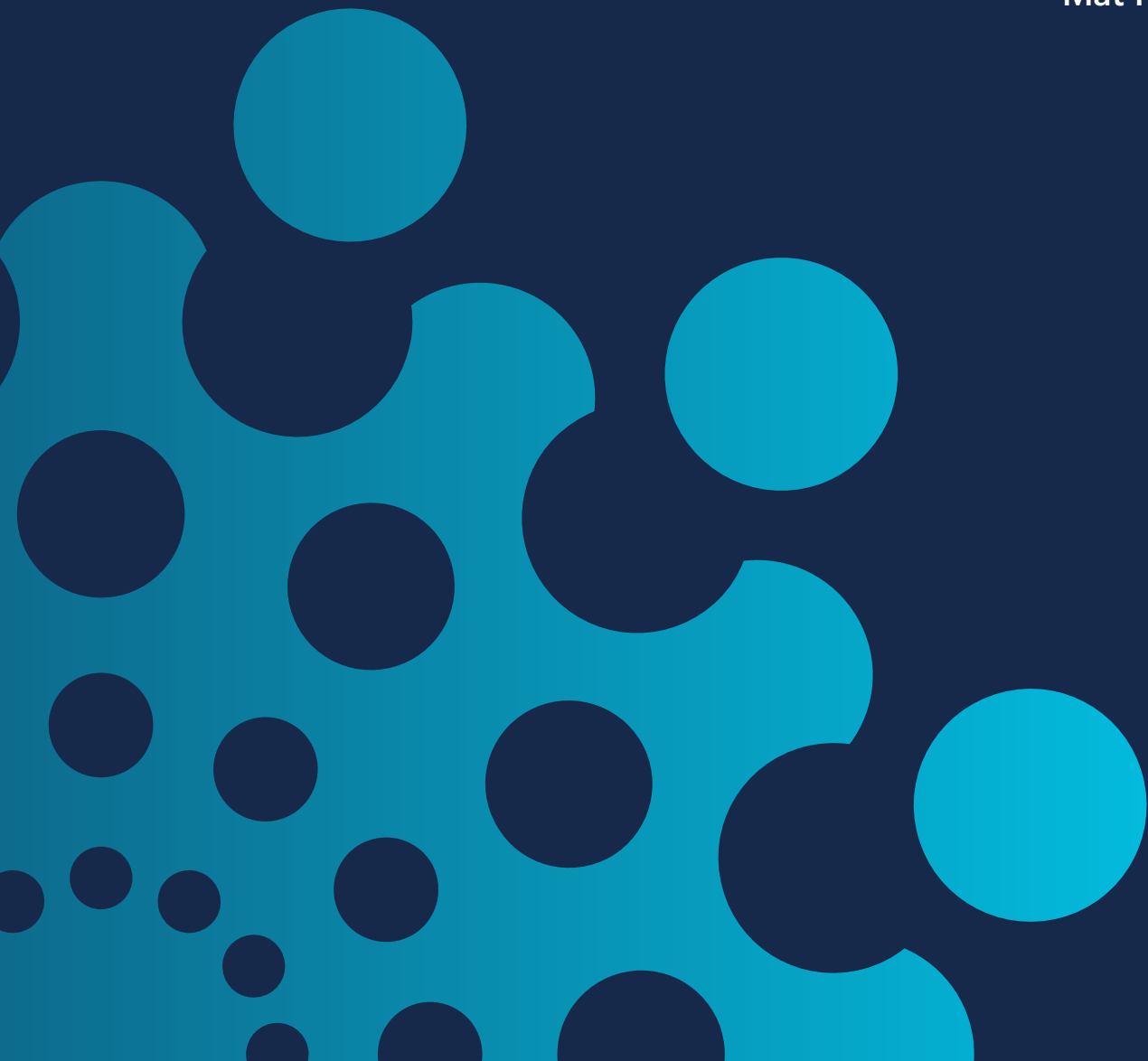# EXPLORING TASK DESIGN AS AN ENABLER OF LEADING TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

PRACTICAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE USE OF THEORY

A BCF CURRICULUM INVESTIGATION GRANT REPORT

Lorna Shires
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About BERA

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the home of educational research in the United Kingdom. We are a membership association committed to advancing knowledge of education by sustaining a strong and high quality educational research community.

Together with our members, BERA is working to advance research quality, build research capacity and foster research engagement.

Since its inception in 1974, BERA has expanded into an internationally renowned association with both UK and non-UK based members. It strives to be inclusive of the diversity of educational research and scholarship, and welcomes members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. It also encourages the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

Aspiring to be the home of all educational researchers in the UK, BERA provides opportunities for everyone active in this field to contribute through its portfolio of distinguished publications, its world-class conference and other events, and its active peer community, organised around 30 special interest groups. We also recognise excellence in educational research through our range of awards. In addition to our member-focussed activity, we aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.

About the British Curriculum Forum

The British Curriculum Forum aims to bring together all those with an interest in collaborative curriculum, research and development.

Through events, awards and grants, the BCF supports communication and collaboration in the study and practical implementation of the curriculum in schools, colleges and wider educational settings. Connecting schools, colleges, universities and others, our work promotes the study of theoretical, innovative and practical aspects of the curriculum, drawing on a rich history, spanning more than 40 years, and continuing the tradition of research and development founded by Lawrence Stenhouse.

The British Curriculum Forum is the successor to the British Curriculum Foundation which was incorporated into BERA in 2014. The BCF has been in existence for over 40 years (and was previously known as The Association for the Study of Curriculum).

The BCF aims to:

- promote the study of theoretical, innovative and practical aspects of the curriculum
- provide an authoritative medium through which the opinions of teachers and others may be expressed on matters of the curriculum
- provide means of communication amongst all those concerned with the study of the curriculum and/or its practical implementation
- enable BERA to connect with schools
- enable practitioners to engage with research.

About the BERA BCF Curriculum Investigation Grant

BERA and the BCF's biennial Curriculum Investigation Grant is intended to support and recognise the importance of research led by schools and colleges that focusses on curriculum inquiry and investigation. It is awarded to researchers based within schools and colleges, and is intended to enable those researchers to:

- identify an issue impacting on the development of an aspect of the curriculum in their school/college
- design, implement and evaluate a response to the issue identified;
- disseminate the processes and outcomes of the inquiry/investigation within the school/college;
- develop a strategy to sustain curriculum investigation/inquiry within the school/college;
- contribute to research and scholarship in the study of the curriculum.

This report by Lorna Shires and Mat Hunter is one of three projects supported by the Curriculum Investigation Grant for 2018–2019. The other two projects, reports from which have been published simultaneously, were:

- *Learning from variation*, by Ruth Trundley and Helen J. Williams
- *Local language, school and community: Curricular innovation towards closing the attainment gap*, by Claire Needler and Jamie Fairbairn.

For more information about the Curriculum Investigation Grant and these reports, see bera.ac.uk/award/bcf-curriculum-investigation-grant

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SUMMARY

This research project was one of three winners of the British Curriculum Forum's Curriculum Investigation Grant for 2018–2019. It adopted task design (Doyle, & Carter, 1984) as an element of curriculum theory as the lens through which to illuminate the practical theorising (Tatto, Burn, Menter, Mutton, & Thompson, 2019) of the school in relation to the curriculum. The aim was to investigate whether such theory can be of practical, sustainable use as a tool for leaders, and as a means of generating tools that teachers can use in leading and teaching the school curriculum.

A cultural-historical perspective is very useful to school leaders because of its emphasis on teaching and learning as being in a dialectical relationship (Hedegaard, 2002). Hedegaard's notion of pedagogy as a 'double move' (van Oers, 2019) builds on Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) by conceptualising teaching as a double move between the activity in the lesson – the task that instantiates the curriculum – and the concepts to be taught within the curriculum. This theoretical approach was presented to the teachers involved in the collaborative curriculum development project through the use of key themes. During the project, the relevance of a cultural-historical analysis and its focus on meaning-making grew in significance as it became clear that one of the teachers' drivers was not activity per se, but rather how meaning was developed through activity: 'how pedagogy is a form of social practice which shapes and forms the cognitive, affective and moral development of individuals' (Daniels, 2016, p. 1).

The basis for this method of collaborative work drew upon the theoretical frameworks developed by Anne Edwards (2010). The research took place in naturally occurring lessons with the teacher maintaining control over the research process. Two research tools were developed: one to inquire into task design as enacted in the classroom by the teachers, and one to support the teachers' inquiry into what mattered to them as they planned, taught and assessed. The process provided a range of opportunities for teachers to communicate the values that motivate them and shape their teaching; it was also designed to enable exploration of how the teachers theorised their practice in relation to task design and pedagogy as a 'double move'.

Four predominant concerns mediated the process the teachers used and how they understood their role.
- The teachers planned lessons with the goal of enabling pupils' understanding rather than their recall of factual knowledge. Understanding was interpreted as internalisation of the subject

matter such that it had shaped the pupil's sense of identity in relation to the subject – that is, they saw themselves as a bit more of a historian than they had previously.

- The teachers' long-term goal was to enable pupils to become agentic in relation to the subject knowledge and skills – that is, to be able to make informed decisions based on the knowledge acquired via task accomplishment.

- The teachers saw their work as relational. This was most often expressed as aiming to 'bring out the best' in the pupils, related to their identities not only as students of the subject, but also to their roles as pupils in the school and to the adults they would become – after Bruner (1960).

- The teachers shared the long-term goal of wanting pupils to care about the subject for its own sake and for its importance to society. The teachers wanted pupils to care not just about the assessment outcomes, but about the subject's intrinsic value.

This interpretation of the practice of teaching in this project suggests that the teachers viewed their role as enacting knowledge through a social practice, rather than as deploying elements of cognitive science.

From this work, the following themes arose.

- **For relational work:** the importance of 'bringing out the best' in the pupils, teachers, subject and curriculum, and of addressing 'what matters' to teachers and their pupils.

- **For the move to pupil agency:** 'How I get them to pick up the pen for themselves'.

- **For teaching for understanding:** the 'exchange' between teacher and pupil as a 'social manifestation' of understanding, and the 'internalisation' of new learning.

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study arose from a British Curriculum Forum (BCF) award of an investigation grant to support collaborative research with a focus on curriculum inquiry and investigation. The work took place during the school year of 2018–2019. This was a significant time for school leaders because during this period Ofsted was consulting on and developing the education inspection framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019a). It became clear during this process that the curriculum was the topic of renewed focus with a change in emphasis. This was based on Ofsted's view (Ofsted, 2018a) that leaders in schools were not able to debate and reflect upon the curriculum, and in particular that models for curriculum design were often weakly implemented (Ofsted, 2018b).

Fast-forward 12-to-18 months to the autumn term of 2019, pop your head around any headteacher's office in England and ask them what the three I's are. The response will be, 'intent, implementation and impact': this is the new curriculum mantra of the EIF, shaping how the school curriculum in England is interpreted and enacted. Although the three I's, in action, probably mean the same as 'plan, teach and assess', schools feel the need to signal to Ofsted that they share knowledge of these terms and that they have incorporated them into their school lexicon – schools have rewritten websites and polices to include them. The curriculum is clearly now a high accountability issue for schools.

The BCF supports communication and collaboration in the study and implementation of the curriculum in schools. By connecting a school with a university, this investigation aimed to promote the study of theoretical, innovative and practical aspects of the curriculum-drawing upon the tradition of research and development founded by Lawrence Stenhouse (1975). The BCF grant enabled the school to engage in collaborative working, discussion and thinking about the curriculum at a time of external change. It also provided a structure and an approach by which to systematise the professional judgment of the school's leaders, and the basis for a rationale through which to develop the curriculum.

Task design (Doyle & Carter, 1984) as an element of curriculum theory was adopted as the lens through which to illuminate the practical theorising (Tatto, Burn, Menter, Mutton, & Thompson, 2019) of the school in relation to what is taught in the school curriculum. At the time of the investigation, prominent messages to school leaders were framed around the curriculum needing to move towards being knowledge-rich, particularly in secondary schools, where GCSE syllabi had been

through radical change in terms of content, progression and the means of assessment.

In this project, through a process of inquiry and investigation, the school explored how theoretical understanding of aspects of the curriculum, teaching and learning could enable thinking and practical work on the curriculum by leaders within the school. By considering the practical use of theory as a tool for leaders and to generate tools for teachers in their work in leading and teaching the school curriculum, the aim was to investigate whether such theory can be of practical, sustainable use.

2. CONTEXT

It is clear that, since its inception in 1992, Ofsted has had a huge influence on how schools and school leaders work. During the consultation for the 2019 EIF, this influence was framed by Ofsted as 'indirect' (Muijs, 2018) – that is, as a regulator, Ofsted had never directly expressed preferred activities (Ofsted, 2019b). However, it acknowledged that many aspects of the work of schools were designed in response to its evaluation schedules and grading criteria. It was, indeed is, common practice for school leaders to mimic or replicate whatever is Ofsted's current methodology (Ofsted, 2019b, Ofsted, 2018c).

In that same timeframe, the national strategies, developed as part of New Labour's 'education, education, education' focus, provided guidance, resources and evidence as to what, why and how schools and teachers should teach (DfE, 2011). Clearly framed as part of the strategy to raise standards and 'close the gap' of underachievement, the relationship teachers had with the curriculum shifted out of all recognition. Teachers now 'delivered' a curriculum that had been passed to them to transmit – described as 'teaching as telling' (Daniels, 2005).

By the time of its consultation for the new EIF in 2019, Ofsted appeared to have determined that schools and teachers had by-passed the curriculum and had opted instead to teach assessment objectives (AOs) (Ofsted, 2018a). Pupils aged 5–19 have often committed an AO to memory as a result of its repetition in the language of the classroom, the posters on the walls and the assessment grids stuck into exercise books.

The curriculum had come to be a receptacle for the needs of policymakers to demonstrate that 'something is being done' (Dow, 2019). Curriculum as a performativity measure includes topics of concern to be covered or 'ticked off' by mapping and auditing to 'prove' the school has done its job. Cycling helmet use, obesity and screen time are recent examples (Burke, & Lehain, 2018) for which schools use theatre companies, 'drop-down' days and other mechanisms to squeeze content into the timetable. This way of working distances the curriculum from Bruner's view of what should be taught in school (Bruner, 1960), even if each individual topic has merit at face value. The role of the 'curriculum deputy' in a school was driven by the need to fit in more content and measure assessment by outcome. However, on what criteria should someone charged with responsibility for a school curriculum base their planning?

The educational press and national training providers have focussed on cognitive science, memory and Rosenshine's principles of instruction (Rosenshine, 2012) as providing the tools to inform teachers' classroom practice and to address their need to cope with curriculum changes. Lists of characteristics, behaviours or models to mimic (Collins, & Evans, 2007; Reynolds, Sammons, De Fraine, Van Damme, Townsend, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 2014), while arousing great interest for those in schools concerned with school effectiveness and improvement and how to improve teaching, may have limited impact because they only address the surface features of teaching and learning as observed from the outside for accountability or compliance. Practical theorising – the use of ideas gathered from a range of sources (Tatto et al., 2019) – necessarily has an impact on how and what a teacher thinks about the curriculum they teach.

Task design (Doyle, & Carter, 1984) as an element of curriculum theory was chosen as the lens through which this inquiry and investigation would think about curriculum development because, as an approach for the school, it had clear links to knowledge enactment by the teacher (Edwards, 2015) and pupils and teaching activity as pedagogy (Daniels, 2016).

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Theoretical framework underpinning the curriculum development project

A cultural-historical perspective is very useful to school leaders because of its emphasis on teaching and learning as being in a dialectical relationship (Hedegaard, 2002). This operates in direct contrast to the historical position of Ofsted, which led to a focus on judging and evaluating teaching in terms of its impact on learning where teaching operates in transmission mode. If learning and teaching are understood as integrated (Hedegaard, 2002) this enables the role and knowledge of the pupils to be brought into the curriculum and to be used for learning in the classroom. School leaders urge teachers to consider the 'starting points' of pupils before teaching, but in practice this has led to teachers conceptualising that as a differentiation challenge (Taylor, 2019). Hedegaard's notion of pedagogy as a 'double move' (van Oers, 2019) builds on Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) by conceptualising teaching as a double move between the activity in the lesson – the task that instantiates the curriculum – and the concepts to be taught within the curriculum.

> *'Hedegaard starts out from a strong Vygotskyian principle that the learning of subject matter should extend a child's everyday meanings, and enable a child to use this knowledge for the conduct of everyday activities. Subject matter can only be successful if it builds on a child's everyday knowledge.'*
>
> van Oers, 2019, p. 126

The double move is as a result of the teacher working to advance the subject matter from the pupil's everyday knowledge and to extend it towards the concepts in the subject matter so that they are integrated in a spiral rather than a linear or transactional relationship. This enables the pupil to move to a relationship with the new theoretical knowledge that they can use in their own practice, both as a learner in the classroom and in their daily life.

Hedegaard tested and applied the double move as an interdisciplinary teaching experiment in Danish schools (Hedegaard, 2002). The teaching approach was driven by 'big questions' shaped by connections within and across the concepts of the subject matter and the children's everyday local knowledge formed by their cultural and historical life in Denmark.

This theoretical approach was presented to the teachers during this project through the use of key themes. First, the theme of teaching as an *exchange*, after Shulman: 'Some form of dialogue, exchange, conversation or alternating argument – some kind of social manifestation of the understanding – is central' (Shulman, 2000, p. 133).

Second, Mercer and Middleton's metaphor of teaching as a *bridge* was also illuminating:

> *'Faced with the responsibility for the advancement of large numbers of learners, teachers have to organise, energise and maintain a local mini-community of enquiry. Teachers are expected to help their students develop ways of thinking that will enable them to travel on intellectual journeys so that they understand and are understood in wider communities of discourse. However teachers have to start from where the students are, to use what the students already know and help them to go back and forth across the bridge between everyday and educated ways of thinking.'*
>
> Mercer, & Middleton, 2007, p. 19

Doyle (1985) argues that the curriculum can be seen as a collection of academic tasks: the work of pupils in relation to what they have to produce; the operations used by them to generate the product, and the resources available to them while they are generating the product.

> *'Tasks, in other words, instantiate the curriculum in a classroom. They are the curriculum in motion – the actual curriculum that is taught – and they embody a teacher's understanding of the content as educative experience. Task design and enactment, then, are at the core of the work of teaching.'*
>
> Doyle, 2015, p. xiii

During this curriculum project, the relevance of a cultural-historical analysis and its focus on meaning-making grew in significance as it became clear that one of the teachers' drivers was not activity per se, but how meaning was developed through activity: 'how pedagogy is a form of social practice which shapes and forms the cognitive, affective and moral development of individuals' (Daniels, 2016, p. 1).

3.2 Methods mediating the curriculum project

This was a collaborative, iterative curriculum development project involving school senior leaders and an academic/researcher working together to integrate theory with practice over the course of a school year. The school

and academic/researcher worked in partnership through a process of co-construction. The school had identified within their development process for the school year that curriculum development would be the central focus. The goal of the school was to use a focus on the curriculum to also facilitate discussion on teaching approaches and pedagogy. The role of the academic/researcher was to provide theoretical insights into task design and pedagogy to support the practical theorising of the senior leaders and institutional feedback at agreed times during the project.

The basis for this method of collaborative work drew upon the theoretical frameworks developed by Anne Edwards (2010). Her analytical concepts were used in order to gather insights from very experienced and committed staff, but also to form a framework for analysing the way in which both sets of professionals can work together on a common complex problem. Edwards's extensive research into how professionals from different fields, with each bringing their own expertise, work together on common professional concerns, draws upon a cultural-historical perspective (Edwards, Fleer, & Bøttcher, 2019). Her three analytical concepts are:

- **relational expertise:** 'an additional form of expertise which makes it possible to work with expanded understandings of the joint complex problem as an object of joint activity, and the ability to attune one's response to the enhanced interpretation offered' (Edwards, Fleer, & Bøttcher, 2019, p. 13)

- **relational agency:** 'working together purposefully toward goals that reflect the motives that shape the expertise of each' (p. 61)

- **common knowledge:** 'a conceptual resource from which each can negotiate activities and identities in order to work agentically' (Edwards, 2010, p. 10).

These were central to both the activity and interpretation of the inquiry and investigation because they mediated the research process (Nicolini, 2012).

The project took the form of initial discussions between senior leaders and the academic/researcher to establish a shared understanding of the object of the activity – that is, how to use the curriculum as a vehicle for further development of the school's practice in teaching and learning. A programme of work was then scoped out which involved training for the teaching staff on several key theoretical aspects of task design (Doyle, 1983) and pedagogy as a 'double move' (Hedegaard, 2012), and a series of lesson observations and activities based around those self-selected lessons with volunteer teachers. This research then took place in naturally occurring lessons with the teacher maintaining control over the research process.

Two research tools were developed: one to inquire into task design as enacted in the classroom by the teachers, and one to support the teachers' inquiry into what mattered to them as they planned, taught and assessed.

During the lessons the researcher analysed task design using a template developed from Doyle's research, and teachers completed reflection templates which were designed to draw out their aims for the activities in the lesson, but to link them to their longer-term motives for learning and the curriculum as represented by the subject they taught. These templates were modified from ones used by Edwards and Daniels in their research to understand the learning challenges faced by directors of children's services (Edwards, & Daniels, 2009; Daniels, & Edwards, 2012).

The research process as a whole was designed to form common knowledge between the teachers and the academic/researcher. The process provided a range of opportunities for teachers to communicate about the values that motivate them and shape their teaching; it was also designed to enable exploration of how the teachers theorised their practice in relation to task design and pedagogy as a 'double move'. The aim of the work between the teachers and the academic/researcher was to see if it was possible to develop some themes for practice – some useful tools (Daniels, 2016) – that would support teachers and school leaders in the practical implementation of curriculum development.

The first research tool was developed from Doyle and Carter's work (1984) on the nature of academic work in schools; it was employed to consider the nature of tasks used by teachers in lessons and how tasks might be used as part of the approach to curriculum development. Several categories were developed from this work and organised into a template for the academic/researcher to consider when observing the lessons being taught. The aim was to develop an understanding of the nature of tasks designed by teachers to teach their subject on the school curriculum. The prompts for the researcher were as follows.

1. Academic task to support: memory; classroom routine; opinion; or understanding.

2. Teaching activity framing the task: direct teaching; or indirect teaching.

3. Task accomplishment leads to the acquisition of: information; facts; principles; or solutions; or to the practice of the following operations: memory; classify; infer; or analyse.

4. To what extent does the task involve risk (how stringent is the evaluation criteria applied by the teacher?) or ambiguity (how far is a precise answer or formula available in advance?).

5. What is the cognitive demand in the task: memory; understanding; transfer; or hypothesis?

6. How far can the task be defined by the following components: product; operations; resources; or significance for assessment?

7. What is the teacher's role in scaffolding the task? What assistance is offered?

The second research tool developed was a reflection sheet for teachers to complete after they had taught a lesson. The teachers again had control over the selection of the lessons they used as the basis for the reflection. The template was developed from one used by Daniels and Edwards (2012). It asked the following three questions of the teachers.

1. Very briefly describe one everyday activity where you were aware that you were promoting learning in or for the lesson.

2. What did you do during that activity – what actions did you take? You can mention as many actions as you like.

3. What are the long-term aims behind how you worked with pupils in this activity? How do your actions in the activity relate to these aims?

The aim of the reflection sheets was to enable inquiry into what mattered for the teachers as they designed tasks for pupils in their lessons and to develop a sense of how they made meaning of the activity, shared across teacher and pupils, to focus on learning the school curriculum in the lesson.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 How teachers enacted the curriculum through tasks

The task design of 27 lessons was analysed using Doyle's work (1985) as a lens. The tasks in each lesson were considered in relation to activity around the teacher or the pupils. Tasks were designed so that pupils were engaged in activities using the key ideas or knowledge base of the particular lesson. The tasks required pupils to do something either verbal or written (Berry, Loughran, & van Driel, 2008). Most frequently, a task was designed so that pupils would acquire principles in relation to the knowledge contained within the task. Tasks aimed to engage pupils in activities in which they used inference in order to make connections between the knowledge they had already secured and the new knowledge being presented. Lessons typically involved direct teaching, but tasks represented indirect teaching and were usually the stepping-off point from which the teacher hoped that pupils would either practice the required activity represented in the task – and be able to move to independence (that is, with minimum prompts or guidance from the teacher) – or to agency, where they would use knowledge to make informed decisions. The lesson as a whole included the full 'scaffolding' process, beginning with the teacher 'doing' and the pupils 'watching' and ending with the pupils 'doing' and the teacher 'watching' (Bliss, Askew, & Macrae, 1996). These two elements of the lesson involve performance or demonstration by teacher or pupils. After the tasks were introduced, the role of the teacher and pupils became more fluid, in that while either the teacher or pupils were 'doing', the other party was 'helping' (Edwards, 2015). This was when teaching as assistance (Vygotsky, 1978) in the task was most clearly seen, but also when teaching could be seen as a mediated process because the teacher was responding to how the pupils engaged with the task and adapting their responses to suit.

The teachers engaged in three activities around the introduction and management of the tasks in the lesson. First, teachers used anecdotes to connect the rationale for the task to previous common experiences – previous lessons or current events in the lives of the pupils taken from what was going on in school or in the media. Second, teachers introduced key terms or definitions by moving between everyday language, experience or knowledge that the pupils would have, and re-phrasing and re-framing the concept with the introduction of either more technical, precise, 'scientific' (Karpov, 2014) words or through explanation of the concept underpinning

the definition, thereby making explicit the core concepts or principles, or syntactic knowledge, of the subject being taught. Third, the teachers introduced the tasks to be completed by the pupils (that is, the work to be done by pupils in the lesson) with a comment on its importance for them in relation to the goals of agency in the assessment task, or as someone who inhabits the subject knowledge (that is, assuming the identity of a historian, artist or poet, for example) (Edwards, 2015).

The subject knowledge of the teacher was a significant factor in the presentation of the tasks, and its effectiveness in the lesson was supported by the relational expertise of the teachers. The teachers all operated a metacommentary throughout the lesson, which most commonly explained the importance behind the task and expressed their explicit rationale for including the task within the lesson. The teachers focussed on their role being both explicit and clear – often checking with pupils whether the explanation had been sufficiently clear in order to ensure pupils understood what had just happened. The teachers moved into aspects of 'performance', using tone or volume of their voice, gestures and body language or by signalling that something important was about to be conveyed. They stepped in and out of 'performance' mode most often around the introduction of the task; this heightened performance signalled that they were emphasising something to the pupils or that something important was about to be happen. The teachers sought to inspire confidence and trust in the pupils, about the teacher and about the task. They did this most frequently by describing what pupils would be able to know and do without the assistance of the teacher at the end of the task, and often explicitly asked pupils to trust them by engaging in the task, sometimes cajoling them in order to gain co-operation from those who expressed reluctance, fear or concern. Teachers used different pronouns at different stages in the implementation of the task within the lesson: 'we' was used at collaborative stages; 'I' was used to emphasise that the teacher could be trusted in their task design; and 'you' or the pupil's name was used to isolate the individual from the group, either to coax them into co-operating or to highlight good performance that the rest of the group should follow.

4.2 What matters to teachers?

Thirty reflections were completed by the teachers and analysed. The theoretical concept underpinning the reflections was that, 'philosophy is manifested through the ways we work with content' (Hedegaard, & Chaiklin, 2013, p. 37). Teachers identified their aims for the lesson from this, and three elements might be inferred:

- how the teacher identified the learning challenge of the school subject on the curriculum

- the long-term strategy the teacher adopted in relation to the subject

- their aim to improve pupils' learning in relation to the subject.

They identified the actions they took within the lesson in order to promote learning, and in the activities associated with the lesson, before and after, such as homework or revision. These actions were designed to take the form of enabling, coaching, facilitating or collaborating. The teachers identified the specific activities they had designed within the task for the pupils; these identified the learning behaviours that they wished pupils to adopt in relation to the task, to the subject and to the school curriculum. Analysis of the teachers' reflections highlighted how the teacher saw what they did in the lesson – when the teacher stated why the class, individual pupils or the teacher was 'doing something', and how the teacher set up what pupils would do as a task within the lesson. Teachers defined their actions in the lesson as either discussing, explaining, instructing or presenting. When teachers made their rationale for the task explicit to the pupils they justified it in terms of pupil understanding, enjoyment or experience gained. The teachers introduced pupil activity within the tasks by stating that pupils would be involved in choosing, determining, selecting or copying.

These reflections were a resource for professional learning by the teacher because they enabled them to consider the links between the actions that they took in the lesson and their priorities as a teacher of a subject on the curriculum. The pedagogic demands of the tasks were made clear by the teachers. They considered how 'what mattered' to them as a teacher of a subject on the school curriculum shaped their practice, and how they interpreted 'what mattered' to the pupils in the subject at that time. The teachers were skilful in combining the common knowledge they created with the class and using the tasks they had designed so that pupils were motivated to undertake the tasks and operate as increasingly agentic. The teachers used their relational expertise, along with their subject and curriculum knowledge, as the frame for their relational agency and the common knowledge that they created with the pupils. The teachers most commonly expressed their aim in teaching the curriculum and in designing tasks as enabling pupils to engage with the subject on the school curriculum as their relational work (Edwards, 2005) – that is, their ability to motivate pupils and their skill in developing agency within the pupils as a class and as individuals in relation to the subject and any summative assessment.

'I want them to love the subject as I think this is really motivating. I want to keep their interest and spark, which is hard to do whilst also trying to get them a good grade sometimes. I hope I get across the reasons to learn and understand some of the more abstract content we are covering and I hope that they will look at the world differently, if only for a moment.'

Teacher 1

'I aim to build their confidence in writing by "seeing behind the curtain" of the process to show them what thinking looks like in practice.'

<div align="right">Teacher 2</div>

'I want them to have a question in mind when they work so that they are more discerning with the topic and also learn more from it. I want students to be more discerning with the information – I want them to do something with the information so that they are more likely to remember it.'

<div align="right">Teacher 3</div>

'So you're having to really drill down into what the [activities are that make students independent]; what are the best activities to do? What are the best tasks to maximise the kids' potential and also maximise the time, and make sure they are prepared for the next bits?'

<div align="right">Teacher 4</div>

'I think for me [the subject] really matters because I think it's part of understanding the shape of the world we live in today and part of understanding just how things operate. But for me I think also one of the things that is quite fundamental is realising that it doesn't have to be this way. And that kind of sense of future agency. But when it goes to the learning, I suppose it's the kind of, it's the debates and the discussions and the giving, it's the giving them the knowledge and encouraging them to analyse it and to think about it and to listen to each other but also to come to their own judgments which I think ended up with quite a lot of the things I think of as being activities being quite fundamental to a lot of them. That I want them to know some stuff, to think about it and to do some kind of evaluation.'

<div align="right">Teacher 5</div>

'I suppose I think of it [teaching] as a two-stage thing. So first of all I try to get them to see it as people. So try to relate it to their everyday lives and try them to get to see [the concept] and then move it back to a more formal analysis in terms of your explanations. But it's like trying to get them to see that it's more complex than that [the everyday idea] and trying to get them to see the point of it all.'

<div align="right">Teacher 6</div>

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The teachers involved in this inquiry, investigating how theories around task design might support their teaching, were concerned with how to develop pupils' motivation and agency in relation to the subject. This was manifested in four predominant concerns by the teachers which mediated the process of their teaching and how they understood their role as a school teacher of the curriculum.

- The teachers planned lessons with the goal of enabling pupils' understanding rather than their recall of factual knowledge. Understanding was interpreted as internalisation of the subject matter such that it had shaped the pupil's sense of identity in relation to the subject – that is, they saw themselves as a 'bit more of a historian' than they had previously.

- The teachers' long-term goal was to enable pupils to become agentic in relation to the subject knowledge and skills – that is, to be able to make informed decisions based on the knowledge acquired via task accomplishment.

- The teachers saw their work as relational. This was most often expressed as aiming to 'bring out the best' in the pupils, related to their identity not only as a student of the subject, but also to their role as a pupil in the school and to the adult they would become – after Bruner (1960).

- The teachers shared the long-term goal of wanting pupils to care about the subject for its own sake and for its importance to society. The teachers were motivated by wanting the pupils to care beyond the assessment outcomes, and instead to care about the subject's intrinsic value.

This interpretation of the practice of teaching in this inquiry and investigation suggests that the teachers viewed their role as enacting knowledge through a social practice, rather than, for example, by deploying elements of cognitive science.

5.1 Recommendations

Schools and teachers need to talk about the values that motivate them and shape their teaching of the curriculum.

1. Consider framing partnerships between schools and university education departments, and with academics/researchers, around the role of knowledge and the joint development of epistemic cultures (Cetina, 1999). As Oancea (2019) has commented, rather than focus on the epistemic fallacy that there is a gap between educational theory and practice, shift the dialogue to what theory and practice have in common – that is, inquisitiveness, tools and virtues. Doyle (2013) suggested that looking to connect theory and practice addresses three important concerns: it enables schools and teachers to address the instrumental (what can we do with this concept; what does a good one look like; and what does this mean for me/us?); it enables congruence (does this fit in my classroom?); and it addresses the question of cost – the time and resources to move forward. If, as Winkler (2001) has argued, theory connects ideas and ruptures the boundaries of experience, then theory is an important tool for schools and teachers. Partnerships that work to develop theory as a tool for practitioners offers another way to work with research – 'what works' can be seen as testing out the efficacy of past practices, whereas theory might suggest a way of looking to the future (Stones, 1992).

2. Consider developing the debate in schools and for teachers around the topic of agency. This is a topic arising in literature and the term is not often found as part of the lexicon of school leaders and teachers. Yet agency is clearly a long-term goal of teachers for the pupils that they teach, and it might be a goal for school leaders and teachers in relation to curriculum development. Conceptions of agency include 'the capacity to make informed decisions' (Burn & Edwards, 2007), and as ecological and emergent – 'something that happens through an always unique interplay of individual capacity and the social and material conditions by means of which people act' (Priestley, 2015) and 'therefore the promotion of teacher agency requires a focus upon the beliefs of individual teachers but also requires collective development and consideration' (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). In terms of curriculum development, Ball (with Maguire & Braun, 2012) has already suggested that agency is a key factor in how teachers and schools make choices about how to put policy into practice, and is a means of addressing some of the practicalities often neglected by policymakers. Edwards, Fleer and Bøttcher (2019) suggested that motivation and agency can be helpfully explored through the recognition of the demands of practice, so the phrase 'what matters' is a useful tool for discussion of the processes and outcomes of curriculum development as a professional practice in schools by teachers and leaders.

3. Develop themes from research and theory to act as heuristics, enabling teachers to act on and through theory in their practices. This enables researchers and academics to explain their underpinning research and what teachers and school leaders need to know about it.

From this work, the following themes arose.

- **For relational work:** the importance of 'bringing out the best' in the pupils, teachers, subject and curriculum; and of addressing 'what matters' to the teachers and the pupils in their classes.

- **For the move to pupil agency:** 'How I get them to pick up the pen for themselves'.

- **For teaching for understanding:** the 'exchange' between teacher and pupil as a 'social manifestation' of understanding, and the 'internalisation' of new learning.

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