same four colleges. The manner in which these discourses were analysed offers context and relativity to curriculum development practices. Most

importantly though, the use of discourse analysis facilitated exploration of conversations that may otherwise have been lost, and thus may have prevented us from uncovering some exciting gems in relation to curriculum development practice and discourse.

The methodology of discourse analysis was situated within a shared philosophical foundation of both transformative and constructivist paradigms - constructivist because the discussions which formed part of this research contributed to constructing the social reality of curriculum development practices; and transformative because both the methodology and advisory group were aimed at creating greater agency amongst educators in relation to curriculum development, thereby offering potential for transformative practices. Additionally the recommendations and ensuing framework offer transformative potential when included formally as an early part of the curriculum development process. This research was initially inspired by the work of Barnett and Coate (2006), who urged educators to engage in curriculum development discourse and not to be afraid of discussing the difficult questions. It adds to the curriculum development conversation by using the inquiry as a tool to prompt curriculum development discourse; and by proposing a framework for curriculum development teams to use as an early intervention to stimulate critical curriculum development discourse and reflection. Scott (2007) contends that key moments in curriculum history were being lost, leaving a curriculum that is not vigorously negotiated or agreed. Using this proposed framework for curriculum development practice and discourse can help stimulate and reinvigorate both educators and curricula. Imagine how a passionately and vigorously debated and thus informed curricula, could transform our learners. We must become, and remain, critical agents of the curricula we are developing. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to be involved in developing a curriculum for learners. I close this piece of research with a quote from Barnett and Coate (2006, p.25) that initially inspired this study.

Through curricula ideas of higher education are put into action.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information Sheets and Consent Forms

1.1 College Permission and Approval

From: Fiona O'Riordan [<mailto:fiona.oriordan@qcd.ie>]

Sent: 20 February 2014 17:04

To: xxx (educational developer in each college)

Cc: xxxx (member of advisory group)

Subject: My Research

Hi xxxx

Many thanks for agreeing to support me with my research. As I was saying on the phone on Tuesday, I am at the point where I am ready to commence my field work for my Doctoral research.

My research is on Curriculum Development Discourse – the full title is the proposal of “**Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Investigating Practice and Discourse**” and is in part fulfilment of my Ed.D in Queens University Belfast.

The purpose of the research is to provide a space for the voice of academics to engage with, and influence curriculum development, in the context of higher education, and the key objectives are to:

- Engage educators in curriculum development discourse
- Illuminate educators’ epistemological beliefs and their role in curriculum development
- Empower educators in relation to curriculum development

The research is informed by constructivist and transformative paradigms and uses discourse analysis as the methodology. I tell you this, because the aim of the methodology is to encourage educators to have a voice in curriculum development (programme design). So it is hoped that this research will encourage and empower educators to consider their input and role in curriculum design, thereby ultimately enriching the design process. In this way it is hoped that your institution (and programme design teams) will benefit from being part of the research.

Specially what I ask from you is if you could seek permission from two programme directors to be interviewed; and convene a group of approx. six lecturers for a focus group (the six lecturers do not necessarily have to be part of the same programme, in fact it would be better if they were not so that I could diverse views and input).

I am attaching information sheets and consent forms for both focus groups, and in-depth interviews. These are for information purposes only for yourself and the others involved in the research. I will give a brief introduction and organise participants to sign consent forms just prior to the interviews and focus group. In addition I attach a suggested consent form for your Academic Council approval.

As discussed on the phone, I am inviting a member of my research advisory group, xxxx, into the focus group to observe and take notes. This is to contribute to the validity and reliability of the research.

Can I suggest a visit to xxxx to conduct both the two interviews, and the one focus group on one of the following dates, whichever suits you:
xxx

Looking forward to hearing from you, and thanks again for your support xxx.
Best wishes

Fiona.

Academic Council Approval

This is a request made by _____ on behalf of Fiona O’Riordan, who is conducting a study to propose “**Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Investigating Practice and Discourse**” in part fulfilment of her Ed.D in Queens University Belfast. Fiona works in Griffith College as Head of Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence, and has worked with many of our programme development teams in an advisory capacity over the last number of years.

The purpose of the research is to provide a space for the voice of academics to engage with, and influence curriculum development, in the context of higher education, and the key objectives are to:

- Engage educators in curriculum development discourse
- Illuminate educators’ epistemological beliefs and their role in curriculum development
- Empower educators in relation to curriculum development

I am seeking Academic Council approval for our institution to take part in this research, which will involve two in-depth interviews with two programme directors who recently led a programmatic review or design team; and one focus group with a six lecturers who recently worked as part of a programme review or design team.

Our participation is entirely voluntary, and we are under no obligation to take part in this inquiry. Furthermore if we wish to withdraw from the study at any point prior to the analysis phase of the research we are free to do so. She assures us that all information our team of educators share with her will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that all comments/contributions will be anonymised both in terms of your participant name, and the institution they work in.

In addition she guarantees us that all data will be stored on an encrypted laptop and backed up on an encrypted USB memory stick. Once the research is complete Fiona gives us her work that all data will be carefully and fully destroyed.

The School of Education’s Research Ethics Committee at Queen’s University Belfast granted permission for this research in December 2013.

Academic Approval Granted

Signed by: _____

Date: _____

Fiona has said we are to feel free to contact her at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if we have any questions regarding this inquiry.

1.2 Advisory Group

My name is Fiona O’Riordan, and I am conducting a study to propose “**Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Investigating Practice and Discourse**” in part fulfilment of my Ed.D in Queens University Belfast.

The aim of this research is to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this aim are to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate educators’ philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development; to irradiate current curriculum development practices; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development.

1. What is the role of the advisory group?

The purpose of an advisory group in the context of this inquiry is twofold; (i) to help develop a sense of agency and ownership of curriculum development and design within your discipline; and (ii) to contribute to quality research. The research paradigmatic influences underpinning this inquiry are constructivist and transformative. This simply means that research methods that offer opportunities to construct multiple realities through interacting with educators in the social world of curriculum development are appropriate. In addition the methods deployed must embrace an advocacy role with the objective of empowering educators to question and challenge existing unjust or inequitable curriculum development practices. The role of the advisory group is to inform the research with a view to initiating change in curriculum development way beyond the period of time involved in this inquiry. In the context of this inquiry, advisory group input at each of the phases of the research outlined below is invited.

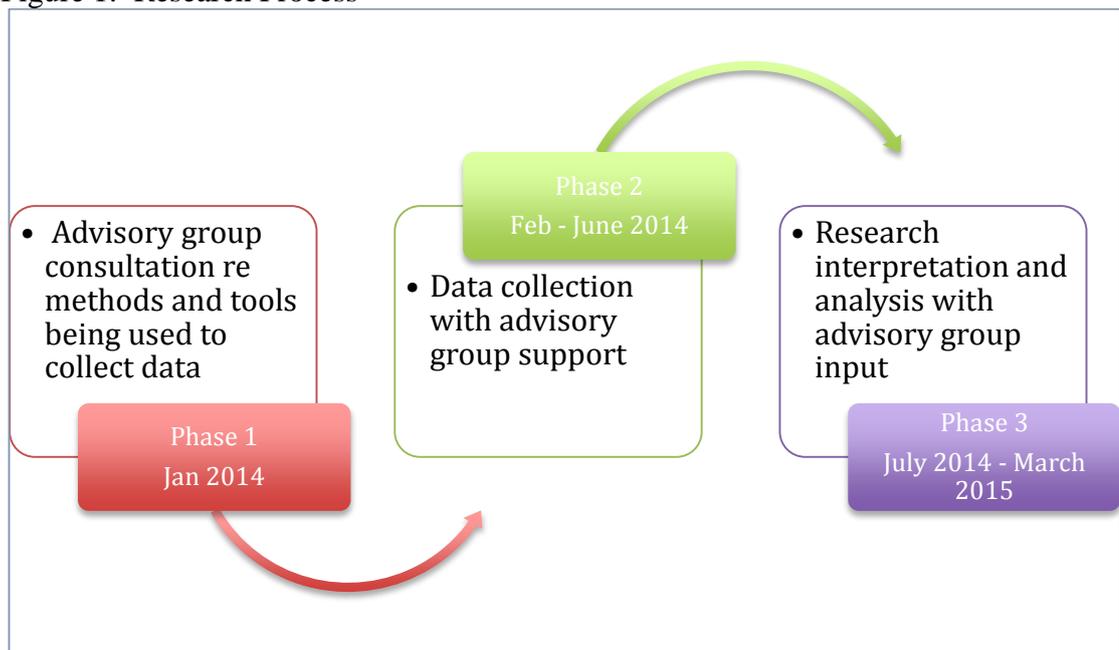
2. What is the research methodology?

- Phase 1: Advisory group informs research approach and tools (e.g. questions/prompts);
- Phase 2: A member of the advisory group will be invited in to one of four focus groups with programme design teams. The advisory group member will act as

a non-participatory observer who may take notes. The focus group will be recorded and transcripts, along with other forms of discourse (e.g. previous validation reports and experience, institutional review processes) and the advisors input, will be used for analysis using a discourse analysis approach;

- Phase 3: Research team comprising of primary researcher and research advisory group engage in data analysis and interpretation.

Figure 1: Research Process



Please feel free to contact me at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if you have any questions regarding this inquiry.

I have read the attached guidance notes, which explains my role in the research as a member of the advisory group.

....

I understand the guidance notes, and realize I will be working as a member of an advisory group in a research project aimed at providing a space for the voice of academics to engage with, and influence curriculum design, in the context of higher education.

I understand that all the information I become privileged to as a result of this research is to be kept strictly confidential.

I understand that I may be requested to sit in as an observer on one of the focus groups at the data collection phase.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time but when I do withdraw, or when the research is complete, I must continue to keep all information that I was exposed to during the research completely confidential.

I understand that this research will be published in form of a Doctoral dissertation and, where possible, in appropriate journals, or presented at appropriate conferences.

- I **AGREE** to working on the advisory group for this research.
- I **AGREE** that I have not been coerced in any way to work on the advisory group for this research.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Many thanks for giving the time and commitment to inform this inquiry through being a member of the advisory group.

Please feel free to contact me at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if you have any questions regarding this inquiry.

1.2 Interview and Focus Group Participants

Research Information Sheet for Focus Groups

My name is Fiona O’Riordan, and I am conducting a study to propose “**Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Investigating Practice and Discourse**” in part fulfilment of my Ed.D in Queens University Belfast. I work in Griffith College as Head of Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence.

The aim of this research is to elucidate the voice of educators with regard to their experience of curriculum development practice and discourse, in the context of higher education. The key objectives in realising this aim are to engage educators in curriculum development discourse; illuminate educators’ philosophical beliefs and their influence on curriculum development; to irradiate current curriculum development practices; and contribute to capacity building among educators in relation to their role in curriculum development.

You have been invited to take part in this research because of the role you recently played in curriculum development (programme design) process. I am interested to hear your views about the experience, in particular in relation to the role you played and the manner in which you informed the development process, and ultimately the end programme. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part in this inquiry. Furthermore if you wish to withdraw from the study at any point prior to the analysis phase of the research please feel free to do so. You can also be assured that all information you share with me will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and your comments/contributions will be anonymised both in terms of your name, and the institution you work in.

Your role in the research is to take part in a focus group with five or six of your colleagues in the same institution, who have recently been involved in a programme design or re-design process. The others involved in the focus group may, or may not, have been involved on the same programme development teams as you have. I will be the focus group moderator and my colleague on the research advisory group will take notes. With your permission, the session will be recorded, and anonymised transcripts

will be used for analysis using discourse analysis. A research advisory group is consulted when analysing the transcripts. This advisory group have signed a confidentiality form and I will have anonymised all transcripts in advance of the analysis. The purpose of the advisory group is two-fold (i) to create a sense of agency amongst educators with regard to engaging in curriculum development discourse; and (ii) to contribute to quality research.

The benefits of you taking part in the research includes informing future programme design practices, and offering you a space to engage in curriculum development discourse with an expectation that this will assist you in future programme design processes.

Once I have completed the research and defended same in my Ed.D Viva, I give you my personal assurance that I will destroy all recordings, notes and transcripts. In the meantime all information will be stored on my laptop, with back up on a USB memory stick – both of which will be encrypted.

The School of Education's Research Ethics Committee at Queen's University Belfast granted permission for this research in December 2013.

Please feel free to contact me at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if you have any questions regarding this inquiry.

Many thanks.

Fiona O'Riordan

Research Information Sheet for In-depth Interviews

My name is Fiona O’Riordan, and I am conducting a study to propose “**An Analytical Framework to Elicit Curriculum Development Discourse in Higher Education**” in part fulfilment of my Ed.D in Queens University Belfast. I work in Griffith College as Head of Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence.

The purpose of the research is to provide a space for the voice of academics to engage with, and influence curriculum development, in the context of higher education, and the key objectives are to:

- Engage educators in curriculum development discourse
- Illuminate educators’ epistemological beliefs and their role in curriculum development
- Empower educators in relation to curriculum development

You have been invited to take part in this research because of the role you recently played in a curriculum development (programme design) process. I am interested to hear your views about the experience, in particular in relation to the role you played and the manner in which you informed the development process, and ultimately the end programme. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part in this inquiry. Furthermore if you wish to withdraw from the study at any point prior to the analysis phase of the research please feel free to do so. You can also be assured that all information you share with me will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and your comments/contributions will be anonymised both in terms of your name, and the institution you work in.

Your role in this research is to take part in an in-depth interview, which, with your permission will be recorded. Anonymised transcripts will be used for analysis using discourse analysis. A research advisory group is consulted when analysing the transcripts. This group have signed a confidentiality form and I will have anonymised all transcripts in advance of the analysis and their input. The purpose of the advisory group is two-fold (i) to create a sense of agency amongst educators with regard to engaging in curriculum development discourse; and (ii) to contribute to quality research. The benefits of you taking part in the research includes informing future programme development practices, and offering you a space to engage in curriculum

development discourse with an expectation that this will assist you in future programme development processes.

Once I have completed the research and defended same in my Ed.D Viva, I give you my personal assurance that I will destroy all recordings, notes and transcripts. In the meantime all information will be stored on my laptop, with back up on a USB memory stick – both of which will be encrypted.

The School of Education's Research Ethics Committee at Queen's University Belfast granted permission for this research in December 2013.

Please feel free to contact me at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if you have any questions regarding this inquiry.

Many thanks.

Fiona O'Riordan

Research Consent Form

I have read the attached information letter, which explains the research aimed at providing a space for the voice of academics to engage with, and influence curriculum development, in the context of higher education.

....

I understand that the letter is asking me to participate in a focus group/interview.

I understand that all the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my name and the name of my institution will not be included in any reports.

I understand that this inquiry is using an advisory group as part of the data collection phase, and analysis and interpretation phase.

I understand that my contribution will be recorded, but that transcripts will be anonymised.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time up until the data analysis phase.

I understand that this research will be published in form of a Doctoral dissertation and, where possible, in appropriate journals, or presented at appropriate conferences.

I **AGREE** to take part in the above research

I **AGREE** that I have not been coerced in any way to take part in the above research

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please feel free to contact me at Fiona.oriordan@gcd.ie or +3531 4150437, at any time if you have any questions regarding this inquiry.

1.4 Email re Anonymity

Fiona ORiordan

Thu 06/08/2015 12:58

Inbox; Sent Items

To:

Fiona ORiordan;

Dear Colleagues

I am nearing the end of my thesis - submission date is 15th September 2015. Many thanks to you all for contributing to the research. I look forward to sharing the findings with you once my Viva is complete.

In the meantime, I am writing up the ethics section and thought it important to remind you that all contributions in the focus groups are to remain anonymous. I have ensured in the write up that contributions are anonymised, and members of the advisory group have reviewed the chapter to ensure this is done so satisfactorily.

Again, thank you all for participating.

Warm regards

Fiona.

Appendix 2: Interview and Focus Group Structure

2.1 Alignment of Research Questions and Codes

<i>Background context</i>	<i>Prompts</i>	<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Data Analysis Code</i>
Bobbit (1918) and Tyler (1949) purport an objectives based approach to education where curricula are designed to create with pre-defined objectives – viewed by some as reductionist where learners are moulded (Kelly, 2009) and developed for a particular function (Hogan, 2010). As an approach it is similar to the current model of curricula design. Hirst (1922) proposes education is to indoctrinate learners into a discipline by discipline experts, and Schwab (1978) - curriculum designed by discipline experts. Lawton (1984) - curriculum designed to prepare graduates for an ambiguous world.	What do you think the purpose of higher education is? Do you hold ideological and liberal beliefs about the purpose of HE? Or do you think the purpose of HE is driven by economic and political imperatives, or is it about addressing issues of social transformation? In this context then, what should the objectives or outcomes of a successful curriculum be, in your opinion?	Q1: What do educators see as the purpose of higher education?	Purpose of higher education
Stenhouse (1975) says in order to create divergent curricula educators need to question existing curricula. Barnett and Coate (2006) call on educators to challenge the curriculum through discourse. Apple (1982) argues that transformed curricula comes through struggle but advises us against blindly reproducing existing curricula. Scott (2007) is concerned that curriculum is designed based on ‘false consensus’ and with little negotiation. In any event, discourse appears to be at the root of all transformation.	In your experience is curriculum development or curriculum discourse taking place? Is so where and by whom? (in faculty; conferences; affiliated bodies) What factors influence such discourses? (politics, values, QA, marketers) How do you locate yourself within curriculum development discourse? To what extent do you feel you can contribute to such conversations?	Q2: What are educators’ experience of curriculum development practice, and discourse?	Practice of curriculum development discourse
Some objectives are less tangible than others & are more associated with higher level outcomes (Eisner, 1969; Popham, 1972; Stenhouse, 1975). Knowledge or content for inclusion is arbitrary and based on the beliefs of those designing the curricula (Moore and Young, 2001). Dewey (1956) subscribed to a body of knowledge based on disproving hypotheses; Popper viewed this as identification of falsehoods (Lawton, 1984). The content or knowledge included in a curricula is largely dependent on the philosophical beliefs educators hold dear, and their ability to	What is your (i) understanding and (ii) experience of curriculum development. For example do you see it as content or learner centred? Or being about the product (the qualification) or process (the learning experience)? What are your views of knowledge? To what extent do you feel responsible for developing the learner beyond the knowledge or content contained in a	Q3: Are educators’ philosophical beliefs underpinning their experience of curriculum development?	Educators’ Philosophical Beliefs

<p>defend these beliefs – Pinar (2006) refers to this as reassertion of our intellectual commitment.</p>	<p>curriculum? How are questions of what should or should not be included addressed?</p>		
<p>The current environment of higher education is driven by the Bologna Process and the consolidation of same into the European Higher Education Area in 2010 (ENQA, 2009). As a result curricula are developed within a regulated and standardised space using quality assured processes and procedures which includes templates and guides such as the Award Standards (QQI, 2014). High level strategy document directing higher education nationally until 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) calls for economic recovery through higher education many of the subsequent curricula were designed with significant industry input. The strategy document does recognise that higher education can contribute to a more rounded and fulfilled individual with a sense civic and societal agency. Institutional strategies recognise this. Impact of validation panel report.</p>	<p>What do you see the role of QQI as being? What other stakeholders influence development of the curricula in your opinion? Do you feel that your academic freedom or autonomy are diminished in any way?</p>	<p>Q4: What contextual factors do educators see influencing curriculum development?</p>	<p>Context and Landscape of Higher Education</p>
<p>Loci of power or perceived loci of power permeates much of the literature, in particular the role of the state through legislation and the regulation body of QQI (Department of Education and Skills, 1999; Department of Education and Skills, 2012), and the National Strategy for Higher Education (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). This is redolent of the views of Apple (1982). Giroux (1992) discusses power balance between education and the wider society. Other power issues are presented throughout the literature in terms of the struggle for universal and collective truths in doctrinal disciplines (Hirst, 2007). Moore and Young (2001) contend there are two opposing traditions (i) neo-conservative where curriculum as a body of discipline knowledge is paramount versus (ii) the technical-instrumentalist where curriculum is about contributing to the economy. Freire (1990) argues that power and knowledge are inextricable linked and based in relativism. This study asks the question of participants regarding where they perceive the loci of power to reside in curriculum development.</p>	<p>What are your thoughts on this view? How much of the discipline expert (you) should be invested in the curriculum? What extent does your own professional biography influence curriculum development? What are your views on neutrality of opinion and influence in the curriculum development process?</p>	<p>Q: 5 Where do the loci of power reside in curriculum development?</p>	<p>Loci of Power</p>

<p><i>Triggers for curriculum development and reform</i> come from many different places e.g. QQI; Industry; Government; Learners etc. In tandem with these drivers is the increased attention to pedagogical research into how students learn.</p>	<p>What triggers do you believe influence curriculum development? Should educators be more or less empowered in relation to curriculum development? How (if at all) would you want to see curriculum development reformed?</p>	<p>Q6: How can educators be empowered in relation to curriculum development?</p>	<p>Educator Empowerment</p>
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2.2 Focus group structure/guide

We will start with a discussion on philosophical questions like what you believe the purpose of HE is; and what knowledge is included and on what basis. Then we will explore your understanding and experience of curriculum development and where curriculum discourse occurs; followed by a discussion of your role and input into curriculum development and the contextual factors influencing curriculum development leading into a discussion on loci of power and your sense of agency or otherwise in curriculum development. We will then finish up with possible triggers for curriculum development, and curriculum development reform.

Curriculum development in the context of this research refers to new programme design; and the programme review process.

1. Many great educationalists over time have said that the **purpose of education** is the pursuit of knowledge.

What do you think the purpose of higher education is?

Do you think the purpose of HE is driven by economic or societal imperatives?

Is it different now than what it used to be do you think?

In this context then, what should the objectives or outcomes of a successful curriculum be, in your opinion?

2. Curriculum development, in higher education, has undergone enormous change in recent decades. It has been said that one of the **greatest**

paradigm shifts in curriculum development is that driven by the EHEA/Bologna Process. The move is towards a quality assured, compliant, and transparent system of higher education.

What is your (i) **understanding** and (ii) **experience** of curriculum development.

For example do you see it as:

- content or learner centred?
- being about the product (the qualification) or process (the learning experience)?

Barnett and Coate call on educators to take part in the **curriculum conversation** and believe this discussion is largely absent in higher education. They suggest this is because it is such a complex topic.

In your experience is curriculum development or curriculum discourse taking place?

Is so where and by whom?

What factors influence such discourses?

How do you locate yourself within curriculum development discourse?

To what extent do you feel you can contribute to such conversations?

3. There are **different ways of thinking of knowledge**. Some educational theorists say knowledge is independent of the knower and consequently elevates universal knowing (collective) over the particular (individual). Others advocate a model of knowledge acquisition based on intellectual freedom and say the curriculum is about the experience in which learners and their very selves are formed - 'the trajectory of human formation'

What are your views of knowledge? And knowledge for inclusion in curriculum?

How do your own values and beliefs about knowledge and education influence or inform curriculum development?

To what extent do you feel responsible for developing the learner beyond the knowledge or content contained in a curriculum?

What extent does your own professional biography influence curriculum development?

4. In a landscape of HE where **transparency and standarization** appear to play prominent roles (EHEA; Bologna) some educators believe there may be a risk that **localized or discipline expertise and academic freedom is diminished**, or perhaps even missing from programme design and development.

What are your thoughts on this view?

Who has a legitmate interest in informing curriculum? e.g should learners be involved? Industry? Marketers? QQI? Curriculum design experts?

5. What are your views on neutrality of opinion and influence in the curriculum development process?

How much of the discipline expert (you) should be invested in the curriculum?

In your experience, how are curriculum development teams are devised? On what basis?

In your view, where and how are questions of what should be included or excluded in curriculum addressed or considered? (programme director; programme team; validation panel)

Who has ultimate decision making power in agreeing curriculum (regarding what should be included and excluded), in your experience?

What sense of agency do you have in the curriculum development process?

Are you concerned about members of the design team who are disengaged in the process? And would you have any advice as to how to engage them more?

Should educators be curriculum developers as well as discipline experts?

6. Triggers for curriculum development and reform come from many different places e.g. QOI; Industry; Government; Learners etc. In tandem with these drivers is the increased attention to pedagogical research into how students learn. This research influences curriculum development in terms of depth of learning; role of assessment to drive learning; contact time and resources required to enhance student learning etc.

What triggers do you believe influence curriculum development?

Should educators be more or less empowered in relation to curriculum development?

How (if at all) would you want to see curriculum development reformed?

2.3 Excerpt from Focus Group Transcript

So what I was going to do is start with is your understanding and beliefs regarding the purpose of higher education is because I want to use that to try and see how your, I suppose, philosophical beliefs about education or knowledge inform the programme that you've been involved in designing....And then see how you get your voice heard. And basically look at how a team is sort of developed and what content gets left in and left out and on what basis.....

What do you think the purpose of higher education is?

Male: Have you got a couple of days?

I know.

Female: In the ideal world.

In the ideal world, yes, and then we'll talk about in reality. We can do both together. What do you believe the purpose of higher education is?

Male: Jobs.

Jobs.

Female: To equip our young people.

Female: Yes, preparation.

Female: To equip our young people to go out into the workforce.

So is it to equip them for workforce or to equip them for the world?

Male: Workforce, absolutely.

Female: I would love to say the world, but I would say realistically it's more for the workforce.

Male: I'd be slightly different. I think like part of our education here is to make sure that they can produce something.

Female: Oh no. My personal opinion would be that we do less of the pastoral. We should be doing more of the pastoral than we are actually, but I think realistically the focus is on the academic and preparing them for the workforce.

Male: Yes. I'd say in reality, that's how it is, but I think a lot of us may not teach that way sometimes.

That you bring in a lot of the other transferable skills?

Male: Yes, social skills.

And in that context then, what do you think the purpose of knowledge is? Or not the purpose, what do you think knowledge is? Is knowledge some sort of collective body of stuff that we teach the students or is it sort of an individual learning, the trajectory of the learner's sort of formation, if you like?

Female: Well, my opinion of it is that the world of work that the students are going out into will include times when they're not working, so you're taking all of that, but also like in programming, I teach Java. And I don't know in 20 years' time what programming language they will be using, so I'm trying to teach principles.

Rather than...

Female: Trying to teach them so that they have got enough skills that they can learn whatever they need. So you're not trying to teach them, 'This is how you do it in Java.' You're trying to teach them, 'Well, this is the principles behind programming. This is why it's done this way.' So whenever a new language comes out, they can adapt -

Adapt.

Female: - and learn so that when we send students out there, they have to face a world of work that's going to be up and down. They're going to have times out of it, so they need to have skills and they need to have enough skill that they can then retrain.

And know when they need retraining.

Female: And know when they need retraining and to keep an eye on what development's out and have enough skills that they don't need to come back in again and do another course.

Male: Yes, makes sense.

Female: I don't know how you put that in words.

Male: It delivers a choice. The government tells us it's jobs only. That's what we're here for. If we want to slip in a bit of psychology and physiology and all of that, we can do that, but it's a lot harder.

Primarily about...

Male: You haven't the time to do it all now.

Female: Say the officer would be with us from the Access office. Their focus would be on the social, the communication skills, that kind of thing, as opposed to the academic.

So it's less about the content. It's about the learner and their ability.

Female: Confidence building and that kind of thing, yes.

Male: But some of our learning outcomes would cover that, wouldn't they? Social presentation skills.

Female: Yes.

They do, don't they? The competencies.

Male: Yes.

Female: Yes.

Male: It's not a skill in design. It's a skill in presentation skills, talking to people, discussing. So sometimes you can cover that within the practicalities, but they still have to do it when they leave college. In our case, do a presentation or talk to different types of people.

And that's nice. I think what you're saying, if I understand you correctly, is they're not mutually exclusive. Like you can do both. You can develop those skills.

Male: Yes, I think you can over a period of three or four years.

In addition to preparing them for industry.

Male: Yes.

Male: That's part of it too, I think. And give them the sense that those skills are transferable.

They don't have to confine this to photography.

Male: No matter what subject I think you're teaching, you have to be able to develop transferable skills.

Male: Our time is being reduced all the time. Something's going to have to give. That's where my difficulties are. I have a programme, it was five days. Now it's two hours a week. I just don't have time for the philosophy. These are the skills. I see that.

Female: And that's a shame, in a way.

Male: That's gone.

Female: And I think the key is the confidence of students and the motivation of students and really working on that. Now, you can do that in the way that you teach, but I think it's a key because if you have a really motivated student, even if they're not fully the top ability, they'll probably do better than somebody who's not, or who's really good, but hasn't have the confidence to go. Confidence is so important.

Female: And it's a pity that there's not more time to do that.

Male: I totally agree. Absolutely. The focus should be maybe on developing the skills for them to go and find out what they need to find out or to learn what they need to learn because we'll never have enough time to teach them everything.

Female: Yes, support them. So that's what we're trying to do in computing, is give them lots of hands-on first year and try and take the hands off and get them to do more. Now, we talked about it, but it's not...

Female: And I have to say, computing in first semester, you have a student development module.

Female: Yes.

Female: Where the focus is completely on their own self-development, which I think is brilliant in first year in college.

And what's the feedback from that module? Are the students benefiting from it?

Female: Well, I don't teach that module. I just teach the students and we get a big percentage of students who maybe would have relating problems. They tend to be attracted to computing. But some of the students who need that social development the most find it extremely challenging.

And try and dodge it.

Female: And try and dodge it, yes. And yet they need it the most and they don't quite realise that. And some of the others really take to it like a duck to water and they love it and it builds up the class, the team support then.

Male: Dynamic.

Female: Dynamic, and that stays with them.

Female: And the social interaction, the confidence and the social interaction.

Female: Oh yes, all of that. It starts then.

And maybe they're skills we need to embed in all modules then. And I think we are, to a large extent, aren't we, in programmes, embedding both the technical and the practical skills with the kind of key skills?

Female: Yes, trying to do it more, yes.

Male: There is no feedback throughout the system. There's no way of finding out things. If I want to find how many of last year's fourth years got jobs, I have no way of finding that and I can't get it, and that's feedback to me, the lecturer, as well.

So you're able to design your programme learning outcomes, from what I'm hearing, very successfully. And then I wonder do you feel capable of making

decisions about what content gets included and what gets left out? Where are those decisions made? On what basis are they made?

Male: I'm taking chances on that all my life. Not formally trained.

Male: Again, back to the QS programme, I mean we get outside help in to make sure we have everything included in the programme that the industry demands. And once we design a programme, then we have the validation panel to go through, so there's a good checking mechanism. You've six people in front of you, all experts in the field, and they're able to tell you what's right and what's wrong.

Female: And the one panel was a great panel and the feedback was so useful.

Male: So if there's any weaknesses then.

Female: And we also had an expert, so we sent it out and got feedback before it got to.

And do you do the same with your programmes, send it out to experts?

Female: Yes.

That's a really good practice. I hadn't come across that before.

Male: I'd rather send it to two or three experts, but we tend to send it to one. Just somebody I don't know, but they came back with some nice comments.

Comments anyway.

Male: Some comments were just not relevant. They hadn't been through education, just the practical end of it. But yes, it does work, but I'd rather send it out to two or three people now than just the one.

Male: Some of the programmes, once they're up and running say for a year, then you know for professional accreditation, there's another checking mechanism. So if it isn't good at that stage, then you know.

That's actually a very good point, xxx. So you are saying that it is a professionally designed programme, even if we don't start with a curriculum development professional or expert.

Male: Yes. It doesn't happen in every programme.

Male: And the panel as that checking mechanism.

Female: The panel is very important. We were really pleased with the panel.

I think I touched on this, but just want to make sure I did. Do you feel confident that your voice is heard in the curriculum development process? Do you feel there are mechanisms there to allow your voice to be heard?

Male: Oh, very much so, especially if you're in the team.

Female: Yes, definitely.

Male: Sometimes people maybe left that group because they didn't feel good enough. That's no problem there. So in our department, ok.

Female: Yes, it's good, yes. It's pretty equal.

Do you feel you'd have the opportunity to have your voice heard?

Male: Well, I'm not sure about that. I possibly believe that again, in multiple departments, it varies from department to department. One issue is call a meeting of 40 people and five turn up, so where's the common?

Male: We're missing 75% of voice, so the ones that are there will take the decision and away we go. That doesn't sound right to me.

Male: Like our strategic IT planning meeting, all of our lecturers were aware. Four lecturers turned up and we've driven the strategic needs for the whole department. Not right.

Male: But you can't really force lecturers to go to them.

Male: You can't force them to go to anything. That's maybe a problem.

Male: There are certain lecturers and I'm just saying that that's what they do. They come and do their nine to five job and they head off. You give them a module to teach, they'll teach it. Like that's fair enough.

Female: That's true, yes.

Male: But that's up to them.

Male: Some are our most experienced people as well. They've got a great wealth of experience. We're missing out on it.

Female: Maybe that's a better way of putting it. If you're there and you attend the meetings, your voice will be heard.

Male: Yes. You've made the effort, so.

And then you would wonder about those excellent experts who are coming into the class and not informing the programme. And do you think the programme is missing anything as a result of that or are you happy that the, I suppose, fact-gathering part of the process is good enough?

Male: It's good, but those people not there, absolutely not.

And it brings me to a question that I kind of had thought about asking and I left it out, but I think I'll ask it, if you don't mind. And that's do you think a curriculum development team is better if it's made up of a wide spread of

discipline expertise or passion? So if you're putting together a team, do you want to work with passion and people or do you think no, it's much better that I get Fiona on board because she's the expert in that area?

Male: Both. But passion is really important, I think, yes.

Male: Both, yes.

Female: Passion is really important. You could be an absolute expert in something, but if you have no passion for it, it's not going to transfer, is it?

Male: I think in most programmes as well you have the core competencies, the core learning outcomes and with that probably goes the passion. And then outside of that then, you have the softer skills, the non-core things, and maybe those are the people that aren't showing up to the meetings.

Male: And you want the begrudgers as well. I want them all in there to hear what they all have to say.

You want them all.

Female: That's true.

Male: Absolutely, I want them all there. Personally speaking, if I was in management, I'd want them all there. That makes the best outcomes.

Female: I'm relatively new to all this. I've come from other places. It's just interesting as to why people don't want to join in that as lecturers. Has anybody actually tried to explore the reasons?

Male: Well, I've asked a few. Why should I bother? I get paid so much money. I'm happy enough.

Female: Or sometimes I've done my bit before now. I'm leaving it to the next crew?

Female: Yes.

Female: It's hard to know how people are passionate about their subject if that's how they feel.

Male: Well, they'll come to a meeting.

Female: I suppose that's back to the thing, they could be an expert, but there might not be any passion.

Male: I'm not saying that the lecturers don't come to these meetings. They're probably very good at what they do, but they're not interested in developing the courses or you give them a module to do, they'll teach it and they'll teach it to their best ability, but that's as far as they'll go.

Male: Fiona's question is do you need them there at all?

Female: I think you do.

Male: I think you do.

And have you any ideas on how we can engage those who are disengaged?

Male: Find out why they're not coming and deal with it.

Female: There's some challenge.

Male: A lot of it too is probably a generational thing too, the older.

Male: There's staff who have been in here, some staff, a good nine years.

Thanks for that. Now I would like to move on to...

Appendix 3: QUB Ethical Approval

Memorandum

To Fiona O'Riordan
From Katrina Lloyd, Chair, Ethics Committee
Date 13 November 2013
Distribution Supervisor
School of Education Office
File
Subject Ethics Approval for Research Proposal "An Analytical Framework to Elicit Curriculum Development Discourse in Higher Education" (submitted 6.11.13)

The School of Education Ethics Committee has approved your proposed study subject to you addressing the advice for minor amendments. Please indicate in the table below how the amendments have been or will be addressed. Once you have completed this, please sign it, obtain your supervisor's signature, and submit it to the Research Office. You will then receive an official ethics approval memo, **without which you are not permitted to proceed with your research.**

<i>Minor Amendments</i>	<i>How these have been/will be addressed</i>
<p>There are a number of areas that need to be addressed and/or clarified.</p> <p>1) Need to clarify how you are going to recruit those for interview/focus group - is it purposively or randomly? You state both in section 4.</p> <p>2) If participants are to be chosen by their QA Manager or Head of the Teaching and Learning Units how will you ensure that they are willing participants and not compelled to take part? Similarly, how will you ensure that your invites, as Head of the Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence, will not pressurise staff into participation?</p> <p>3) Confidentiality is not the same as anonymity. You mention confidentiality. How can you assure anonymity given the issues identified - small numbers, in-depth comments that are likely to illustrate traceable information etc</p> <p>4) The Research Information Sheet (Appendix A) has too much personal opinion. By declaring your 'belief that a passionate team of educators are required to design a programme within a highly discursive and shared-ownership curriculum development environment' you are in danger of leading participants - ie. they will say what they think you want them to say.</p> <p>5) I am a little unclear of the role of the Advisory Group - you seem to have the research well planned and thought out so why is there a need for the group? What will happen if the Advisory Group does not agree on the in-depth interview/focus</p>	<p>1. Recruitment is purposively based on the participants recent involvement in curriculum development; and their accessibility/availability to take part in the research. I have corrected reference to random selection in request for ethical approval form.</p> <p>2. Purposive selection relates to research requirement (i.e. must have been involved in curriculum development process during the last two years). Those issuing the invitation (i.e. QA Manager, Head of Teaching and Learning Units, or researcher) will send invitation out to the full purposively chosen sample and then randomly choose six (or one in the case of the in-depth interview) from the replies. When inviting participation it will be clearly stated that participation is entirely voluntary and there will be no implications either for those who take part in the research, or for those who do not take part in the research.</p> <p>3. Confidentiality is primarily related to information the advisory group is exposed to. In terms of anonymity, the researcher will be sensitive to the fact that there are small numbers and that the teaching and learning community is a small community. As such the research findings will be written up carefully and any references that might contribute to traceable information will be edited out or used as part of the wider research group findings. In addition, it is expected that the advisory group will assist in ensuring this sensitivity and disclosure of traceability is not evident in the writing up of the research. While I will do everything in my power to maintain participant anonymity, I have declared the possibility of traceability in the participant consent forms. In discussing methodology with my supervisor, Professor Jannette</p>

<p>group approach given that this has already been decided by the researcher? Also, given their advisory capacity why does one member need to attend the interviews/focus groups? If this is to be the case it needs to be made clear in both Appendix A and B. The advisory group members also need to consent to their participation in the interviews/focus groups. In Appendix D therefore, you should include a sentence that specifies that one of the roles of the advisory group is taking notes and observing the focus groups/interviews.</p>	<p>Elwood, on 11th December 2013, we agreed to conduct eight in-depth interviews. This will help reduce concerns regarding traceability and anonymity.</p> <p>4. I accept the point made here and will remove the paragraph on my motivation and move directly into the purpose of the research. Thank you.</p> <p>5. The role of the advisory group in the context of this inquiry is two fold; (i) to help develop a sense of agency and ownership of curriculum development and design within their discipline; and (ii) to contribute to quality research. In terms of 'unpicking' both roles in the context of why I am using an advisory group, please see the following: (i) two (of the three) key purposes of the research are to engage, and empower educators in relation to curriculum development discourse. The literature shows that advisory groups within the community and with children are very successful in securing a sense of agency and capacity building amongst the community being researched – in the case of this research it is the higher education teaching and learning community. (ii) the literature demonstrates that research advisory groups contribute enhanced quality of research. Specifically, and in the context of this research, the relationship of the researcher with the participants being researched is some cause for concern in terms of bias and subjectivity. The advisory group will contribute to greater objectivity in terms of collection and analysis of findings.</p>
<p>6) If you are going to use the advisory group you need to outline in more detail how they will be recruited.</p>	<p>I do accept that perhaps given the imitations of time and the fact that the research design is already well thought out, that the research group do not need to advise on the design element. However, I would welcome their views on the research instruments that are proposed for both focus groups and interviews.</p> <p>In terms of a member of the advisory group sitting in the interviews and focus groups, I accept that it is not necessary for a member to sit in on the in-depth interviews because I am using thematic analysis (and indeed it may be disconcerting given that in-depth interviews can be quite intense and personal as they are a one-to-one experience). However, I do think it is important that a member of the advisory group sit in on the focus groups because I am using discourse analysis and this will require analysis at many levels (and not just analysis of transcripts).</p> <p>Having discussed this with my supervisor, Prof Jannette Elwood, on 11th December 2013, we agreed that the advisory group will contribute to quality research and assist with possible researcher reflexivity and bias. They will act as a type of steering committee.</p> <p>I have amended appendices A, B and D as requested.</p> <p>6. The advisory group was chosen for their central role in curriculum development, and their willingness and availability to consult in this manner. They are selected for their expertise in curriculum design, and are provided with interim reports for consultation throughout all phases of the inquiry.</p>

Date: 12 th December 2013	Student Signature: 
Date:	Supervisor Signature: Jannette Elwood (by email)

Note: Amendment(s) relating to the advice must be discussed with your supervisor and incorporated into your overall plan. If the advice is not satisfactorily addressed your studies **are not be permitted to proceed**.

Please note it is important to ensure that you follow the procedures outlined in your submission, including any amendments made as a result of the Committee's advice.

Any departure from the approved procedures must be discussed with your supervisor, and may require additional ethical approval.

Note for the supervisor: it is the responsibility of the supervisor to add any research projects involving human participants, material or data, to the University's Human Subjects Database for insurance purposes. (The Human Subjects Database is accessible through QOL under 'My Research')

Appendix 4: Coding and Themes

		Themes				
<i>Codes</i>	<i>References Coded</i>	Curriculum Development Teams	Curriculum Development Discourse	Educators' Philosophical Beliefs	Industry Driven Curriculum Development	Regulatory Framework
Practice(s) of curriculum development discourse	All texts 245 excerpts	X	X	X	X	
Purpose of higher education	17 texts 160 excerpts	X	X		X	X
Loci of power	18 texts 74 excerpts	X	X	X	X	X
Context and landscape of HE	18 texts 62 excerpts	X			X	X
Educator empowerment	16 texts 83 excerpts	X	X			X
Educators' philosophical beliefs	13 texts 52 excerpts	X	X	X		