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**Junior Cycle Reform – *Why Context Matters:*
A context-centric analysis of curriculum reform in
lower Irish secondary education**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with curriculum policy enactment in the field of lower secondary education in Ireland. The research illuminates the experiences of teachers and school leaders in three pilot schools who were enacting a new Junior Cycle (JC) curriculum on a trial basis, prior to national roll-out to schools across the country.

This reform, recognised by many as the most significant in the history of Irish education, has been marked by slow introduction, fragmentation and high levels of contestation from teacher unions. The initial aim of this research was to generate theory on the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding their enactment of this new curriculum, as described in *A Framework for Junior Cycle*, released by the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2012). The research agenda lay within the interpretivist paradigm and followed a grounded theory methodology. The main method employed was both group, and individual, focussed interviews. Ball's policy cycle (with modifications by Lesley Vidovich) provided a conceptual framework through which to analyse how teachers and leaders in the pilot schools had interpreted *The Framework* and translated it into practice across different levels of policy enactment.

As the study progressed, the nature of what was being generated through the process of theory construction indicated that what was of central concern for participants was matters to do with context. Thus, in keeping with interpretive and grounded theory approaches to research, it was deemed necessary to re-orientate the aim to allow for a more specific interrogation of the contexts that influenced the enactment of *The Framework*. Consideration was given to the influence of school and system contexts on actors' interpretations of JC reform and its translation into practice.

The results of the study suggest that curriculum policy and the management of the reform process at a system level influenced actors' interpretations of JC reform, whilst the management of school policy and participant values influenced its translation into practice. A new concept, contextual leverage, illuminates how policy can be managed to bring about a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum at a school and system level. A context-centric theoretical model is presented, which reconciles the other concepts constructed in the study to describe how JC reform has been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered.

Consequently, this study offers a contribution to knowledge that responds to the dearth of contextualised policy responses in the change literature. It looks to move beyond the truism that 'context matters' in curriculum policy enactment through illuminating *what* contexts matter, *how* they matter and *why*. This research presents, and expands upon, statements regarding why context matters for schools, for policy analysis and for system level governance. Context, in this regard, is not bleached into the background of the policy landscape but rather becomes a centralised, active force through which we can understand and mediate change better.

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For me, this thesis has been a labour of love. Its focus is a testament to my love for education, and the vocation of teaching. Its submission is a tribute to the investment of love from those closest to me, without whom I would never have completed. The pain to complete this thesis is proof that, at times, love hurts! Whilst I could not discernibly acknowledge all those who have been part of this labour of love, it would be remiss of me not to mention a few:

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Abbreviations

JC	Junior Cycle
JCPA	Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement
DES	Department of Education and Skills
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
SEC	State Examinations Commission
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CBA	Classroom-Based Assessment
SLAR	Subject Learning and Assessment Review
AfL	Assessment for Learning

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with curriculum policy enactment in the field of lower secondary education in Ireland. The research illuminates the experiences of teachers and school leaders in three pilot schools who were enacting a new Junior Cycle (JC) curriculum on a trial basis, prior to national roll-out. The initial aim of this research was to generate theory on the perspectives of key stakeholders on the enactment of this curriculum, described in *A Framework for Junior Cycle*, released by the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2012). The research agenda lay within the interpretivist paradigm and followed a grounded theory methodology. As the study progressed, the nature of what was being generated through the process of theory construction indicated that what was of central concern for participants was matters to do with context. Thus, in keeping with interpretive and grounded theory approaches to research, it was deemed necessary to re-orientate the aim to allow for a more specific interrogation of the contexts that influenced the enactment of *The Framework*. The use of the term *context* in this research refers to “*The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). I sought to understand why context matters in the enactment of JC reform by looking at the dynamism and inter-relationships of school and system level contexts influencing policy actors as they interpreted the new curriculum and translated it into practice. The research endeavoured to apply a contextual lens to the analysis of curriculum policy. The approach to policy analysis is aligned with the conceptual frameworks of Stephen Ball and Lesley Vidovich as it considers the contexts of influences, practices and effects from the micro level of the classroom to the macro level of the state apparatus. This shall be presented in more detail in the following chapters.

1.1. Context and rationale for the study

1.1.1. A Framework for Junior Cycle

The DES launched *A Framework for Junior Cycle* in October 2012. This document, outlining a new curriculum framework for JC education in Ireland, represents some of the most fundamental proposals for change in the JC curriculum, and indeed in Irish second-level education entirely, in the history of the state.

1999). The findings were stark. With the dominance of a terminal written examination, they found the Junior Certificate programme inadequately served students due to its lack of a range and modes of assessment techniques; “Students, it is argued, have never experienced the Junior Certificate Programme as it was intended” (p.2). Over the next decade, efforts at rebalancing subjects ensued to reflect, amongst other things, a broader range of student achievement. This all took place against the backdrop of a number of drivers at a national and international level. The rise of PISA and a neoliberal agenda, an economic downturn, the global education reform movement (GERM) and research influences on teacher and student experiences at JC (Smyth, 2009; Gilleece, et al., 2009) began to lay the foundation for a significant curriculum change in Irish education. This was realised in October 2012, as then Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, launched *A Framework for Junior Cycle*.



Fig.2. Front cover, *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2012)

The *Framework* departed from the Junior Certificate programme in a number of significant ways. Firstly, it outlined a school-based model of continuous assessment with a less weighted terminal examination at the end of third year (60% of overall grade, 40% for continuous assessment). A dual approach to assessment characterised the *Framework*, with formative and summative assessment taking place continually and at the site of learning. This is pointedly different to the over-reliance on a single, summative assessment

instrument which defined the preceding Junior Certificate programme. The *Framework* was underpinned by 8 guiding principles for JC education. These principles informed what a student should be able to achieve at the end of JC, encapsulated in 24 ‘Statements of Learning’. These statements both underpin the school programme and inform the learning outcomes of subject specifications and short courses. The *Framework* also proposed a skills/competency based curriculum, in which students would develop and use 8 key skills throughout the JC learning journey.

- The student:**
1. communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1⁵
 2. listens, speaks, reads and writes in L2 and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to her or his ability
 3. creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts
 4. creates and presents artistic works and appreciates the process and skills involved
 5. has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making
 6. appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives
 7. values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts
 8. values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change
 9. understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him
 10. has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably
 11. takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others
 12. is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active
 13. understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices
 14. makes informed financial decisions and develops good consumer skills
 15. recognises the potential uses of mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning
 16. describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships
 17. devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills
 18. observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions
 19. values the role and contribution of science and technology to society, and their personal, social and global importance
 20. uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge
 21. applies practical skills as she/he develop models and products using a variety of materials and technologies
 22. takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills
 23. brings an idea from conception to realisation
 24. uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner

⁵ L1 is the language medium of the school (English in English-medium schools; Irish in Irish-medium schools). L2 is the second language (Irish in English-medium schools; English in Irish-medium schools).

Fig. 3. The 24 Statements of Learning, from *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2012, p.12)

The *Framework* offered a degree of flexibility to schools in designing their curriculum.

Students could sit a maximum of 10 subjects/short courses (equivalent to half a subject in

terms of contact time). Schools could set a minimum of 8 subjects with 4 short courses, 9 subjects with 2 short courses or 10 subjects with no short courses. This is at the discretion of each school – they would be given the “opportunity to involve students and their parents in the discussion about the kind of programme that will best serve the needs of the students and the school, while at the same time meeting the requirements of the Framework” (DES, 2012, p.2). At the end of third year, a *Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement* (JCPA) would be awarded to each student reflecting achievement in a number of areas across the 3-year JC, as opposed to just the exam grades reported in the current Junior Certificate. These areas include state examination results, achievements in the area of *Wellbeing*, classroom-based assessments, short courses and other learning experiences. A five-point grading system is proposed for state examination results– achieved with distinction (90-100%), achieved with higher merit (75-89%), achieved with merit (55-74%), achieved, (40-54%), not achieved (0-39%). The award would be weighted the same as the current Junior Certificate in keeping with the Irish National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ level 3) guidelines. The *Framework* also proposed standardised testing in literacy, numeracy and Science in 2nd year, and examinations in 3rd year to be administered and assessed within the school.

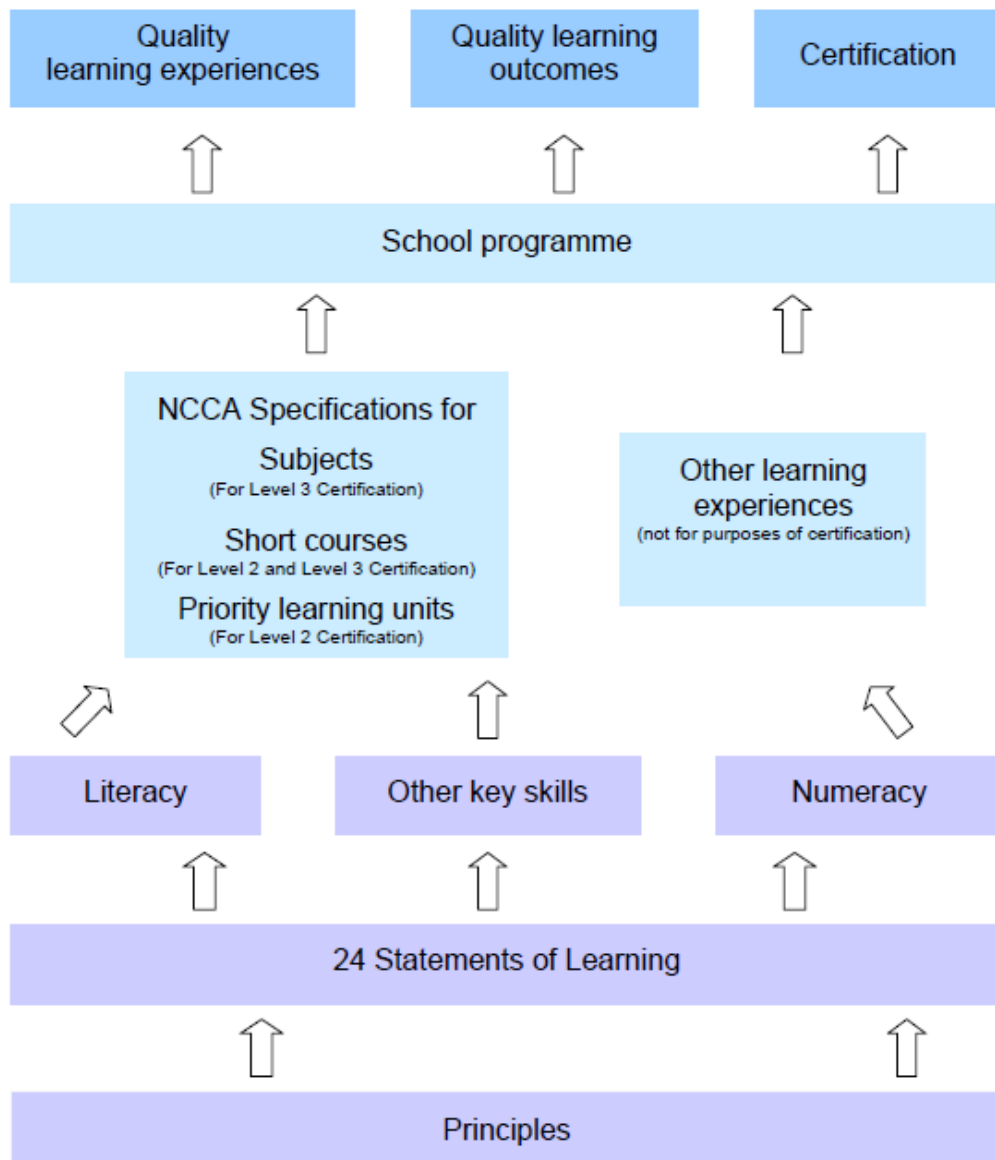


Fig. 4. Using the *Framework* in designing a school programme (DES, 2012)

The *Framework* was developed in accordance with the partnership model of curriculum reform facilitated by the NCCA. Representative partners from all aspects of education were involved on the JC reform committee. Continuous professional development (CPD) began in 2013 for school leaders and teachers of English, as this was the first subject introduced in September 2014. The phased introduction of all subjects/short courses on the JC curriculum is expected to be completed by 2020ⁱ. A new DES support service, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) was established in July 2013, “to provide high quality CPD & resources that supports schools in the effective implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework” (@JCforTeachers, 2013).

Various elements of the *Framework* were piloted in 49 network schools around Ireland. Dubbed the “Junior Cycle School Network”, these schools were “supported in working on various aspects of the reform with a view to exploring fully the opportunities and implications for schools of the reforms as well as the nature of the supports schools will require” (NCCA, 2012). These schools generated examples of the *Framework* in action for dissemination of best practices. Teachers and school leaders from three of these schools volunteered to participate in this study.

1.1.2. Reform concerns

Educational reforms, whilst they may differ contextually, in terms of pace and significance, share some common factors (Day & Smethem, 2009, p.143). They are proposed to address implicit worries of government related to personal and social values of society, to accelerate improvements and increase economic competitiveness. They normally lead to destabilisation, if only temporary, as they challenge existing teaching practices. Thus, they can lead to an increased workload for teachers. This is also observed by Ball (2008) who asserts that increased work intensification, paperwork and bureaucracy have decreased teacher empowerment and left teachers feeling professionally marginalised.

Indeed, there is an acceptance in the literature that reform projects which by-pass teachers, are overly prescriptive or shunt significant contributions from implementing agents will not succeed (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). Specific to curriculum, it has been found that teachers express dissatisfaction with not being involved in debates on curriculum decision-making (Porter et al., 1990; Skilbeck, 1990). This view was echoed within the context of JC reform by teacher unions:

Teachers genuinely feel that they had not been consulted in advance of the Framework’s proposals for the Junior Cycle curriculum, in particular the changes to certification and assessment [...] the fact that the final policy decision of the Minister [of Education] departed so radically from the NCCA’s advice [in ‘Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle’, NCCA 2011] has, literally, stunned teachers. They feel that the Minister has sidestepped the partnership process thereby ignoring the voices of teachers and others. (ASTI, 2013, p.7)

As shall be revealed in this thesis, the introduction of the *Framework* has been fragmented, stalled and highly contested by teacher unions. Such has been the degree of contestation, that the original *Framework* was rewritten in 2015 in response to outcomes of the DES negotiations with The Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers’

Union of Ireland (TUI). Given that “realising deep educational change can only happen through teachers and school management and their interactions and relationships with the learner” (NCCA, 2009, p.16), and the ever-growing emphasis on developing schools as transformative learning organisations (OECD, 2011), it is desirable to understand the factors which could nurture and hinder this development as teachers and schools interpret JC reform policy and translate it into practice. This research was conducted before any major contestation of JC reform occurred and the enactment of a re-written *Framework*. Whilst it represents an early snapshot-in-time of a complex reform process, it is hoped there is relatable learning which could contribute to our understanding of JC reform since the time the research was conducted, and ongoing.

Where discourses of efficiency, productivity and partnership have become part of the zeitgeist of educational change, “there is a growing recognition that schools need to lead the next phase of reform” (Hopkins, 2009, p.206). In this environment of “unrelenting and even repetitive change, then, it is essential to understand how teachers experience and respond to educational change if reform and improvement efforts are to be more successful and sustainable” (Hargreaves, 2005, in Day & Smethem, 2009, p.149). A shift towards schools leading reform requires a creative balance between top-down and bottom-up change efforts as well as a measure of capacity building within schools as we move towards an era of prescriptive policy married with generative policy grounded in the professionalism of those responsible for enactment. A new and uncontested terrain of policy making looms in Ireland, and an Irish contribution to the reform discourse would be valuable. As Timperley and Parr (2005, p.245, emphasis added) put it, “concerns *out there* need to be translated into concerns *in here* if change is to be successful”. Whilst neoliberal policy narratives may assume certain degrees of uniformity in the nature and purposes of reform movements, there are lessons to be learned from the situated narratives that are part of the lived experiences of practitioners. This assertion has been one of the driving motivations for this thesis.

Education policy enactment is at times driven by a desire for alignment between the intended and enacted curriculum (Cuban, 1998). When disparity occurs, it can lead to a pejorative framing of teachers’ mediation of policy. This is fuelled by the populist assertion that ‘teachers matter’. This claim, whilst noble, prioritises the individual capacity of the

teacher over the structural, relational and cultural conditions that influence teachers' enactment of policy (Drew, et al., 2016, p.2). This thesis argues that one of these conditions, context, must not only be taken into consideration, but centralised alongside the concept that teachers matter. Teachers are not solely agents of change, they are agents of change in context. This thesis seeks to understand why context matters in the enactment of JC reform.

1.2. Structure of this thesis

This thesis follows a traditional academic structure comprising of seven parts. When read in the presented order, it intends to tell the story of the research journey and theory generation from the lived experiences of policy actors interpreting JC reform and translating it into practice. It also intends to clarify for the reader how my theoretical and conceptual frameworks served as a lens through which I viewed the research from its inception to final analysis of the data, and beyond to making a contribution to the situated field of curriculum policy analysis.

Following from this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised thus:

Chapter two – From theoretical lens to research questions

In this chapter, I consider how my personal and professional life history have influenced my choice of theoretical lens and interest in the fields of curriculum and education policy. I present theories of curriculum and education policy analysis, which informed the development of a conceptual framework which framed the research design.

Chapter three – Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature in the field which this thesis is located. Given that this research is concerned with policy at multiple levels but also rooted in the practice of schools, the chapter provides an overview of drivers for change at national and supra-national levels, positioned within Ireland. It also examines the importance of context in the practice of policy enactment and presents a warrant for the contextual lens applied in this research.

Chapter four – Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the chosen methodology and methods used in the study and the research procedure followed.

Chapter five – Results and Analysis

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the results of the study relative to the research questions.

Chapter six –Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the analysis based on a constructed theoretical model.

Chapter seven – Conclusion

In this final chapter, I present concluding remarks in relation to the study and the field of curriculum policy analysis. I reflect upon the research journey and present a contribution to the field in relation to the overall aim of the research.

Chapter 2: From theoretical lens to research questions

2.0. Framing the research - *why my context matters*

Becoming a doctoral student has solidified for me the importance of the researcher in the researched. From my training as a teacher in the natural sciences, I might have previously considered researcher bias to be an unhealthy prospect. Through engagement with literature on part 1 of the EdD and practical experience in the field of research in part 2, I became aware that the researcher and those they research bring a history with them, a sense of self and experiences to which they attach significance (May, 1999, pp.20-21). I now see the importance of reflexivity in providing an “explicit recognition of the fact that the social researcher, and the research act itself, are part and parcel of the social world under investigation” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.234). Two exponents of the grounded theory methodology adopted in this study, Strauss and Corbin, affirm that the perspectives and belief systems of the researcher influence the ways we view and work with data. They emphasise the need to “look at experiences, feelings, action/interaction, to denote the structure or context in which these are located” (Corbin in Cisneros-Puebla, 2004, p.21). In this regard, a researcher biography serves as a reflexive account of the research conducted (Ball, 1990, p.170).

In arriving at the conceptual framework that guided the initial aim and research questions, I needed to reflect upon my own personal beliefs and values to reveal my ontological and epistemological assumptions, also referred to as a “worldview” (Creswell, 2009, p.6). There are various definitions of ontology and epistemology. Guba (1990, p.17) describes them as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”, whereas Crotty (1998, p.8) says epistemology is “how we know what we know”. Creswell (2009, p.6) describes the concept of a “worldview” as “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds”.

The exposition of a personal biography has supported me in exploring my worldview, allowing me to reflect upon the “anchor points” (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005) that shaped me from a social, economic, historical and political perspective. Through accounting my own

experiences of becoming a young man to the present day as a researcher and leader of JC change, my shifting epistemological assumptions are revealed. Given that this research is focussed on the dynamics and inter-relationships of contexts I find it ironic, albeit unapologetically, the degree to which my own shifting contexts influenced this study. I shall elaborate upon this in the methodology chapter.

This exercise has, admittedly, left me with a sense of personal discomfort. I felt the tension of what Troyna (1994) described as the “confessional tone” of an auto-critique. I raise issues from my past that I would rather not be defined by, but have nonetheless influenced my conduct in this research from conception, to data analysis, and final write up. I also felt concern for the audience of this thesis, who may see a biography as an exercise in self-aggrandisement, watching as I condemn myself to a “bottomless pit of [subjective] solipsism” (Eisner, 1992, in Greenbank, 2003, p.793). That being said, I stand by the importance of presenting my own narrative. Not only because I wish to conform to standards and expectations of rigour in qualitative research, but because my experiences on the doctoral journey have taught me that I cannot write somebody else’s story unless I can write my own.

The extract that follows demonstrates my position as evolved from my formative years in education - from a secondary school student, to college graduate and novice teacher:

Becoming an adult – my grey days

My years in secondary education were not what you would call ‘normal’. I became an adult too young. I was raised very working class, quite close to the poverty line in a single parent family. At the age of fourteen, I left the family home due to episodes of emotional and physical violence which compromised my wellbeing. I lived with my uncle for a time and then my grandmother. This was a dark time in my life, in which I felt quite lost in the world. I found it difficult to know my place, beyond the obvious indicators- I was homeless, poor, and doomed to rot in my home town. I came very close to leaving secondary school to work a number of times, and would have, had it not been for the positive influences of my teachers, especially my late English teacher. He saw great potential in me and encouraged me to just turn up every day. I channelled my energy into my education. Buoyed by the motivation I received in

school, I saw education as my 'ticket out' of the vicious working class cycle in which I saw people around me so entrenched. I refused to accept that social mobility was not possible for me, and strove to 'break the cycle' for myself. I graduated with honours from my secondary education and moved onto third level, the first person in my family to do so. The intercession of my English teacher quite literally changed my life. I pursued a degree in science education, inspired to do the same for others.

Becoming a teacher – my green days

My third level education was (thankfully) quite standard. I learned my craft in the natural sciences and in science pedagogy. I excelled at teaching practice throughout my four year course, and graduated with an honours degree in science teaching for secondary education. I became adept at the nuts and bolts of being a science teacher – laboratory management, safety, appropriate discipline and developing a rapport with the students.

Tradition, innovation, excellence– my golden days

My first long-term teaching role was in my current school, an amalgamation of 3 smaller schools in the locality. I was there from the start in 2003 when, from a blank sheet, our staff built a school. I was (and still am) fortunate to work under the leadership of an innovative and supportive Principal who gave every opportunity a chance and invested in people, especially me. Similar to my experiences in secondary education, I believe I responded well to my Principal for this investment. I drove innovation at my school, establishing traditions of excellence in science education. Our school became known for science fair excellence on the local, national and world stage over the course of ten years. Similarly, I established a tradition of football in the school, coaching many teams to All-Ireland success. This was a golden period in my life as I 'made a name for myself' as a person who pursued excellence in everything I did. I received national awards for science teaching excellence, upskilled myself as a coach and coached teams from local to elite national levels.

My career at this point was marked by a sense of drive, energy and ambition to be the best teacher I could be, inside and outside the classroom. I was driven to excel, but also to provide my students with the opportunities I never had. Given the

amalgamated nature of our school, 'running with the runners' formed part of the leadership strategy of school management, and I was one of the front runners. I confess to a lack of compassion for some teachers in my school whom I perceived to be 'less innovative'. I couldn't understand, nor accept, why they would not give anything less than their all to the school and its students. This was wrong of me, as I now know; "no nation has gotten better by focussing on individual teachers as the driver" (Fullan, 2011, p.10).

My classroom work during my green and golden days was defined by coverage of content. I demonstrated excellence in the delivery of subject matter. I developed student competency in practical science through recipe-style scientific investigations. The expectation from parents and students was high grades in the Junior and Leaving Certificate exams, and I measured myself by these expectations. My engagement with my subject was characteristic of the technical-rational interest that has been so pervasive in Irish curriculum discourse (Gleeson, 2010, p.122), and market-driven expectations of performativity (Ball, 2003). I was conflicted by the quality of learning experiences I was providing for my students. I was a master of 'drilling content', but did this help to develop students as learners and instil the love of education I had experienced as a child? Through mentoring students for science fairs, I saw their passion for learning develop as they explored their interests as real scientists. This was disconnected from the reality of 'doing science' in school. I felt the 'goodness' of my subject was being outsourced to extracurricular activities, disconnected from the science classroom.

Personally, this was also a golden time in my life. I had moved out of my home town and married my college sweetheart, built a house and started a family. I had broken the working class cycle that I so feared as a young man, and had become a middle-class, successful educator.

This excerpt from my biography illuminates a number of underlying values which I held in adolescence and retained as a teacher. I was conscious of the working class background from which I came, and had an acute awareness that I was subject to the socio-economic circumstances into which I was born. However, I challenged the assumption that this was my path and, as such, strove for excellence to escape this reality. Pursuit of excellence

became a hallmark of my personal and professional life. I recognise a tension between my early practice as a teacher and my underlying values and beliefs. I felt a responsibility to conform to delivery of a content-heavy curriculum which was not attuned to my own values of education as being an emancipatory endeavour; a journey marked by exploration over completion, illumination over coverage, discovery over delivery.

This reflective exercise reveals my beliefs to be aligned with a constructivist epistemology. I recognise there are multiple participant meanings that are constructed in a social and historical context, but that meaning is also conferred within and by these contexts. In this case, “we are born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture” (Crotty, 1998, in Creswell, 2009, p.8). The role of the researcher, from this stance, is to interpret actors’ meanings of the world they engage with. This interpretation arises out of human interaction and theories of meaning are inductively developed (ibid, p.8).

The theoretical perspective underpinning this research, arising from my constructivist epistemology, is interpretivism. Such an approach seeks to reveal the diverse meanings constructed by individuals within a social context (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). To understand a phenomenon is to examine how those experiencing it perceive the world around them, given that social reality is both constructed and negotiated (Bogdan & Niklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). O’ Donoghue (2007, p.16) captures the foundation principle of interpretivism as follows:

For the interpretivist, the individual and society are inseparable units. From this, it follows that a complete understanding of one is not possible without a complete understanding of the other. Also, society is to be understood in terms of the individuals making it up and the individuals are to be understood in terms of the societies of which they are members.

An interpretive approach was deemed suitable for this study given that my interest in understanding the enactment of JC reform was grounded heavily in understanding the perspectives of those participants who were enacting it. These perspectives were informed by how teachers and school leaders experienced the phenomenon of JC reform within their socialⁱⁱ and professional settings. Their perspectives on the enactment of the *Framework* also inform, and are informed by, the construction of the society we live in. This premise is evidenced by the tentative debates surrounding JC reform in Irish society and how these debates and the perspectives of those enacting the *Framework* mutually influence one

another. Further, my own perspectives on the experiences of these practitioners is constructed. As such, I deem it incorrect to assume there are ‘findings’ from this research. Interpretivism eschews the notion of an objective reality about which we can ‘find out’ things. Rather, just as my participants are deemed to be constructors of their own reality, so also am I, as a researcher, a constructor regarding the focus of my research investigation. Thus, I refer at all points throughout this thesis to ‘results’ of the research, rather than ‘findings’. For similar reasons, I refer throughout to theory as being ‘constructed’ from the data rather than being ‘emergent’.

Interpretive ideas find resonance in the enactment of education policy, particularly when considering context. That *context matters* in policy enactment is somewhat of a truism in both academic and government circles (Ball et al, 2012, p.19). However, acknowledging this significance requires a greater consideration of differences between school contexts over ‘external’ contexts at the system level (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006, p.312). The actions of the individual cannot be fully understood without consideration of the contexts within which these actions take place. In turn, these contexts find meaning within society at a macro level, but also in the interactions and negotiations that individuals engage in at the micro level. In this study, I contend that application of a contextual lens to policy analysis affords us the opportunity to interpret the dynamics and inter-relationships of contexts at a school and system level, and how these inform the construction of meaning by actors regarding JC reform and its enactment.

A further excerpt from my biography demonstrates how my own changing contexts influenced a shift in my assumptions regarding enactment of change:

Expanding my professional ‘toolbox’

Leading people and teams

After a number of ‘golden years’ enhancing my professional capital, I became interested in leadership opportunities beyond the classroom. I received a post of responsibility for developing a teacher-pupil mentoring scheme at our school. This required me to lead pupils and a team of teachers partaking in a formal mentoring scheme. I pursued a masters’ in education management and applied leadership theory in practice as mentoring coordinator. I quickly began to appreciate the

different degrees of commitment and readiness that teachers and pupils bring to their practice. In order to lead effectively I needed to have a diverse 'toolbox' of leadership strategies and knowledge and the ability to seamlessly transition between these. I applied myself well in this leadership role, as was noted by the positive reactions of teachers and students to the organisation of the mentoring scheme and the high quality of support they received (King, 2012).

I was subsequently offered a position as a year head, a role which I fulfilled for 7 years. I was responsible for leading a team of 5 teacher-tutors in supporting year groups of 100 to 150 pupils. As a leader of a year group, I refined and enhanced my leadership skills through engagement with parents, students, teachers and school management. I was exposed to a broad range of partners from different socio-economic circumstances. I began to appreciate that as a leader I needed to be able to bring people with me to realise a shared vision for the year group. This required me to demonstrate the capacity and empathy to 'meet people where they are at'. I developed my 'toolbox' of strategies to challenge and support students and engaged with their parents in a kind and professional manner.

My greatest learning came from my work with school management and tutors. In leading my tutor team, I became intimately aware of the different circumstances that influenced tutors' practice, and the great diversity in this regard. Classroom experiences, relationships with colleagues, union issues, personal experiences and values. These were some of the factors that shaped the complex picture of professional action. These factors, which I now see as *contexts*, were temporal, relational and could be both enabling and constraining for tutors in fulfilling their role. Through my interactions with the Principal and Deputy Principal(s) in my school, I was exposed to a number of other contexts that influenced their decisions, such as board of management and DES expectations. Over time, I began to realise in practice what I was learning from theory, that "situations are fluid and changing, events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly effected by context – they are 'situated activities'" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.20). I developed a great interest in the nuances of contexts, and how they influenced practitioners (including me) in different ways.

Leading curriculum innovation

All this time, I felt the familiar tensions from my golden days. I experienced frustration and disillusionment with the curriculum. Rather than become dispirited, I turned my energies to trialling innovative curriculum practices and supporting the professional learning of teachers. I worked part-time in teacher CPD with Science teachers, and on European STEM projects on scientific inquiry. I tried to rectify some of the issues I saw in Irish Science education through publishing a textbook for the new JC Science Curriculum Specification. I demonstrated leadership in supporting teachers to improve practice. I was exposed to a broader field of professionals, all influenced by different contextual factors, some common, others competing and all the while evoking different responses.

Through my studies on the EdD, I came to learn about educational policy as a “set of technologies and practices which are realized and struggled over in local settings” (Ball, 1994, p.10). I began to see resonance with my experiences of education within and beyond my school community and the principles of educational policy studies. I realised I was a subject to technologies in my school that situated me in repressive power relationships. These included the bureaucracy that came with leadership responsibilities and union issues, and accountability pressures in an assessment-driven curriculum culture. I came to see myself as an agent of policy; that my disillusionment with, and empowerment to lead curriculum, were my responses to the policies governing my work. I began to see how I was experiencing the resistance, dominance and the chaos/freedom that is the trialectic of policy as created in practice (ibid, p.11).

From days grey, green and golden, to expanding my professional toolbox, I navigated a path from being egocentric, to student-centric and then teacher-centric. As I was exposed to different people and experiences, I developed a practical understanding of how policy is ‘done’ by people and to people, and was able to reconcile this with *a priori* theories of educational policy.

This excerpt reflects an intimacy between the researcher and their research focus, rendering the notion of sterility in research as mythical (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p.65). My

professional path illustrates my desire to support educational change by attempting to influence policy in practice and curriculum in context. A research focus on JC reform stems from this desire. In this study, my ontological assumption of context is that it describes *the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood.* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). With regards to enactment of JC reform, context is taken to mean the circumstances that form the setting for the interpreting of JC reform and its translation into practice. In keeping with the definition of context, this research contends that enactment of JC reform can only be fully understood in terms of these circumstances.

In comparing the process of change to a stage production, Hayward and Spencer (2010, p.172) allude to what context means for schools:

In some ways the process of change is like a dramatic production: the impact of what is happening on stage depends on the effectiveness of direction, backstage work and lighting, though when everything is working well none of these is noticed.

If the school is a stage, then the context is the backdrop, the lighting, the props, the behind-the-scenes actions, prompts and instructions that the audience seldom see. These are the circumstances and settings amongst which, and within which, the play is acted out by the actors. Different actors can perform differently based on the influence of these circumstances. And, as this research will show, if the circumstances are altered in some way, it can influence the ways in which the actors perform. My epistemological assumption is that this performance, influenced by context, is best seen through the eyes of the practitioner at the micro level of the school. As I shall demonstrate in the following sections, this lens is multi-layered, as contextual dimensions within and across levels of the policy process influence practitioners' enactment of JC reform.

In searching for a conceptual lens through which to view this research and which aligned with my worldview, I was drawn to interpretive theories of curriculum policy. In the next section, I provide insight on the key theorists who helped me to develop this lens.

2.1. Education policy

It is difficult to agree a definition of policy amongst scholars. In fact, reference has been made to “the vast literature [...] which attempts to define policy. The one thing all of these attempts have in common is their recognition that achieving such a definition is not an easy task” (Taylor et al, 1997, p.23). However, policy researchers (Ball, 1993, 1994; Taylor et al., 1997; Ozga, 2000) do agree that policy, by nature, is both process and product. Policy is “a course of action, adopted and pursued”, as well as a “web of interrelated decisions that allocate values” (Hill, 1997, pp.6-9). Policies vary in terms of their content and, from an educational point of view, can include things such as governance of schooling, criteria for admission of children, strategies for catering for diverse learners, and of particular interest to this research, the curriculum to be experienced in schools.

Ball (1990, 1993, 1994) and Taylor (1997) reject the view of the policy process as top-down, orderly and rational and describe it more as cyclical, freewheeling and chaotic at times. The emphasis on struggle in the policy process has been given consideration, *contra* to the notion that policy formulation moves seamlessly to implementation regardless of setting. The work of Stephen Ball and his colleagues (Bowe, et al., 1992; Ball, 1994) is of notable interest in this regard, and forms the foundation for the approach to policy analysis being considered in this thesis. Prior to Ball’s approach to policy analysis (1994), policy actors were seen as constrained by prescriptive policies produced centrally; policy was *done* to them. However, whilst still acknowledging this macro influence, Ball’s framework for policy analysis recognised the agency of the policy actor as contributing to the policy process. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault (1980), he analysed the power-knowledge relationships in such processes. He argued that policy became an “economy of power, a set of technologies and practices which are realised and struggled over in local settings... [this included] both text and action, words and deeds, what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Ball, 1994, p. 10). He addressed the struggles between policy actors and policy makers over language, the winners of which set the discourse for policy formation. Building on Ball’s understandings of policy, Taylor (1997) examined policymaking as a mechanism of state; she also emphasised that policy was more than text production. She stressed that policy “involves processes prior to the articulation of the text and the processes which continue after the text has been produced, both in modifications to it as a statement of values and desired action, and in

actual practice” (ibid, 1997, p. 28). Further to this, Rizvi & Lingard (2010) assert that policies exist in context; having a prior history linked to earlier policies, actors and agencies that may extend beyond education and indeed beyond the nation state.

With such broad conceptualisations of policy and the acknowledgement of its presence in all areas of education, it is incumbent upon policy researchers to “develop theoretical framings to support policy research which is relevant to all levels of the policy process” (Vidovich, 2007, p.286). The following sections endeavour to do just this.

2.1.1. A policy cycle across levels

Ball’s understandings of policy are located in what he calls a “messy complexity and serendipity” (Ball, 1993, p.14 -15) within which a clear definition of policy stages is impossible. He, along with others (Ball, 1990; Bowe, et al., 1992; Ball, 1993; Ball, 1994), offers a framework for analysing policy across various contexts that are messy, chaotic and beyond demarcation. Each of them represents areas of tensions and struggle as different policy actors and subjects achieve agency in context. The key features of this framework for policy analysis which are relevant to this thesis include:

- the idea of a policy cycle and its contexts of influence, text production, practice, outcomes and political strategy
- the fluid nature of the analytical approach to policy advised within the cycle, reflected in his suggestion of using these ideas as a ‘toolbox’ for analysis rather than a single theory (Ball, 1993, p.14),
- the application of these ideas to curriculum policy, particularly to JC reform.

The policy cycle (Ball, 1993) conceptualises policy as a messy process consisting of interacting contexts. The first of these, **the context of influence**, focuses on the forces which drive policy. An analysis of influence considers the antecedents and pressures which gave rise to the policy initiative under study. **The context of policy text production** considers the need to examine policy texts to understand their intentions, their underlying assumptions, and the dominant and shifting ideologies which are either explicit or implied within them. This context is recognised as a struggle of interests, over policy as text and policy as discourse. There are “writerly texts” (p.16) which normally go uncontested, and “readerly texts” which are open to interpretations by policy subjects and actors. Policy text analysis

allows us to take account of what the policy document legitimises and, by generation of systems of knowledge which legitimise, what is excluded. It reveals policy subjects as both having a voice and as marginalised. **The context of policy practice** refers to changes in practices as a result of policy. Ball asserts the need for two extra contexts (p.26) to make this cycle complete in theoretical and practical terms. **The context of policy outcomes** is concerned with analysing how changes to practice as a result of policy impacts on issues such as social justice and opportunity. Finally, **the context of political strategies** looks at the political and social phenomena which might be addressing some of the inequalities arising as outcomes from policy enactment.

Vidovich & O'Donoghue (2002) and Vidovich (2007) extend the work of the policy analysis framework outlined above to form a conceptual model depicting possible interrelationships between the contexts of a policy process at the macro, meso and micro levels. This model (Fig.5 below) represents the messiness of a policy process whilst also providing a scaffold for conceptualisation to reduce its unwieldy nature.

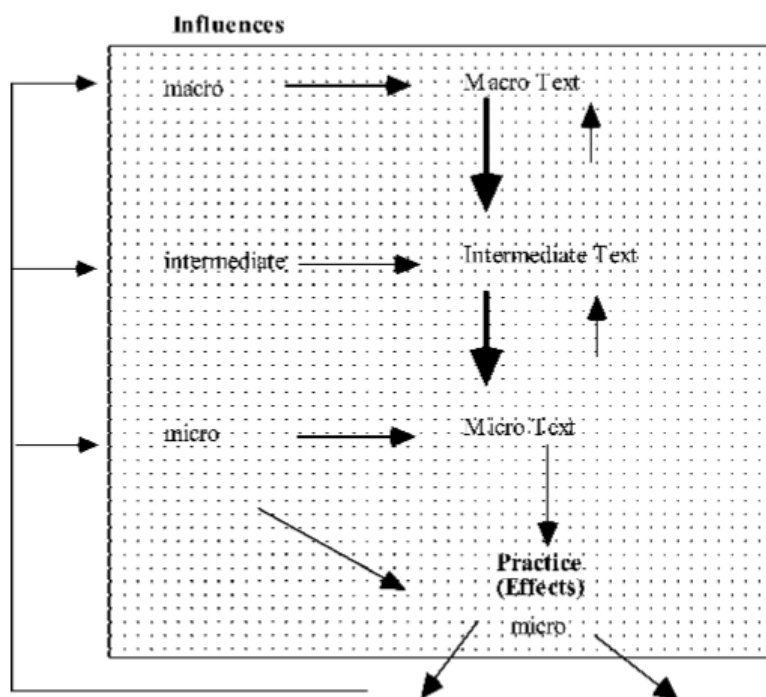


Fig. 5. A hybridized policy cycle (from Vidovich, 2007, p.291)

This form of policy analysis “explicitly links the ‘bigger picture’ of global and national policy contexts to the ‘smaller pictures’ of policies and practices within classrooms” (2007, p. 285). This thinking is congruent with my own assumptions, reflected in my biography, that we are

both subjects and actors of policy. It is also consistent with Ozga's assertion, with which I agree, that "policy happens everywhere in education" (2000, p.2). Finally, it is attuned to the focus of this research, to understand the nuanced enactment of the *Framework* in schools. This "turning up [of] the focus at the micro level" of policy analysis (Vidovich, 2007, p. 295), of considering the micro-level agency of grassroots policy actors alongside the meso and macro-level structural policy processes, contributes to the ongoing democratization of education.

Personal reflection was an important exercise in revealing my ontological and epistemological beliefs. In my early career, and influenced by my life history, I held an assumption around policy in practice which marginalised teachers who I saw as less innovative. This position was neglectful of policy influences at multiple levels within the system. It was only when I professionally grew beyond my classroom practice that I developed a deeper awareness of the nuanced ways teachers enact policy, and the contexts influencing this. In ways, the contribution from this research reflects my commitment to de-marginalise those practitioners I may have taken for granted in my early career, but from whom I have learned so much since.

The frameworks of Ball and Vidovich allow for the analysis of the complex processes of policy in a way that is not bound by any single theoretical perspective. Rather, Ball draws on three approaches of critical theory, post-structuralism and critical ethnography. This was in keeping with his view of the importance of having "a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories – an applied sociology rather than a pure one" (Ball, 1994, p. 14). The marriage of these three approaches by Ball was borne out of his desire to get away from a "commentary and critique" (ibid, p.15) style of policy analysis and to bring greater empiricism into the realm of policy studies. Vidovich drew on the theoretical perspectives of critical theory, post-structuralism and feminism. As such, she concurs with this need for "theoretical eclecticism" to offer a broader range of analytical tools to "capture the increasingly complex global-national-local dynamics of education policy in new times" (2007, p. 290).

2.1.2. Curriculum as policy

Looney (2001) attempts to align the area of curriculum studies with that of policy studies through a consideration of curriculum as policy. She argues that Ball's policy cycle could serve as a unitary device for theories on curriculum development and policy development within the "the vacuum created by the collapse of the Tyler rationale [for curriculum]" (Pinar, 1998, in Looney, 2001, p.151). Looney argues that Irish curriculum studies has suffered from a loss of theoretical critique consequent of the dominance of the technical, managerial paradigm. Current education discourses in Ireland provide give-away examples of such a technicist viewpoint in the form of "delivery" of education, of "in-service training" (Government of Ireland, 1998), the importance of having an education as against being educated, the emphasis on covering the course given that "coverage, in the sense of hiding or screening, is the antithesis of education as exploration and discovery" (Gleeson, 2010, pp.122-3). This rational, technical dominance, argues Gleeson, "has allowed fragmentation and discontinuity to go unchallenged, while macro curriculum issues are neglected" (2000, p.26). Looney, (2001, p.153), arguing that "curriculum studies and policy studies share the same symptoms [of theoretical isolationism]", says there is a need to find fresh perspectives on curriculum which could lead to the development of new theories in a post-Tyler age. Curriculum, Looney says, "is policy, and policy in its most public form" (ibid., p. 153), and states that "Ball's policy cycle offers some theoretical perspectives for curriculum policy" (ibid., p. 159). She presents a modified version of the policy cycle, in which the policy contexts become curriculum contexts:

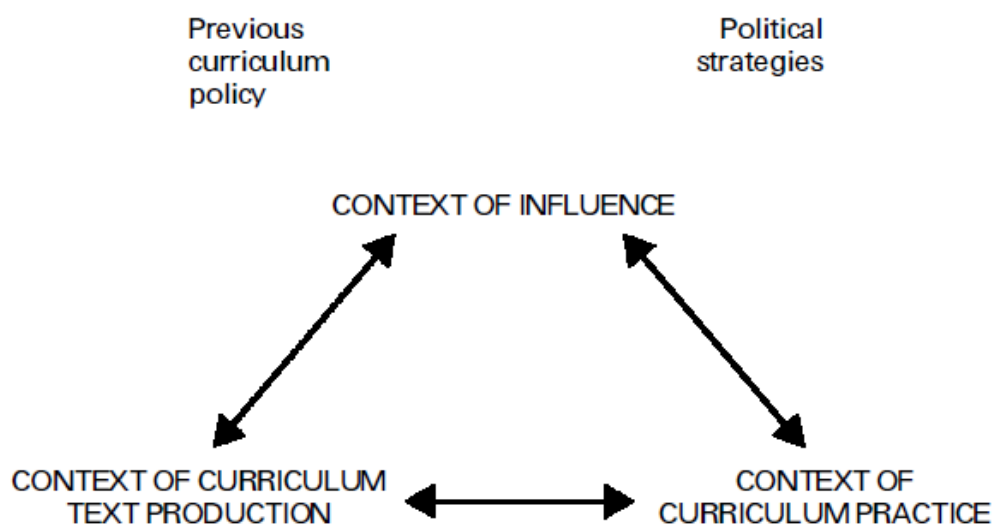


Fig. 6. The curriculum cycle (Looney, 2001, p.159)

Whilst this thesis deals primarily with the context of influence on enactment of curriculum policy, it cannot be considered in isolation from the other contexts; they bleed into each other. This all-embracing, layered and tumultuous view of policy lends itself to what Ball, Bowe and Gold (1992) and Ball (1993) refer to as a “trajectory study”. Such a study employs “a cross-sectional rather than a single level analysis by tracing policy formulation, struggle and response from within the state itself to the various recipients of the policy” (Ball, 1993, p.16). An analysis such as this tersely summarises the nature of this research.

2.1.3. Bringing it together

This study aims to examine the policy process of curriculum reform through considering the enactment of the *Framework* by key stakeholders. This enactment, whilst primarily concerned with practice, informs and is informed by various contexts of the policy trajectory. These include the contexts of influences, production of policy texts, practices and effects, outcomes and political strategies. I consider policy processes at play at the micro level of the school, as well as macro level influences, as practitioners and leaders within three school sites interpret JC reform, consider its enactment and translate the policy into practice. The study is situated within the general fields of policy sociology (Ozga, 2000; Ball, 1990) and critical policy analysis (Ball, 1994). The concept of a trajectory study (ibid) has been suggested as a useful description of this research, reflecting the dynamic relationships between the various policy actors at the different levels of micro, meso and macro policy enactment.

Given the messy nature of reform, that it “comes across as an octopus with several arms” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006), it was necessary to develop a way of conceptualising and operationalizing the complex processes at play. Ball’s policy cycle is comprehensive and, accordingly, was deemed appropriate to underpin the research reported in this thesis. This model was modified according to Looney’s (2001) suggestions of a curriculum policy cycle, taking into account the contexts of influence and practice in the light of previous curriculum policy. It also acknowledges the interrelationships between the various contexts of a policy process at the macro, meso and micro level according to Vidovich’s hybridized policy framework (Vidovich, 2007). By combining the contributions of these theorists, I devised a tentative policy analysis conceptual framework, which provided a practical lens through which to view this research. This framework is outlined in Fig. 7 below.

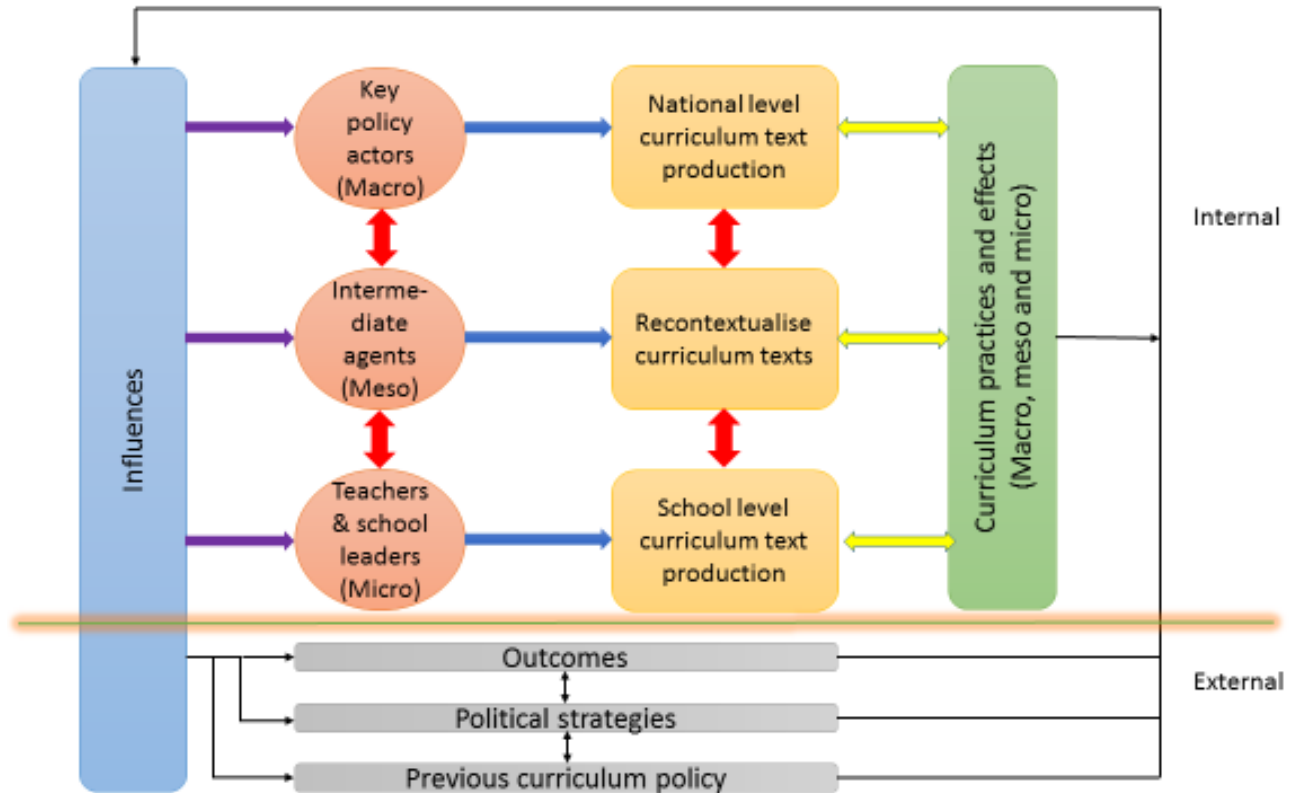


Fig.7. Conceptual framework for curriculum policy analysis at multiple levels of the policy process

All of Ball’s five contexts of the policy process are included within this framework. It also includes Looney’s treatment of curriculum as a policy imperative; the relevance of curriculum text production and changes to curriculum practice are outlined. Vidovich’s three levels of the policy trajectory are incorporated. National policy actors represent the macro level, whilst school leaders and teachers account for the micro level. Meso level actors include intermediate agents such as disseminators and collaborators within the JC Schools Network and the JCT Support Service. These actors have an important role in bridging macro policy with the micro level experiences of the school. In this space, they support a recontextualising of policy intentions as they link the intended curriculum with the enacted curriculum in schools. As shall be discussed in the results chapter, each school had a designated JC coordinator. These were teachers with an official responsibility for leading and supporting JC reform efforts at the micro level of the school, as well as liaising with the NCCA at the meso level. With feet in multiple levels of enactment, these coordinators were described as ‘intermediary’ level actors.

The potential role of the state and international factors may exist as an external influence, and are thus incorporated within this model. Also in keeping with Vidovich, the context of policy influence is considered from an external and internal standpoint, whilst in keeping with Looney's views of the curriculum policy cycle, the importance of previous curriculum policy is noted. The contexts of outcomes and political strategies are included to account for "issues of justice, equality and individual freedom" (Ball, 1994, p.26). This was seen as befitting this research, given the mission of the DES to allow schools the freedom and flexibility to tailor the *Framework* to suit their individual needs in providing "a quality, inclusive and relevant education with improved learning outcomes for all students, including those with special educational needs" (DES, 2012, p.1).

The arrows show interlinkages between contexts and levels of the policy trajectory. The contexts of practices and effects are linked with all levels of the trajectory, based on the view that all levels have a role in the enactment of the *Framework*. It is conceivable that some practices and effects may become future influences whilst others may not.

There are a number of strengths to the conceptual framework presented above. Firstly, it provides a systematic way of framing research questions that guide the researcher towards action. It provides a means to analyse the policy process at the three levels of interest in this study and across multiple contexts. Further, whilst this is a policy trajectory study, this framework keeps the concept of curriculum central to the research, thereby allowing for questions of curriculum and policy to be considered in the data collection for completeness. However, one could also argue the framework is too postmodern and overly analytical, adding another layer of messiness. Postmodern approaches to policy analysis have been criticised for raising problems without offering solutions, for creating a "post-structural paralysis" when it comes to issues of power relations and social justice (Humes & Bryce, 2003) Finally, the framework strongly emphasizes practice. Cognisant of these possible weaknesses, the framework is considered most appropriate as I believe it serves as a useful tool for investigating the complex policy processes involved in this curriculum reform. In addition, given the gestational stage of this policy process in the prior to staggered roll-out of JC reform, this research was admittedly all about practice. With reference to this framework, the aims of the study and guiding research questions are now considered.

2.2. The ebb and flow of research questions

Whilst the structure of this chapter may suggest a progression from my worldview to research questions as linear, this was not the case. My aim was to *be guided by the question* (O'Donoghue, 2007) of JC enactment from the perspectives of key stakeholders. At research proposal stage, I tried to reconcile my methodology with symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective, influenced by its degree of 'fit' with a grounded theory methodology as postulated by previous researchers. However, this was not aligned with the path the research followed and was hence disregarded. Initial research questions were drafted and finalised, guided by the conceptual framework for curriculum policy outlined above. As the research progressed and data was being collected and analysed, I became concerned with the process I had engaged with. I recognised the importance of laying this process out clearly so, as a form of human inquiry, it could be taken seriously (Crotty, 1998, p.13). This impetus for clarity drove me to articulate my theoretical perspective and, from this, my ontological and epistemological assumptions.

As I developed data categories, organising concepts were constructed, providing insight to the enactment of JC reform from the perspectives of the participants. Through an iterative process of concept refinement and eventual theory generation, the research questions evolved (Appendix A) to reflect a tighter focus on context. Whilst this fluidity is characteristic of a grounded theory study (Hood, 2007, p.156), I still maintained integrity to the theoretical influences that guided this research. In the conclusion chapter, I shall reflect how the constructed theory from this research finds support from the theorists who provided the original curriculum policy lens through which I viewed the enactment of JC reform.

Reflecting the focus on context and its influence on JC enactment, the guiding aim for the research is stated thus:

Taking context as an active force that mediates the enactment of policy, and with regards to the stakeholders within and across the school sites – why does context matter in the enactment of JC reform?

Specific research questions arising from this aim are:

1. What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site?
2. How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform?
3. Why have they engaged in these ways?
4. How has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered?

This chapter has presented the research in this thesis as an interpretive study of curriculum policy enactment, underpinned by a constructivist worldview. Using curriculum policy theories as a lens through which to view the question of JC enactment, the final aim and research questions for the study have been presented. In the next chapter, I present a literature review of key themes of relevance to this research. In the following chapter, I consider the methodology and methods employed to explore the research questions.

Chapter 3: Literature review

3.0. Introduction

The study reported in this thesis is located within the domain of curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education. There is a specific emphasis on context as influencing practitioners' enactment of a system-wide curriculum reform. Hence, it is important to pay attention to current thinking on system-wide change internationally and specific drivers for change in Ireland. The enactment of policy in schools, and the influence of context on this enactment, shall also be considered.

This chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section, 'introducing system-wide change', is concerned with system drivers for educational change across the world. The second section, 'drivers for Junior Cycle reform', considers the national and supranational policy drivers which midwived JC reform into existence. The third section aligns the key features of the *Framework* with international trends in curriculum goals. In the fourth section, 'acting back', the negative washback to JC reform from teacher unions since the time of data collection is discussed. Finally, in 'the case for context', I present a warrant for consideration of context, and research of this kind, to support understanding and successful enactment of system-wide changes such as JC reform.

3.1. Introducing system-wide change

Globally, system-wide change initiatives have turned to education reform as a means to national improvement. A number of drivers of educational reform have emerged as part of the global education reform movement (GERM). These drivers have manifested differently in various nation states, leading to different outcomes for individual school and system-wide educational improvement. However, one commonality across countries is the agreement that educational reform strategies must focus on the context of teaching and learning and build capacity at the micro level of the school (Hopkins, 2009, p.202). Or, as Fullan (2011, p.3) so aptly says, "the key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of students and teachers as the central driving force". This focus has been expressed in a number of international curriculum developments, resulting in a renewal of energy to the field of curriculum studies after a somewhat moribund twenty years previous (Moore, 2006; Edwards, 2011). These developments seek to situate schools and teachers at the centre of

curriculum reform. In the words of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011, p.51), successful reform “requires teachers to contribute as architects of change, not just as implementers”. This message has rung true in many curriculum reform initiatives, including those in Scotland and Ireland. The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) posits a renewed vision of the teacher as a curriculum developer and an agent of change (Priestley, et al., 2016). In Ireland, the NCCA (2009, p.16) share this sentiment:

Realising deep educational change can only happen through teachers and school management and their interactions and relationships with the learner. This kind of change has to see teachers, truly, as the key agents of change.

Focussing teacher agency around interactions with the learner exemplifies another common trend seen in recent curriculum design- “learnification” (Biesta, 2010). That is, the centralising of the learner at the heart of schooling, alongside prominent discourses of choice and personalisation. This “learnification” has been accompanied by an increased emphasis on active learning and formative assessment in curriculum design (Priestley, et al., 2016; Hopkins, 2009). These emphases also ring true in the Irish context, wherein Junior Cycle reform presents a “dual approach to assessment [...] and increases the prominence given to classroom-based assessment and formative assessment” (DES, 2015, p.7). Add to this a curricular balance between knowledge and skills, and a driver for system reform becomes evident –**personalised learning** (Hopkins, 2009, p.208). Similar approaches to personalised learning have been a driver for system reforms in Finland and Australia, as well as Ireland and Scotland.

There are three other key drivers for system reform that have proven instrumental in raising social, intellectual and organisational capital. The first of these – **professionalised teaching**, seeks to put teachers on a par with other professions in terms of their professional judgement, evidence-based practices and pride in their work. Driving change through professionalised teaching creates the conditions for intrinsic motivation of teachers to flourish (Fullan, 2011, p.3). Examples of countries where professionalised teaching has positively driven reform include teacher promotion based on competencies in Canada and Sweden, specified literacy CPD in England and teacher selection processes in Finland. It is a commitment to professionalised teaching which makes teaching an attractive profession in all high-performing countries, where teachers are seen as nation-builders (Hargreaves &

Fullan, 2012, p.17). The 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) revealed that Finnish teachers find their profession rewarding because of the autonomy and social prestige that comes with being seen as such builders of their nation (Sahlberg, 2015, p.138). As Andy Hargreaves eloquently statedⁱⁱⁱ - “we raise up the people we serve [learners] by raising up those who serve them [teachers]”.

The next driver for system reform is **intelligent accountability** (Hopkins, 2009, pp.209-210). This refers to the achievement of balance between national accountability expectations and the development of capacity for professional accountability in schools. The opposite of this is “toxic accountability” (Sahlberg, 2015, p.138), which narrowly judges schools and teachers based on students’ academic performance. Achieving intelligent accountability involves the use of self-evaluation and formative assessment as checks and sources of evidence to support student learning, whilst at the same time meeting a system need for maintenance of public confidence. Examples include school self-evaluation processes in Ireland, value-added analyses in England and professional accountability approaches in Finland. In Scotland, reflective practice and sharing of ideas has been promoted through CfE. This marks a shift from the policies of previous decades which served to de-professionalise teachers through oppressive regimes of inspection, testing, and bureaucratic accountability (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2010; Wilkins, 2011). These types of toxic accountability are counter-productive to the development of teacher agency as they embrace curricular change. If this type of accountability is centralised as a driver for system change, it serves to demotivate reform actors and distract from the key aspect of system-wide change, which is to influence the culture of the system over structures and procedures (Fullan, 2011, pp.5-6).

Accountability at a school and system level has been a significant issue in JC reform, and in this research. It shall be discussed in more detail below.

The final driver for system reform emerging as part of the GERM is **networking and collaboration** (Hopkins, 2009, p.210). This refers to the spreading of innovation and curricular diversity through collaborative endeavours within and amongst schools. Through community supports, dissemination of innovative practices, school partnerships and so on, schools develop “a vision of education that is shared and owned well beyond individual schools”. Examples of systems that have used networking and collaboration as a positive driver for educational reform include the partnership of leading and failing schools in

England, the vast array of school networks in the USA, coordinated school clusters in Singapore and the use of schools as community social centres in Sweden. In Ireland, recent developments have also shown promise. A rising culture of ‘Teachmeets^{iv}’ has coloured the education landscape, as well as the recent introduction of ‘Researchmeets’ at the Irish Teaching Council’s National Festival for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. Such innovations drive a sense of collective responsibility in the profession. That is, a positive competition within and amongst networks of teachers and schools; a challenge amongst individuals and groups to strive beyond what is humanly and professionally possible. This type of collective responsibility leads to positive system impacts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, pp.142-143).

The four drivers for system reform outlined above are evident, in various ways, in Irish attempts at JC reform in recent years. They are evident not only in the policy intentions of the curriculum documents, but also in circulating discourses within the Irish context. In order to understand how these drivers have worked to influence system-wide change in Ireland through JC reform, it is important to first consider the specific drivers that have influenced JC reform at a national and supra national level. These are addressed in the next section.

3.2. Drivers for Junior Cycle reform

Looney, referring to the curriculum policy cycle, says it “is always related to the full range of political strategies and takes place in the residue of previous curriculum policies and innovations” (2001, p.159). Such is the case with JC reform. Whilst certain voices within the system may say that JC reform was inappropriately rushed, it is in fact part of a reform discourse spanning over 20 years. Following an extensive review of the Irish context over this period, a policy timeline was developed (Fig.8 below). Along this line, one can identify policy milestones that have shaped the discourse on JC reform:

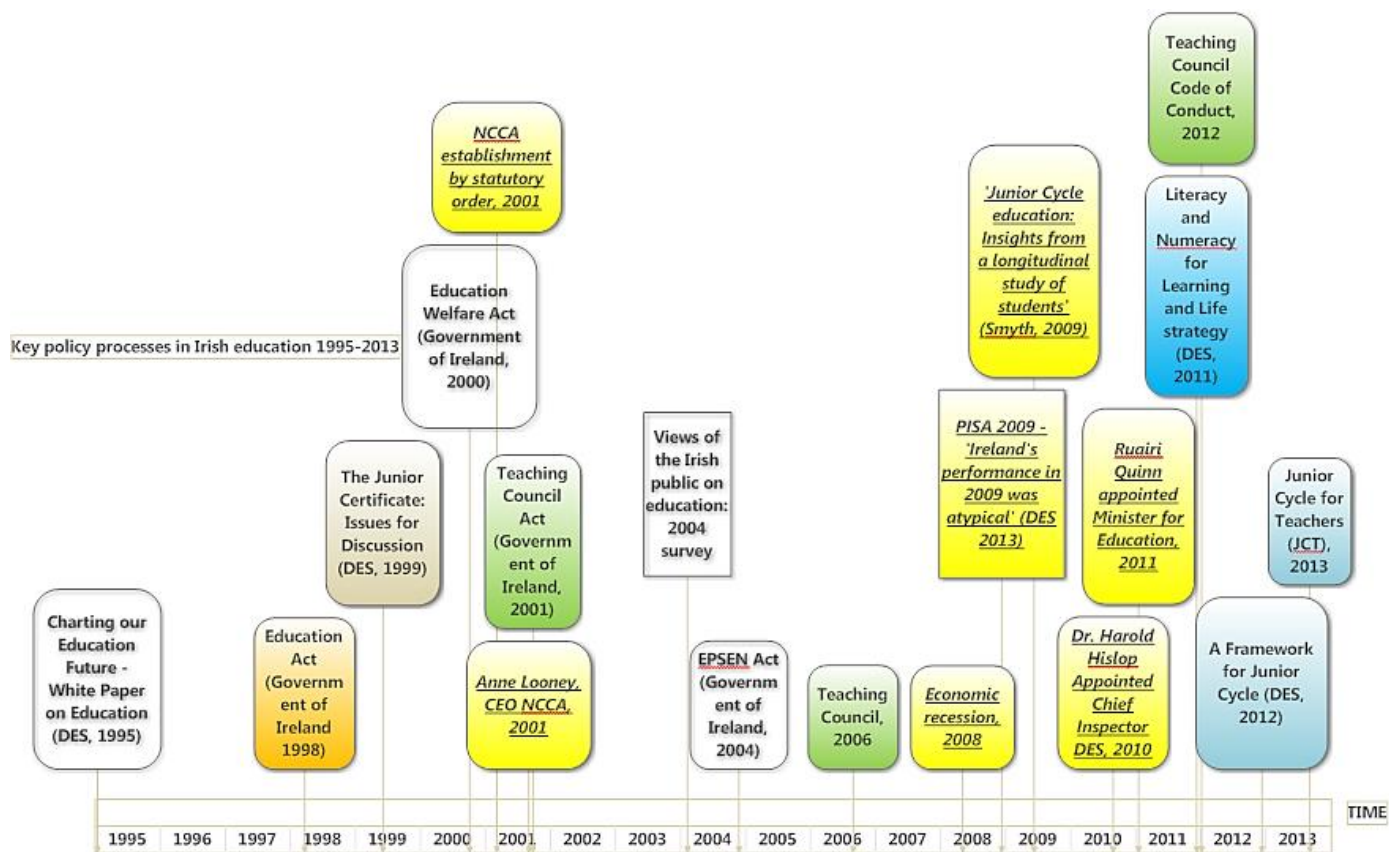


Fig. 8. Policy timeline

The items in yellow are significant policy moments. Their occurrence in a short timeframe is reflective of a changing policy landscape within a “context of influence” (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992) symptomatic of Irish influences and the GERM happening at a supra-national level. The influence of globalisation is evident in this landscape. To view this influence uncritically would assume a sterility of transference of supranational drivers to Ireland. Lingard (2000), however, argues that globalisation is more nuanced than the homogenisation of cultures, policies and economics. One must be able to distinguish between ideology and empiricism when considering what social imaginary is conjured up by globalisation, and how that imaginary is mediated in the nation state. A more nuanced approach is necessary to understand the changes within Irish education. In this regard, I consider the nuanced influences of accountability, neoliberalism, research and policy shifts on the JC reform process.

3.2.1. Accountability

Ball (2003) describes three interrelated policy technologies as part of the education reform 'package' - the market, managerialism and performativity. Within these three elements, a number of travelling reforms have exemplified the GERM discourse, namely standardisation, an intensified focus on literacy and numeracy and the consequential accountability that follows (Conway & Murphy, 2013, p.18). Each of these finds resonance in the Irish context.

Accountability has been a recurrent thread in recent Irish education discourse. School improvement programmes such as the School Development Planning Initiative in the past made frequent references to performance indicators, targets, strategies and testing. Such references were also reflected in the technicist nature of the objectives and performance indicators of the 2005/7 Strategy Statement (Gleeson & O' Donnabhain, 2009).

Programmes of school self-evaluation further build on this work, encouraging schools to set, monitor and improve on targets as part of an overall school improvement plan (DES, 2012). A preoccupation with counting heads dominates the accountability discourse. For example, the DES 2011 Annual Report comments on the 'output' of CPD initiatives, stating that 31,803 teachers attended some 1,492 courses with little commentary on the quality of outcomes in these courses.

Examples of accountability abound within the *Framework*; from the encapsulating of JC education within 24 statements of pupil learning to the self-regulation of teachers implied within a school-based model of continuous assessment. The devolved responsibility for curricular decision making posited within the *Framework*, coupled with a self-governing system of school self-evaluation and external moderation by the DES inspectorate, is further evidence of the primary place of accountability within Irish education. In his foreword to a recent volume of the Irish Educational Studies Journal, the former Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, epitomised this primacy by saying:

Greater accountability and more effective learning are not options, they are essential, if we wish to retain the support of our taxpayers at home and the trust of our partners overseas.[...] In Ireland, we have *enshrined* the importance of accountability of the education system as an objective for every person concerned in the implementation of the Education Act (1998).

(Quinn, 2013, p.7, emphasis added)

It is interesting that the minister referenced the Education Act (1998) in his introduction. The legal accountability of the Irish State in education was mapped out in this document. Following this the State became key actors in the regulation and monitoring of standards in the teaching profession, as per the Teaching Council Act (2001) and the establishment of the Irish Teaching Council in 2006. The Code of Conduct for the Teaching Profession (Teaching Council, 2012) emphasises the moral /ethical accountability and the cultural expectations of registered Irish teachers. The expectations of this Code, as well as the role of the Teaching Council in regulating teachers' adherence to the Code, are reflected in the recent enactment of 'Fitness to Teach' hearings, which have been met by the profession with some reservation. Further, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) asserts the need for our international accountability. It makes pointed references to the importance of benchmarking student performances against future PISA rankings (discussed below).

Teachers are being asked to be more accountable than ever before in their practice, in what has been referred to as a 'rising tide' of accountabilities (Conway & Murphy, 2013). According to Tatto (2007, p.8), "the regulation of teachers' education, development and work via current education reform initiatives increasingly comes accompanied by exogenous accountability schemes at every level of the system".

Throughout the *Framework*, there are numerous references to the flexibility and choice offered to schools in curriculum development. This has to be tempered, however, with the implicit accountability measures. Ball says that "as the focus of appraisal, accountability, comparison and review, the teacher is very visible; as an expert professional actor and decision maker she is all but invisible" (1994, p.62). The *Framework* offers freedom and choice for schools to shape their curriculum according to their own context, and advocates for the professional judgement of teachers through a system of school-based assessment. However, such a system has not existed before in Irish education. The implications are that Irish teachers may experience a new layer of accountability in school-based assessment that heretofore did not exist. Whilst the policy intentions of the *Framework* may be to centralise intelligent accountability systems, this presents a new and untraversed landscape for schools. Thus, teachers and school leaders on the ground are hearing two voices – the *noise* of autonomy and the *numeric* of accountability. Through this cacophony, they could be left wondering about the overall sense of direction. As the results of this research and recent

policy shifts will demonstrate, this cacophony can be problematic for the uptake of system-wide change in schools.

3.2.2. PISA 2009 and the neoliberal agenda

The emphasis on accountability within JC education is reflective of a number of discourses that are linked at a national and a supranational level. These include

- An increased faith from government in education as a healing force for economic recovery, for social justice and equity (Lauder, et al., 2007)
- An affinity for performance management systems and audits as mechanisms for self-regulating governance
- A neo-liberal agenda and associated models of new public management leading to education being reframed as an economic activity

Of these contexts of influence on accountability, the most significant is neo-liberalism. Neo-liberal principles including privatisation, marketization, choice and competition (Dale, 1999; Hursh, 2009) have been the driving force for accountability systems worldwide (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Within this context, we see the development of “neo-liberal professionals” (Rose, 1989, in Ball, 2003), working in a culture where “value replaces values - commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime” (Ball, 2003, p.217). This shift in education policy is evident within Ireland, where the last decade has seen a greater expectation of value for money in education sector investment (Conway & Murphy, 2013, p.17). Although Ireland would consider itself less stringent than the UK when it comes to marketization principles, the introduction of standardised testing in the *Framework* is a significant departure from a low-stakes approach to accountability. Of course, this observation must be tempered with the view that JC assessment is no longer seen as high-stakes (DES, 2012). Given that the Leaving Certificate is the primary determinant for third level selection, the changes to assessment at JC could still be seen as adoption of a low-stakes approach.

Further shifts in ideologies from a national to a global perspective are evident in the NCCA and later DES texts. In justifying their position on literacy and numeracy, the DES and NCCA suggest this issue belongs in a larger political landscape than the national context. The influence of the 2009 PISA scores for Irish 15 year olds is referenced as a reason for change:

What we have learned from our research, our consultations and our PISA scores is that, on close inspection, what we currently offer at junior cycle is falling short of what students need. Ironically, the evidence is that continuing as we are will not keep things the same. It will probably make things worse for our young people.

(NCCA, 2011, p.4)

Irish students showed a significant drop in literacy in the 2009 PISA scores from 'above average' to 'average' (Cosgrove, et al., 2010), sparking an urgent interest in curriculum policy in Ireland. Harold Hislop (2011, p.7), Chief Inspector of the DES, referred to how the "public and political interest aroused by PISA...deepened...interest in how well students are learning...[leading to] a commitment to tackling long standing issues". A "policy window" of opportunity (Kingdon, 2003, p.165) can occur within which a country can demonstrate receptiveness to reform ideas. This can happen as a result of external shocks such as PISA scores. Such factors can generate reform pressure and create an opportunity for new ideas to find public support. In the case of Ireland, the policy response has been the development of a national literacy and numeracy strategy, within which performance targets are explicitly linked to improved percentage points by PISA 2020 (DES, 2011, p.18). The *Framework* placed emphasis on literacy and numeracy. So much so in fact, that literacy and numeracy were elevated above the "other Key Skills" of JC (2012, p.9). This was not the case in the NCCA's original consultation on JC education (2011), where literacy and numeracy were on a par with the other six key skills.

Ball refers to the use of standards and benchmarks as "a tempting and decisive mechanism by which governments can 'steer' schools at a distance" (2012, p.73). Through a discourse of standards informed by a neoliberal agenda, a vision of what schooling is and what it means to be educated is constructed. Whilst this discourse may appear to exist at a national and indeed supra-national level, it has the ability to translate into a "heavy and fearsome materiality" (Probyn, 1993, p.167) within the classroom. The discourse of standards can arrange (and rearrange) all within the field of education under a "tyranny of conformity" (Loveday, 2008). This culture of performance produces day-to-day pressures for schools around target setting, and a focus on deliverables such as standardised test scores. The concern for schools in such an environment is that JC enactment occurs through clearly specified technologies and inventions that position the school in a meta-narrative of schooling as performance (Ball, 2012, p.76). As lessons from around the world have shown,

such toxic accountability does not drive deep and meaningful change. The challenge, then, is to create the conditions for the right types of accountability, enshrined in the *Framework*, to be realised in practice.

3.2.3. All the pieces coming together: research, policy....practice?

The progression and establishment of JC reform has been a product of various pieces coming together from a research and policy perspective. One critical piece of research which informed the introduction of the *Framework* was a longitudinal study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) into the experiences of JC students (Smyth, 2009). This study followed 900 students across 12 schools from entry into first year. It reported on the experiences of students in terms of ability grouping, factors that make good teaching and help students learn, and the nature of student-teacher relations. Multiple stakeholders were involved, but an emphasis was placed on student voice. The findings confirm that students experience a degree of turbulence in their first year of second-level education, as they navigate the transition from primary school (p.2). Second year is characterised as one of “drift”, in which students allocated to lower stream classes tend to disengage with schoolwork. This has been shown to have a long term impact on their achievements in JC and beyond (p.3). In third year, an exam focus takes over and students and teachers report increased pressure due to a demanding workload and changing classroom interactions. This results in an overall decline in the extent to which students are positive about their teachers and school (p.3). The research advocates for different forms of assessment, flexible ability grouping and diverse teaching methods as policy issues that would facilitate a more meaningful student engagement with learning.

The *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) National Report for Ireland* (Gilleece, et al., 2009) has provided insight, from the perspective of teachers, on their role in the JC classroom. An interesting finding pertains to the preference of Irish teachers for “structuring practices” (how learning is structured and organised). The report found Irish teachers showed the greatest affinity to structuring practices of all the countries in the survey (p.78). Their need to prepare for the JC exam and a lack of professional development precluded alternative teaching approaches (p.99). It found that whilst Irish teachers engaged in some professional development, there was scope for more professional collaboration (e.g. school visits, peer observations) in this context, as opposed to professional development focussed

on exchange of materials and discussing student progress (p.99). The report also indicates that Irish teachers perceive a lack of time as prohibiting engagement with the types of active teaching methodologies advocated by the ESRI.

Thus, the outcome of the TALIS report and ESRI study identified a number of reasons for change relating to teacher and student experiences. Their impact was felt within the system, and these two studies were cited by the NCCA in their advice to the minister on JC change.

The impact of PISA and of the economic downturn on the direction of curriculum reform policy in Ireland formed part of what Hislop (2011) and Looney (2012) have cited as a “perfect storm” of educational policy. Three conditions for a perfect storm were prevalent in Irish education in the period 2008-12 – ‘bad news’ from an external PISA report, an economic downturn, strategic leadership in the form of a new DES Chief Inspector Harold Hislop, and a change-oriented Minister of Education, Ruairi Quinn. This tri-facto of conditions allowed government to prepare the path for “an idea whose time has come” (Kingdon, 2003, p.1); critical conditions were present to create receptiveness (in certain quarters) towards an innovation, thereby allowing reform ideas to resonate in a national context.

The influence of national research and a “perfect storm” of international policy shifts has produced an environment in which the policy drivers for JC reform have done enough to establish the *Framework* as the curriculum of the day. However, whilst this curriculum has been endorsed by many education stakeholders, teachers have shown strong opposition. This *acting back*, which shall be discussed below, reflects why it can be challenging to borrow or float curriculum ideas from one nation to the next without getting into the nitty gritty of enactment on the ground, the context within which these curriculum intentions will be realised. Failure to do so may see schools as ciphers written out of the policy process (Ball et al, 2012), thereby decentralising the right drivers for system reform. In this case, reculturing of the profession is sacrificed for the restructuring of established norms and practices.

This section has considered a number of drivers for JC reform both nationally and internationally. The GERM and the pervasiveness of accountability in Irish education discourse has been problematized. Neoliberal principles, informed by concerns over PISA

performance, have also been discussed. Finally, the positioning of research and policy events which facilitated the endorsement of the *Framework* by certain stakeholders in Ireland have been described. The issue that still withstands is the challenge to align practice in schools with the policy intentions that have now been introduced as part of the *Framework*. Before considering the repercussions of this challenge, I shall present some key features of the *Framework* and their concurrence with emerging trends in curriculum goals. To orientate the reader, I shall at times make reference to the original *Framework* (2012) document and the rewritten *Framework '15* (2015).

3.3. A Framework for Junior Cycle – key features

The development of the JC *Framework* in Irish education is reflective of curriculum reform trends seen internationally. Sinnema and Aitken (2013) identify four goals underpinning curriculum reforms across nations. These goals, which recognise the potential for curriculum as a lever for educational improvement, are recognisable in the curriculum policy documents informing JC reform. Firstly, curricula are seen to have a goal in promoting the **improvement of teachers' practice** (Hopmann, 2003), arising from the growing international recognition of the impact of the teacher on student outcomes. In *Framework '15*, it says that “the role of the teacher and the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship will evolve” (DES, 2015, p.29). A number of indicators of lesson content and format in the new JC classroom are described (p.30), including a reduced focus on exam preparation, opportunities for independent student thought, reflection and creativity, and feedback between teachers and students to inform teaching and learning to a greater degree. Interestingly, *Framework '15* presents the proposed changes to teachers' practice as a requirement rather than a recommendation for curriculum: “the role of the teacher *will* evolve....the teacher's role *will* grow, teachers *will* place a greater emphasis on integrating assessment into their teaching” (p.29, emphasis added). There is a suggestion of the teacher's position as a subject in leveraging system improvement through a non-negotiable changing of their practice. As this research will show, this requirement for change does not translate seamlessly into practice and varies by, with and through contexts.

The second goal recognisable in international curriculum reforms is that of **equity** in serving the needs of diverse learners. A number of countries embody equity as part of their curriculum reforms. In Scotland, the CfE aims to “achieve transformation in education in

Scotland” (Education Scotland, no date, p.3, in Sinnema and Aitken, 2013, p.143). In the southern hemisphere, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2012, p.9) state that the curriculum aims to develop “active and informed citizens [who] are committed to the national values of equity and justice”. The Ministry of Education in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.10) assert that “students will be encouraged to value equity through fairness and social justice”. Promotion of equity through curriculum suffuses the *Framework* and *Framework ’15*. For example, one of the guiding JC principles is inclusive education:



Fig. 9. The Principles of Junior Cycle Education (DES, 2015, p.11)

Further, there is a renewed focus on differentiated learning in JC reform, stressing that students of all abilities will be given opportunities to engage with learning and make progress according to their potential (DES, 2015, p.30). This opportunity is afforded to students at all levels, including those who may have special educational needs which prevent them from accessing the NFQ level 3 JC programme. These students will be offered a *JC Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP)*, with achievements in this programme documented on the JCPA.

Equity is promoted in the *Framework* and in *Framework '15* through acknowledging the need to reward a broad range of evidence of student learning, as opposed to narrow measurement in a one-day written exam. The JCPA aims to document student achievement across many areas, including state-certified examination results. Further, the introduction of a common level terminal exam across JC subjects may be considered to be an equitable endeavour, particularly in the light of the negative impact of streaming students at an ordinary level early in their schooling (Smyth, 2009).

The third trend seen in international curriculum reforms involves preparing pupils for the **uncertainty of the 21st Century**. A 'future-proofing' of curricula is evident, wherein it is seen that society "will require a population with the confidence and skills to meet the challenges posed by fast and far-reaching change" (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2009, p.1). In the Irish context, preparing for the 21st century has been a central thrust of JC reform. Eight *Key Skills* are identified as "required for successful learning for students *across* the curriculum and for learning *beyond* school" (DES, 2015, p.13, emphasis in original). The future-proofing nature of the curriculum is realised through the activation of these skills in the classroom, in ways that allow students to deepen their learning and become more self-aware, thereby equipping them to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world (NCCA, 2011, p.19).

Key Skills of Junior Cycle



Fig. 10. The eight Key Skills of Junior Cycle (DES, 2015, p.13)

Further, the learning at the core of JC is described in 24 Statements of Learning. These statements describe what the student will experience as part of their JC programme across the school. Due to a rapid expansion of testing and standardised comparisons of high stakes outcomes there has been a shift in curriculum discourses from subject-specific to generic curriculum criteria and to an increased focus on learning outcomes (Sundberg & Wahlstrom, 2012). The 24 statements of learning and 8 key skills inform the learning outcomes of different subject and short course specifications in the JC curriculum. Learning outcomes can, themselves, also serve to reinforce a future-thinking curriculum due to their

unconstrained nature. An example of such a learning outcome, which would be valid now and in 20 years' time, includes:

Students should be able to illustrate how earth processes and human factors influence the Earth's climate, evaluate effects of climate change and initiatives that attempt to address those effects.

(Curriculum Specification for Junior Cycle Science, DES, 2015, p.17).

Key skills are indicative of wider global trends in various modern national curricula to frame education around the development of key skills and competencies (Priestley , et al., 2013). There are some concerns about framing curriculum according to skills/competencies. For example, in considering the key capacities^v of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Watson (2010, p.99) is apprehensive about the level of indoctrination implied within such a model. He argues that the capacities are “concerned with setting out not what children are expected to know, but how they should be”. There are also concerns around the downgrading of knowledge evident within worldwide trends of new curricular models. A shift from subject specific knowledge to general skills development runs the risk of “oversimplifying and dichotomising the complex relationship between knowledge and skills” (Priestley and Minty, 2013, p. 41). Further to this, weakening of subject boundaries for the purpose of skills development may lead to a blurring of the distinction between academic knowledge and everyday knowledge, leading to students being denied access to “powerful knowledge” due to less content specification in curricula (Young & Muller, 2010). There are various arguments for a subjects-based curriculum, including stability for schools and students, their source of international coherence, their role in shaping teacher identity and the removal of the threat of pupil outcomes resting on the individual teacher. There is a dearth of theoretical grounding in this area from an Irish perspective, leading to a desire for theory generation in this regard.

Finally, JC reform supports students in preparing for the uncertainty of the 21st century through a commitment to *Wellbeing*. A curricular time allowance of 400 hours is ring-fenced for schools to incorporate student wellbeing as part of their programme. The importance of this area is reflected in the Irish Government's policy framework *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014- 2020*. These guidelines are common to all government departments and agencies, community and

voluntary sectors and statutory services. They advocate for an Ireland “where the rights of children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their potential now and in the future” (Government of Ireland, 2015, p.2). It is envisaged that JC reform will help students to flourish now and in the future through a commitment to wellbeing that permeates the curriculum, policy and planning, cultures and relationships in schools (NCCA, 2017,p.8)

The final international trend involves reinforcing **curricular coherence** in reform efforts (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Oates, 2011). One approach to this problem, as seen in New Zealand and England (Sinema and Aitken, 2013, p.145), has been to reduce over-crowded and fragmented curricula through the reduction of content. A similar attempt was made in recent years in Ireland through the rebalancing of Junior Certificate subject syllabi, to be followed by JC reform. The overwhelming response from this process was that whilst rebalancing helped to support curricular coherence, there would be little change to educational outcomes if the examination structures did not change:

The path through junior cycle is a path towards the examination. The closer the terminal written examination becomes, the greater its influence on how and what students learn, and how teachers plan and teach.

(NCCA, 2011, p.5)

Whilst it could be argued that the examination does, in itself, serve as an element of coherence, *teaching to the exam* rewards a limited type of intelligence and does not support the type of learning that will prepare students as lifelong learners. Through experiencing the JC statements of learning and the key skills, the school and students have the potential to experience curricular coherence beyond the level of content knowledge. Schools are required to provide students access to the 24 statements of learning as part of their JC programme. This access can happen through subjects, short courses, the area of wellbeing and other learning experiences. As such, whilst *Framework '15* reflects the international goal of curricular coherence, it does so in a way that offers flexibility in approach to schools.

3.4. Acting back

The 1st phase of introduction of JC reform took place in 2013 on a subject basis. As English was the 1st subject to be introduced, these teachers began to receive their training along with school leaders. Then followed a period of significant political unrest in which teacher unions voted to reject the proposals in the *Framework*. The ASTI and TUI, following a ballot of members, held a one-day strike and a lunchtime walk-out protest against JC reform. Further, they directed their members to withdraw cooperation with the introduction of the *Framework*. This included withdrawal from CPD, meetings, planning, school-based assessment or short course development/delivery as part of JC reform^{vi}.

Teachers felt there was a lack of consultation, particularly in relation to the proposals for school-based assessment, when there had been no such model (on mass) in secondary education prior to this. The fear of damage to the teacher-student relationship, of pressures from actors such as parents, and nepotism were cited as issues of concern from teachers in assessing their own students:

Perceptions of favouritism could quickly emerge – leading to an erosion of trust in the assessment process itself [...] Irish teachers have a deep commitment to the holistic development of their students [...] their primary role is to support and sustain their students– not to serve and judge them.

(ASTI, 2013, p. 3)

Other concerns were also raised, including issues over standards, time and the bureaucracy associated with introducing a new curriculum. Similar to experiences in Scotland (Hayward, 2015), the desirability of the curriculum and its manageability became competing concepts in Ireland, with manageability as a stronger force. Teachers defaulted towards the status quo, leading to cycles of further innovation in response to union expectations. A mediation took place, facilitated by an independent chair, Dr. Pauric Travers, former president of St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University. This mediation resulted in the production of *Junior Cycle Reform – a Way Forward* (Travers, 2015), more commonly known as *The Travers Report*. In this, Dr. Travers recommended a number of suggestions to resolve the *impasse* that had been reached by teacher unions and the DES. Issues over school-based assessment were a sticking point on both sides of the *impasse*:

On the one hand, the Minister's representatives stated as a minimum requirement that assessment should capture the total learning experiences of the student while on the other the Union groups refused to countenance school based assessment for certification

(Travers, 2015, p.1)

A lot of the proposals around assessment in the *Framework* were effectively diluted following *The Travers Report*. The report advised to retain the integrity of externally assessed, state examinations alongside a new system of school-based assessment. The outcomes of these school-based assessments, corrected by teachers, would not be state certified, but rather would be documented on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). As such, teachers would have a role to play in the ongoing assessments of students but would not assess for certification, thereby aiming to satisfy both the DES and teacher unions. The report also called for a number of actions to move forward from the *impasse*. The DES were asked to suspend the introduction of the subject Science for one year, to recommence CPD support for teachers and to rewrite the *Framework* based on the outcomes of the mediation. The teacher unions were asked to suspend all industrial action immediately. Further, all parties were asked to enter negotiations regarding the provision of time and resources for teachers and schools to support successful introduction of JC reform.

The aftermath of *The Travers Report* was mixed. A joint statement on principles and implementation of JC reform was produced, following negotiations between the DES and the teacher unions, in which clarity was provided around professional time allocation. As suggested, the *Framework* was rewritten. In *Framework '15*, assessment by teachers for certification purposes was removed. This next cycle of innovation included a number of new measures for ongoing assessment, including Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) to be assessed in school but not counting for certification in the state exam. To support teacher collaboration on professional judgements, Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings were established, taking place after each CBA. Finally, students would complete an Assessment Task based on the understanding and skills developed in their third year CBA. This task would be externally assessed, and account for 10% of the state certified grade. Fig.11 reflects how the new assessment structures will help to inform planning for learning, teaching and assessment. They are situated within a dual-approach system, with

formative assessment complimented by summative assessment throughout the three years of JC. The difference between the proposed system in *Framework '15*, however, is the retaining of a state-certified assessment structure unlike the proposed school-based assessment model in the original *Framework*:

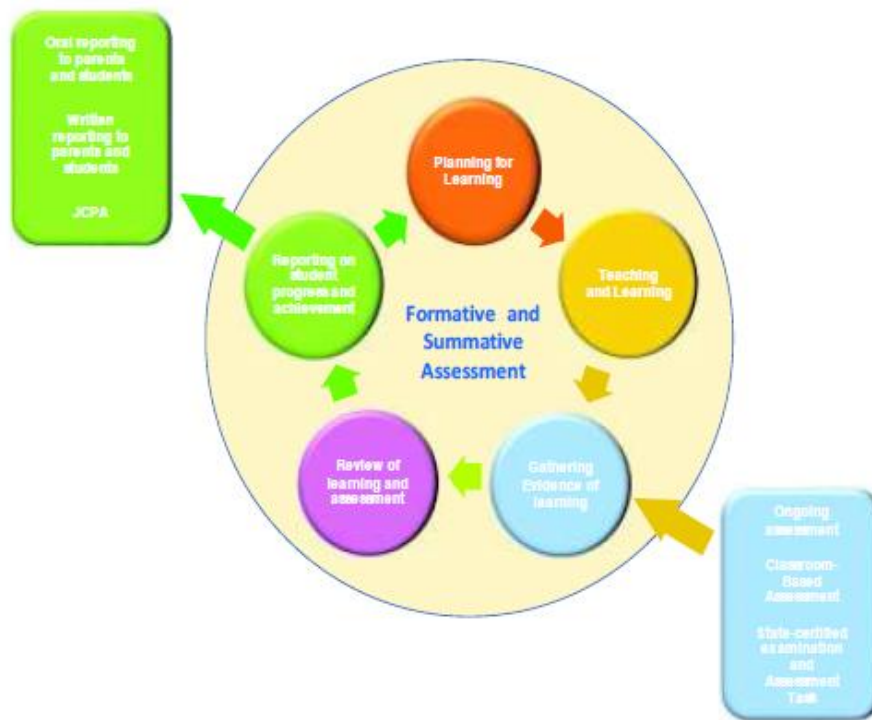


Fig. 11. Planning for learning, teaching and assessment (DES 2015, p.36)

Following these measures, the TUI and ASTI re-balloted their members to accept or reject the new proposals for JC reform. The TUI chose to accept the JC reform proposals, whilst the ASTI once again rejected them. Consequentially, a select cohort of teachers moved forward with JC reform. JCT rolled out a programme of CPD to teachers from TUI schools. Priority was afforded to English teachers, with Science and whole-school CPD coming on stream in September 2015. To this point, only TUI teachers have engaged with CPD for JC reform. ASTI members continue to abide by the directive of disengagement.

Through cycles of innovation and re-innovation, JC reform reflects the complexities of change processes. It has been a reform defined by fragmentation, slow introduction and high contestation. Hayward & Spencer (2010) contend, as do I, that “there are things that matter in the process of real change...Failure to attend to them, as we push the boulder of

innovation uphill, is likely to condemn us to being crushed every time it rolls back down” (p.176). In order to move forward with JC reform, it is important to pay attention to these complexities, as opposed to just the meaning and management of change within the rhetoric of policy documents and system level discourses which, to now, have reflected a narrow perspective of an important curriculum change. One needs to acknowledge that “(t)eachers’ attention to reform is complex, especially in the case of reforms that propose changing the core of the practice [of teaching]” (Spillane, 1999, p.154) as JC reform does. It is my contention that paying attention to the nuances of policy enactment at the chalk face, or as Vidovich (2007) would say, “turning up the volume” of policy work at the micro level of the school, furthers the democratisation of education. As such, theory generation regarding the complexities of change in JC reform enactment as experienced by practitioners is warranted.

In the final section of this literature review, I consider the features of complexity in change through the lens of context. I present some ideas regarding policy enactment in schools, and the importance of context in educational policy enactment. Finally, in the face of what I term *the context problem*, I defend why research of the kind reported in this thesis is justified.

3.5. The case for context

That contextual dimensions are important in education policy enactment is a truism in government as well as in academic circles. Nevertheless, in much policy making and research [this] tends to be neglected.

(Ball, et al., 2012, p.19)

Context is an inherent part of policy enactment in schools, and can be referenced in policy documents to describe how intentions might be realised on the ground. *Framework '15* (DES, 2015) acknowledges the importance of flexibility to school context in designing a school programme (p.5), and the scope for diversity and accessibility in this regard (p.26). It recognises the need for sensitivity to context in introducing Wellbeing (p.23), and advocates supportive, dialogic professional contexts sustained through strong leadership and CPD (p.35, p.40).

However, whilst there is an acknowledgement of context throughout *Framework '15*, it can only be that. Context on the ground cannot be encapsulated within policy rhetoric. As

Laurence Stenhouse (1975, p.6) eloquently reminded us, “educational prophets may teach private wisdom but educators must deal in public knowledge and value-laden issues”. Enactment of policy in schools is a complex and nuanced process involving both interpretation of policy texts and their translation into practice (Ball et al, 2012, p.43). Interpreting policy requires an engagement with “the problem of meaning” (Fullan, 2001, p.8). It is a retrospective, prospective and perhaps introspective process wherein meaning is made of policy texts. Translation, as distinct from interpretation, is a space between policy and practice. Actors use different tactics and processes (meetings, planning, borrowing ideas, etc.) to bring the language of policy towards the language of practice. This is literally “enacting policy” (Ball et al, 2012, p.45). Both interpretation and translation are culturally and historically situated in school life. They are also influenced by key actors, their personal and professional positions. In other words, enactment of policy is influenced by, with and through context.

Numerous contexts can influence the ‘doing’ of policy in schools. However, there have been a dearth of studies that centralise their importance in educational policy circles. Of the few studies in this area, some are worthy of mention. These include the work of Thrupp and Lupton (2006, p.31), in which the cumulative impact of local contexts on policy responses in schools are outlined. They claim that “effective management and teaching in one context is not the same as effective management and teaching in another”. Gillies et al (2010) examined how contextual factors interacted with organisational practices through their study of learner engagement. They found a clash between community cultures and school cultures when introducing pedagogical changes, and as such they needed to comprehend these local contexts in greater depth.

Closer to the themes in this research, O’ Donoghue and Clarke (2010) have highlighted the potential for failure of curriculum initiatives transported from other countries when cultural and economic contexts are ignored. This supports the view of Higginson (1979, p.49) that the context of a nation state needs to be understood in order to understand its education system. In more recent times, the experience of the Finnish education system has taught us that the successes of high performing systems cannot be seen in isolation from their social and cultural underpinnings (Aurén & Joshi, 2016; Sahlberg, 2015).

Change researchers have stressed the importance of paying attention to context for decades. Fullan (1982) has long argued for the need to understand the worlds of those involved in implementing change if more success than failure is to happen. Attention to culture, the potential of bottom-up, participatory processes and consideration of the views of stakeholders are necessary (Hargreaves, 1993; Little, 1988; Rondinelli, et al., 1990) to bridge the gap between the intended and enacted curriculum. As affirmed by O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010, p.201), “the gap between general prescriptive frameworks and successful practice is dependent more on the reflective intuition, the craft and the art of the professional practitioner than on any other prescriptive theory or model”. From a leadership perspective, this has implications for how schools go about their curriculum planning. If school leaders uncritically adopt curricular and pedagogical approaches into their context from another, they may experience an inappropriate fit (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). Curricular and pedagogical decisions are best considered through “situation analyses” (Marsh, 1992, p.79), in which leaders realise the potential for their planning and strategies efforts to “not only be facilitated, but also thwarted, by the school context” (Woolfolk and Margets, 2007, in Clarke and O’Donoghue, 2016, p.5). To this end, Hattie (2008) advises teachers and leaders to consider teaching practices with high effect sizes on student outcomes with “contextualised meaning”. Knowing the practices which improve student outcomes is not enough; the practices must be sharpened and honed through collaboration with colleagues in a supportive environment facilitated by strong leadership.

At a system level, there is a tension between the influence of contextual dimensions and how policy documents envisage “best possible environments for implementation: Ideal buildings – students and teachers and even resources” (Braun, et al., 2011, p.585). One needs only view the cover page of *Framework 2012* (Fig. 2) for a sense of the social imaginary conjured up by JC reform. All students are active, demonstrating skills. Subliminally, one could argue for a stronger emphasis on Science as an image of an experimental investigation takes up over half the page. The teacher is to the side, passive, shaded even, watching on as the students use their skills to learn.

As the literature affirms, local contexts matter. As JC reform was piloted in 2012 then nationally introduced from 2016, real examples of *Framework '15* being introduced in practice have become evident. These bring the picture of JC reform to life in various and diverse settings, as opposed to a conjured image on a policy document. An opportunity presents itself within the system to gain multiple images from these settings of the contexts at play, to reflect an authentic process of change. In this regard:

..a comprehensive, professional knowledge base embedded in the realities of workplaces found in schools and in the environments in which they are located should be available. In other words, we need to know not only 'what works', but also 'what works in different settings' (Clarke and Wildy, 2010, in Clarke and O'Donoghue, 2016, p. 12)

Knowing what works in different settings could open up a number of possibilities to the system. It may allow for responses to JC enactment from a place of "contextual intelligence" (Clarke and O'Donoghue, 2016, p.13). That is, the ability to recognise and respond to a range of contextual factors influencing an event or circumstance, taking into account past events, present variables and preferred outcomes for the future (Kutz, 2008, p.18). At a system level, the types of response could range from appropriate teacher education and support to ensuring the right material and structural conditions are in place to support JC enactment. These types of governmental response have been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Corrigan & Forsyth, 2012).

Recent work by Ball, Braun and Maguire (2012, p.21) looks to locate policy processes within context. In calling for context to be taken seriously, they identify four contextual dimensions influencing how policy is enacted in schools. These are situated contexts (such as history and school intake), professional cultures (such as policy management in schools, values and teacher commitments), material contexts (such as buildings and technology) and external contexts (such as system level pressures). These contexts can be both emergent and pre-existing within macro, meso and micropolitical circles; "policy creates context, but context also precedes policy" (p.19). They also stress these contexts are dynamic, with varying inter-relationships. For example, school history can influence teacher commitments, policy management by school Principals may be influenced by the available technology and space

in school buildings. In such situations, certain policies may be prioritised over others leading to different patterns of emphasis and de-emphasis. These varying contexts initiate and galvanise policy processes and choices (p.24). As such, “context is a mediating factor in the policy enactment work done in schools” (p.40).

3.5.1. The context problem

There is a problem in the literature on policy enactment when it comes to context – it is somewhat dematerialised in reporting on policy processes, or seen as a backdrop against which policy work “happens”. This is due to a tradition of research on schools, their leadership and improvement, which has in the past tended to downplay contextual distinctiveness (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006). Such literatures tend towards a “bleaching of context” in educational policy studies. The result is that contextualised policy responses, acknowledging and celebrating the uniqueness of schools and the nuances of policy enactment, are not possible. This supports a “one size fits all” notion of schooling, in which “social change can be engineered through organisational change and through more efficient, market-oriented public service delivery” (p.311).

I aim to challenge this notion, starting from an assertion that *context is an active force*. I aim to identify the contextual dimensions that influenced enactment of JC reform within and across the school sites in this study, the ways in which they influenced JC enactment and the potential for utilising context to activate policy processes at a school and system level to support the successful enactment of JC reform. In doing so, I hope to make a contribution to contextualised models of practice that are deemed necessary in the literature (p.317). This is warranted on the grounds that “if research provides insufficiently differentiated information about good practice in different contexts, it may be difficult for school teachers and leaders to make the right decisions that would enhance effectiveness in specific areas of school practice” (p.318). A better understanding of how contexts at a school and system level influence practice might help to inform decision making of teachers and school leaders when engaging with JC reform. In this respect, I hope the research will be a worthwhile contribution.

In conclusion, recent commentary on educational policy analysis warns us of the promises and pitfalls of paying attention to context. However, there is an insufficient corpus of knowledge in this area. Further, there is a significant lack of research from an Irish, and none from a JC, perspective. Hence, research that centralises context, identifies contexts influencing policy enactment in Irish schools, and attends to the nuances of contextualised policy responses to JC reform, is justified.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has considered the literature on system-wide change and its relevance to recent policy processes in Ireland, manifested in JC reform. It has served to reflect the powerful influence of economic theories, such as globalisation and neoliberal performativity, from the GERM to the level of the classroom. The chapter has acknowledged teachers and schools as central to curriculum development and change, and recognises a need to understand how they engage with complex change processes. Finally, the chapter focusses on the importance of context to understanding enactment of education policy, as well as presenting a warrant for research of this kind based on the lack of a significant corpus of knowledge in the field of contextualised policy research.

In the next chapter, I present the methodology and methods chosen for the contextualised policy research reported in this thesis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0. Introduction

This chapter examines methodological issues pertaining to the research reported in this thesis. It is organised in four parts. The first part presents the methodological framework for the research. Stemming from the discussion in Chapter 2, I elaborate on the theoretical underpinnings that informed the grounded theory methodology employed. In the second part, I present the methods used to answer the research questions. This includes an overview of the selection of participants and data-gathering methods. The third part concerns the trustworthiness of the methods, ethical considerations and measures to enhance the validity and reliability of the research. Finally, the approach to data analysis is described.

4.1. Methodological framework

The methodological framework underpinning this research was informed by my own interests in the enactment of JC reform. Reflecting on my biography in Chapter 2 helped to frame my values and beliefs within a constructivist epistemology, and a theoretical perspective of interpretivism. In this section, I defend the framing of JC enactment research within the theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and critical theory. I then discuss the grounded theory methodology chosen as consistent with this perspective.

4.1.1. Interpretivism

The interpretivist approach to research is underpinned by four key assumptions involving everyday activity, freedom, meaning, interaction and negotiation (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, p.234). Each of these assumptions have influenced the research reported in this thesis, and are explicated thus.

Firstly, interpretivists affirm that all aspects of society can be traced back to the way individuals act in the everyday, and that changes in society are linked to changes in this activity. To understand society one must understand the activity of individuals in the everyday (O'Donoghue, 2007). In order to understand curriculum policy reform in Ireland, I am looking to understand the everyday activity of individuals within the education sector as they enact this reform. It is hoped the research will reveal the individual subjectivities of the agents involved compared to the subjectivities policy reforms try to construct. Further, I

endeavour to demonstrate difference and congruence with regards to these subjectivities, as some actors demonstrate (lack of) alignment with the subjectivities of the JC curriculum at a system level.

Secondly, it is assumed that people can exercise a certain degree of freedom when engaging in their everyday activities (Blumer, 1969, p.2). However, one cannot ignore that autonomous individuals can be influenced by their background; they “create their own activity to some extent” (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, p.235). This study assumes everyday life within each school site and within the professional contexts of policy actors is created to some extent by these individuals, as they collaborate in defining roles and practices. This assumption is evidenced in the results of this research, as policy actors demonstrate varying degrees of freedom in achieving agency. However, a central crux of this study focuses on how this agency is influenced by background, or context. This achieving of agency in context can serve to support the principles of the new JC curriculum or to reinforce the policy intentions of the previous Junior Certificate.

The third assumption of interpretive research relates to interaction; that through interacting with people we give meaning to our own actions and to the actions of others (Timmermans & Tavoy, 2007). Meaning is constructed as the individual is “continually interacting with the world” (Woods, 1992, p.338). This is a significant assumption in this study as participants wear various ‘hats’ when enacting JC reform. They engage in multiple interactions within and across the school, intermediary and classroom levels of policy enactment. This study respects this assumption as it endeavours to understand the meanings of participants through their professional interactions both horizontally and vertically within these levels.

Finally, it is assumed that the perspectives of individuals may change over time dependent on negotiation of meaning. To this end, O’Donoghue asserts that “everyday activity involves a process of ‘negotiation’ of meaning and, through this, we come to modify our understandings and views” (2007, p.17). This assumption acknowledges that actors may develop a shared understanding of JC reform as they have been and continue to negotiate its meaning. As shall be revealed, negotiation of meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum at a school and system level is integral to the theory constructed in this research.

4.1.2. Critical theory

Critical theory served as an important theoretical perspective in considering issues of social justice, power relations and struggle. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 provided scaffolding for examining struggle amongst the research participants. These individuals were working within the context of different influences, interacting with JC reform and each other in complex social settings, trying to develop their own understanding of these interactions. Power and social justice were key factors in trying to develop an understanding of the JC reform process.

Within each school, there were various professional and social structures. Each school had a management team of Principal and Deputy Principal, accountable to their respective management bodies. Each had a JC coordinator, with a designated leadership role to support school leaders and teachers. They also liaised with the NCCA and JC Network, disseminating knowledge from one to the other. Next there were the teaching staff, of which a number of members were either involved in a JC committee or had been active in piloting elements of the new JC. Finally, at one school site, a number of teachers weren't involved with the new JC in any way. Hence, there were various hierarchical structures, both implicit and explicit, across each school with difference in status across levels.

Reflecting on my shifting contexts in Chapter 2 helped me to recognise the importance of education as a force to challenge inequalities, and the importance of empowering teachers as forces for change. I am in agreement with the NCCA's belief that deep educational change happens through teachers as agents of that change (2009, p.16). One of the motivations for this research was to generate knowledge to inform the ongoing process of JC reform in schools. Although this is not directly a social justice study, issues of social justice formed a 'silent frame' within the research. I deemed it helpful to offer, by way of a critical analysis, a degree of explanation rather than just description of how enactment of JC reform was being organised and decisions were being made.

The ontological assumption of critical theory is that individuals exist in a world premised on a struggle for power and this leads to actions that can privilege some and oppress others (Bernal, 2002; Giroux, 1982; Kilgore, 2001). In understanding these struggles and inequalities, the critical theorist aims to empower the individual (Crotty, 1998). Whilst the language of critical theory may suggest to the sceptic a negative discourse of power,

resistance and oppression, it is not this limited. Research produced through critical theory aims to inform social change, to change people's thinking and, through an examination of human existence, bring about empowerment and emancipation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

As well as Ball (1994) and Vidovich (2002, 2007), the contributions of Blase (1991) and Stone (2001) helped to shape my understanding of power in this research. Blase (1991, p.11) offers a broad definition of "micropolitics" which examines issues of power according to political factors both macro and micro in nature:

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political "significance" in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro- and micropolitical factors frequently interact.

Blase asserts that power, and associated political activities through which power is exercised, permeates through contexts. In gaining an understanding of power, Blase challenges us to look beyond individual conflicts, organisational structures and systems of knowledge. One can analyse power in terms of decisions, events and activities which may be related to the values and beliefs of individuals both within and beyond an institution. In this study, micropolitical strategies evident within and across schools offered insights into how context could be managed to positively influence JC enactment.

Stone (2001) draws a distinction between *power over* and *power to*. When individuals or groups are involved in contestation to either dominate or resist, this is known as *power over*. Those that prevail from such struggles do so because they are either more efficient at using the resources at their disposal or can mobilise more resources to their cause. These are the types of struggles that result in policy mandates; it is important however to remember that such mandates may not be adopted into practice due to resistance from oppressed subjects/actors. *Contra* to this, Stone encourages the exercise of *power to*. The premise of *power to* is that with others we would have a greater power to accomplish things we could not have otherwise on our own. This is to be empowered. Such empowerment, insofar as it shapes how one sees matters and what should be done, can be both enabling

and constraining. Progress in this regard is a matter of refinement, of settlement, sacrifices and accepting responsibilities. Through this “work in progress” (ibid, p.157) an awareness can develop that goals are achievable through collaboration. As such, rather than a battle of wills between actors, individuals can potentially be drawn into interactions based on relational power and common purpose. In such interactions, the actors involved search for viable courses of interaction based on the shared view of navigating the path of least resistance towards a common end result. It is Stone’s position that these interactions are the cornerstone of successful reform efforts.

Critical theory was used in this study to move the analysis of the results beyond a mere representation of the voices of the stakeholders at the school. An understanding was developed about the complex relationships within and across levels of enactment. In developing theoretical constructs that may support sustainable enactment of the *Framework*, it was important to consider the extent to which, leaders in particular, empowered and disempowered individuals. Further, it was important to try to understand the reasons why they themselves were either empowered or disempowered to lead this change. Finally, given that critical theory says individuals should construct a shared meaning if they are to be empowered, to avoid bias in the data collection it was vital that individuals were given the freedom to discuss issues of power and social inequalities should they wish, without being prompted by me to do so. There were instances in the data collection where this occurred freely, which demonstrated how policy decisions at school and system levels serve to situate actors within repressive and productive relationships of power.

In the above sections, I have described the relevance of interpretivism and critical theory to analysing enactment of JC reform across the school, intermediary and classroom levels of the policy process. Considerations outlined for both paradigms have provided a scaffold for examining the rich and diverse perspectives of participants, to question power relations and to create opportunities for empowering the disadvantaged. Next, a methodology consistent with the study, grounded theory, shall be discussed.

4.1.3. Grounded theory methodology

As a strategy of inquiry for this study, grounded theory is considered from the perspectives of Strauss and Corbin (1994). Aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, this strategy “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants and the researcher’s relationships with participants” (Charmaz, 2002, p.677). The researcher uses multiple stages of data collection, constant comparison of data with constructed categories and sampling of different groups to derive a theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory has a wide use in studies of an explorative and descriptive nature (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Since this research seeks to generate theory through exploring and describing the actions and interactions of participants as they enact JC reform, this strategy of inquiry seemed appropriate.

There are a number of strengths to grounded theory. Firstly the iterative, analytical and interactive logic of grounded theory allows researchers to analyse and situate processes; to “make explicit interpretations of what is happening in the empirical work and to offer analysis that depicts how and why it happens” (Charmaz, 2011, p.361). This is a considerable strength for this study given its emphasis on the influences informing participants’ enactment of JC reform. Secondly, the analytical power of grounded theory helps researchers to “see beyond the obvious” (ibid, p.361), to check their hunches, to delve into the implicit meanings behind the activities of individuals. It forces one to subject their ideas to rigorous scrutiny and to test their categories against the data collected. This offered me a meticulous toolkit with which to test suspicions and conjectures in a credible manner. Thirdly, the method allows for construction of middle-range theory. Through comparing data, developing codes, comparing codes, forming categories, and generating and comparing concepts, abstract levels of analysis can be reached. This was significant in the study, as I endeavoured to analyse data from each school and generate theory based on a meta-analysis across the school sites. Finally, grounded theory can inform study on social justice issues as the abstract level of conceptualisation can help reveal links between the lived experiences of individuals and social structure, practice and policies (Charmaz, 2007; Choi & Holroyd, 2007; Einhower & Spencer, 2005, in Charmaz, 2011).

Interpretive researchers are warned to avoid labelling general qualitative approaches as a grounded theory method. This can stem from a desire to legitimise inductive qualitative research or through naïve reading of the method (Charmaz, 2011, p.363). The latter is usually reflected in misunderstandings of coding, theoretical sampling and theory development. Through addressing these points below, I demonstrate how this qualitative study followed a grounded theory methodology.

4.2. Research methods

I was interested in developing theory related to enactment of JC reform in schools. I did not want to merely describe *what* was happening, but *how* different actors were mediating JC policy, and *why*. As such, I was motivated to employ research methods that provided space for dialogue. I wanted participants to share with me, and each other, the ways they were mediating JC enactment. However, I also wanted to frame this dialogue in the context of circulating discourses of JC reform at the point of data collection; to produce a snapshot-in-time of JC enactment. To this end, semi-structured interviews were employed. The employment of the research methods is now considered, beginning with participant selection.

4.2.1. Participant selection

Data collection took place between January and February 2014. Sampling strategies took into account sample size, appropriateness to the limits of space and time for the study, representativeness of participants and access (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 100). Forty nine schools around Ireland had been piloting JC reform since September 2012 and these were the broad group selected for inclusion. This decision was predicated on the potential for teachers and school leaders in these schools to articulate over two years of experience in trialling JC reform. A combination of sampling strategies was initially used to optimize data collection from schools, including opportunistic (*ibid*, p. 113), stratified purposefulness and snowballing (Punch, 2000, p.56).

Six schools were initially contacted to gauge interest, of which 3 had been identified as highly innovative early adopters. Due to access issues, one highly innovative school was excluded. The final sample included three schools, two of which would be considered early adopters. Whilst I strove for particularisation in sampling, the results of data analysis

revealed this not to be the case. However, for the purpose of categorisation, the schools in the study are described as

A type 1 school – a school less than ten years old

A type 2 school – a school more than ten years old

All schools were coeducational and ranged in pupil numbers from 300 to 715. There were differences in the trusteeship and management structures of each school, but this did not feature as a major issue in the results. Within the initial sample of six schools, two were type 1 and the other four were type 2. Half of each type were selected for participation. To enhance the narrative in reporting of the results, the schools and participants have been given pseudonyms:

Type 1 school – Woodville College

Type 2 schools – Kenwood Community School and St. Carthage's Secondary School

Sampling of participants was stratified according to their school role. All participants were micro level policy actors. Within this, three distinct sub-levels of actors were sampled:

- At school leadership level – Principals
- At an 'intermediary' level between classroom and leading JC reform in the school – JC Coordinators
- At classroom level - teachers

Table 1. A summary of the research sample and data collection methods.

3 School Sites	1 x Type 1 – Woodville College 2 x Type 2 – Kenwood Community School and St. Carthage’s Secondary School		
Level	School leadership	Classroom	Intermediary
Sampled population	School Principals	Teachers	JC Coordinators
Number of participants	2	12	3
Gender	2 male	2 male, 10 female	1 male, 2 female
Number of interviews	2 (individual)	8 (mix of individual and group)	2 (individual)
Data collection method	Semi-structured interviews		

4.2.2. Research instruments

This study employed interviews as a major source of data collection. The rationale for interviewing was based on the assumption that, through dialogue, humans generate new ideas and knowledge around topics of common interest (Kvale, 1996). In keeping with the interpretivist underpinning of the research, I aimed to celebrate the “human embeddedness” (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007, p.349) of an interview. I was interested in all forms of communication that the interview process can yield. These included gestures, body language, and non-verbal cues as well as what is spoken. I worked in cognisance of my contribution to the process; that through my communications I co-constructed the interview (Walford, 2001, p.90).

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) were conducted with all participants. This requires a prior analysis of the circumstances which the interviewer wants to understand through dialogue with participants. As such, a scoping exercise was carried

out at each school site to get a sense of the unique circumstances. To avoid getting off point with inessential topics, Kvale (1996) suggests the use of an interview schedule to focus discussion. The scoping exercise helped to frame this schedule in the vernacular of each school and relate the questions to aspects of JC reform they had engaged in. The semi-structured format adopted allowed me to concentrate on specific topics related to the research questions and made the interview more focused than an informal conversation. School leaders were interviewed on a one-to-one basis while teachers/coordinators were opportunistically interviewed, based on their availability, either as individuals or in small groups. Whilst I had concerns over participant dominance in group interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.76), potential for stirring up of antagonisms between members and a reduced potential for emergence of personal matters, I chose this method because the potential benefits outweighed these concerns.

In instances where people work together for a common purpose, it may be appropriate that members of the group get a chance to hear what each of them are saying. These instances merit a group interview (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). The teachers in each school site had been working individually and in teams on enacting JC reform. Some had also been working with teachers from other schools within the JC network, thereby satisfying this criteria. Further, having more than one participant present may allow for cross-checking of stories and complementing with different viewpoints (Arksey & Knight, 1999). I felt it important to allow a flexible discussion to evolve amongst participants and to reduce feelings of being overly interrogated by the researcher.

4.2.3. Data collection

Preparatory work was completed in advance of data collection. Phone calls were made to Principals and JC Coordinators at each school site. I also conducted preliminary visits to 2 schools, wherein I met with the Principals, JC Coordinators and some of the teachers. The schools were invited to share any documents^{vii} or artefacts they had produced as a result of their work on JC reform. This supported the development of interview question schedules, which participants received in advance (Appendix B). This gave them time to prepare for the interview if they so desired. Interviews were recorded on a digital Dictaphone and transcribed. In most cases, Principals were interviewed in their offices and teachers in a spare classroom or meeting room. Data collection for one school (St. Carthage's) took place

at a hotel during a JC planning day. I was invited to attend the day, whereby I took field notes that helped to inform the evolving question schedule. This allowed me to further construct questions in the unique vernacular of the school. All rooms were checked in advance for acoustics and ample, comfortable seating. Interviews took place for each school site during one visit, lasting approximately one day.

Due to time constraints it was not possible to pilot the interviews, thus the first school (Woodville College) served as a site for the main study and for piloting the question schedule. The initial group interview, which was intended to run for approximately twenty five minutes, ran over time as a result of this. The teachers and Principal had been informed in advance that this may be the case and were cooperative. Extra time was given at the end for participants to reflect on the suitability of the research instrument and the questions asked. These results were documented and adjustments were made to the question schedule as necessary.

As the interviews progressed, I used the question schedule to ensure all topics were addressed. Most participants also referred to the schedule. When I felt key issues were not being addressed, I redirected the conversation toward the remaining questions and sought clarifications where necessary. Conversely, any interesting avenues that weren't planned, but had relevance to the research questions, were pursued with enthusiasm.

Given the broad range of JC innovations being piloted, and the unique characteristics of each school discovered through the scoping exercise, the question schedules for each site varied. However, a number of common factors suffused all interviews. Informed by the conceptual framework for the research (Fig.7), I developed questions to address multiple aspects and levels of the JC policy trajectory. Participants were given space to discuss elements of JC reform they had worked on. These included Key Skills, creative timetabling, collaborative development of curricular content, and formative assessment. The question schedule was tailored for each school based on their area of interest. Flash cards were used to stimulate discussion on issues surrounding JC reform at that time. Participants selected from cards stating five issues that were prevalent in JC reform discourse^{viii}, namely:

- Teacher union ballots on non-cooperation
- Teachers assessing their own students

- JCPA - School Certificate Vs State certificate
- Breaking down of subject barriers
- DES slowing down the introduction of the JC

The use of visuals had a number of benefits, such as keeping a focus on key topics and encouraging the participatory nature of the interview process. It provided a structured forum for participants to elaborate on “critical incidents” (Angelides, 2001, p. 431) to identify events of importance to them. Participants were also given the opportunity to address any other items not presented and to discuss them.

4.3. Ethical considerations

Robson (2002, p.65) asserts that “it is vital, at a very early stage of your preparations to carry out an enquiry, that you give serious thought to those ethical aspects of what you are proposing”. The involvement of human respondents in this study raised a number of ethical issues. All participants volunteered to share potentially sensitive and personal information related to their professional practices and beliefs. A strong ethical stance was taken in this study, from the initial framing of research questions, through the data collection process and final write up. Still now, beyond the lifetime of this project, I am conscious of the need for ethical reflexivity. Ethical approval was sought and given via the University of Sheffield Ethics review committee (Appendix C), in which ethical concerns and measures proposed to address these concerns were suggested. All participants were asked for written consent to participate (Appendix D) and received a letter of invite and participant information sheet (Appendix E) to keep. These documents were worded according to the standards expected by the University’s ethics committee. Further to this, personal approaches were made to participants to gain their informal consent.

Throughout the study, I worked in constant cognisance of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998) which states that “everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence [sic]”. At all points, participants were reminded of my commitment to ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity in the research. They were advised, prior to interview, that they had the right to not answer questions and withdraw at any time without prejudice. Throughout the data gathering process, I used good judgement regarding the sensitivity of questions posed and continually sought counsel from my

supervisor. If issues were raised during interviews, they were facilitated using the guiding precept of *primum non nocere*. Participants were assured they would not be identifiable in any way in written reports or presentations arising from this study. Following interviews, they were invited to check transcripts for accuracy.

To ensure confidentiality but also preserve character of the narratives, pseudonyms for interviewees and schools were used. Specific references to job titles or responsibilities were omitted where it was felt participants might be identifiable by them^{ix}. Each school had a number of unique identifiers which had to be written out of the narrative. To aid with this process, I shared the evolving write-up with a participant from each school site, who offered a critical perspective in terms of anonymity. Original transcripts, consent forms and recordings were held securely and will be destroyed upon final publication of this thesis. Participants were informed via the information sheet of their right to withdraw from the research following interview and, if practicable, have their transcript and audio file destroyed^x. Finally, I feel it is important to affirm that I have avoided referring to the nuances of data collection during personal and professional meetings.

This section conveyed the steps taken to ensure that ethical principles were adhered to before, during and after the lifetime of this research. Next, a critique of the measures adopted to enhance the validity and reliability of the research is given.

4.4. Validity and reliability

Firstly, this study celebrates the centrality of the researcher in its construction, data gathering, analysis and final interpretations. It acknowledges a delicate relationship between the researcher and participants which is carefully managed and justified; “we are (as researchers) our own blueprints for our research methodology” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p.67).

Whilst I acknowledge I am in the process of becoming an expert in the discipline of academic enquiry, I recognise I came to this research as a practitioner. Questions have been asked of the legitimacy and validity of practitioner enquiry, insofar as practitioners as researchers are more likely to be consumers of research instead of producers of educational knowledge (Lagemann, 1996, in Yogev & Yogev, 2006). Other concerns include practitioners’ questionable ability to conduct research and their need to transcend personal biases. Based

on these views, practitioners engaging in research should have a desire to identify and address issues of validity and reliability at the core of their research philosophy. Whilst critics of qualitative research methods will refer to the inability for such approaches to circumvent the subjectivity and bias of the researcher, I am of the firm belief that qualitative studies can reduce subjective influences to a high level, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. The steps I took to reduce these influences are explained thus.

Trustworthiness in a research study refers to its quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In relation to credibility, I have worked as a teacher in Irish secondary education for over 16 years and through my various roles have engaged with educational policy at all levels represented in this research. This, combined with the 24 months I spent collating and analysing the data for this study, affirms my prolonged engagement with the professional and situated contexts of the research participants. It also suggests sufficient time to check for incorrect information during data collection. Further, issues identified in the literature review were kept central in developing the research framework and informed the data analysis. Credibility was also enhanced through triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, pp.142-144). Different sources, modes of data collection and analysis were used. Participants were stratified according to role across three school sites. Data was obtained from 5 group interviews and 7 one-to-one interviews across three levels of micro policy enactment (school, intermediary and classroom). Comparisons between the interviews, as well as a meta-analysis across the school sites added credibility. Finally, I have offered by way of critical reflection, excerpts from my personal biography demonstrating the influence of my positionality on the research design. Further excerpts are offered later in this chapter that illustrate how my shifting professional context has influenced my analysis of the data. I deemed this level of intellectual honesty necessary to enhance the trustworthiness of the thesis.

Because of the flexible and evolving nature of the research design, I accept its limited transferability. However, the research was presented in as transparent a manner as possible with a clear exposition of the policy analysis framework used to inform the research questions and the initial data analysis. It is hoped that fellow academics may see the relatable potential for transferability of methods to other areas of curriculum policy

analysis. To this end, the research paradigm, methodology and methods adopted have been clearly articulated along with the data collection and analysis strategies.

In keeping with conventions of qualitative research, and to account for the shifting reform context, an audit trail was used to enhance dependability and confirmability of the study. A research journal was kept including details of interviewees, field notes and references to events as they happened in the media over the course of the data collection. Further to this, minutes of meetings and records of correspondence with participants (phone, email, and text messages) were kept. Audio recordings, interview transcripts and important documentary sources were held in a secure location for the lifetime of the study. Finally, memos related to the data analysis were meticulously taken to support the assertion that the data collected and interpretations developed during analysis were not manifested by the researcher alone. A detailed trail of information linked the researcher to the participants, to the data, to the analysis and to the eventual theory development. These trails of information add to the rich descriptions of the experiences of participants and support the likelihood of the thesis having meaning for its readership.

4.5. Data analysis

4.5.1. Initial coding – questions, comparisons and memo writing

In accordance with a grounded methodology, I simultaneously engaged in data analysis and data gathering. This initially consisted of gathering the data and sorting it into categories (Flick, 2006). This involved “digging beneath the surface to discover the hidden treasures contained within the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.66). Once the first interview had been transcribed, data analysis immediately began. I listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed them verbatim without any changes to the original format to ensure faithfulness to the statements being made. Transcripts were inputted into a qualitative data analysis software package, NVivo, which facilitated coding and analysis.

In the case of coding, it is common practice for researchers to mix grounded theory strategies with more general narrative and thematic analyses (Charmaz, 2011, p.363). This is not to be confused with coding in ground theory, which requires the researcher to move beyond sorting, synthesising and summarising data to questioning the actions and processes at play. Notes, comments, theoretical memos and diagrams were made and questions were

raised about the actions and processes elicited from the data. This “open coding” led to “[b]reaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data, while at the same time, ... qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.195). To preserve the character of the data, provide a handle on the material and identify leads to pursue, a practice of coding in gerunds was adopted during the open coding phase (Appendix F). Whilst Strauss and Corbin’s position on the grounded theory method informed this research, Charmaz (2006; 1990) and Glaser (1998) are greater advocates of coding in gerunds. I adopted Charmaz and Glaser’s approach because I found coding in gerunds placed the emphasis on actions and processes. I was brought into the data from a very early point in the research and found I was able to interact with it better than if I was listing themes and topics. Throughout the coding process, I employed two analytic procedures. They were “asking questions and making comparisons” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.8). I was asking questions whilst also coding at the same time. This coding in action “enables grounded theorists to discern processes that might otherwise remain invisible” (Charmaz, 2011, p.372). Initial coding in gerunds supported a line of questioning of the data which facilitated rich comparisons and exploration of nodes. For example, one of the early codes I created was called ‘not knowing’ (Appendix G). Under this, participants expressed concern at ‘not knowing’ about JC reform. Through questioning and making comparisons, I began to ask *what* aspects of JC reform they did not know about, *how* did they see themselves as not knowing and *why* different aspects of JC reform evoked this sense of ‘not knowing’ amongst participants. Through such interrogation, I developed a sense of different aspects of the reform process constraining and enabling participants. This allowed me to move the analysis into deeper phases of axial and selective coding (O’Donoghue, 2007), in which I reconciled the various aspects under organising concepts. This process was non-linear, iterative and required a constant revisiting of coding across various phases. Memo writing was an essential support to this process.

Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.118) assert that “memos and diagrams begin as rather rudimentary representations of thought and grow in complexity, density, clarity and accuracy as the research progresses”. As the analysis progressed and data reduction took place (Miles & Huberman, 1994), code notes and memos become more refined. Through this, further questioning and interaction with the data, categories were developed and

presented to respondents to ascertain the accuracy of my interpretations. This ‘member checking’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) supported development of more precise categories. I asked participants to feed back to me in spoken and written format. In all cases, they were satisfied the representations I was making in relation to the thesis were appropriate. In presenting my constructed categories to participants, I aimed to stay true to Strauss & Corbin’s stance on theory development grounded in the data but also dependent on the creative interpretations of the researcher:

Theories are always traceable to the data that gave rise to them – within the interactive context of data collecting and data analysing, in which the analyst is also a crucially significant interactant.

(Strauss & Corbin, 1994, pp.278-279)

At this point, I must explain what I am terming categories and concepts. I share Bazeley’s (2007, p.82) position, who sees categories as descriptive labels for phenomena and concepts as broader constructions that run through the entire data set and are the product of abstract thinking and reflection. Thus, through the constant comparative method, creative memo writing and mapping I moved from inductive coding and development of categories to abductive reasoning and the development of concepts. The categories and concepts developed in this study shall be introduced in subsequent sections.

4.5.2. Data analysis – *why my context matters*

To enhance methodological rigour and the credibility of the analysis of results, Cutcliffe (2000, p.1479) identifies the “need for the grounded theory researcher to acknowledge his/her prior knowledge and tacit knowledge, to bring such knowledge in to the open, to discuss how it has affected the theory development”. In Chapter 2, I presented my position within this research process. This is defensible through employment of grounded theory stemming from a constructivist epistemology. Through interaction in the field, data is seen as co-constructed between participants and the researcher. The data reflects the position of both participants and the researcher within a social, historical and situational setting (Charmaz, 2009a; 2009b). Personal reflection helped me to demonstrate reflexivity in this regard at all stages of the research process. At this point, I shall revisit my position in the research and its influence on the data analysis.

Due to my personal and professional circumstances, a significant amount of time passed between collecting and analysing of the data from school sites; approximately one year. Throughout this time period, and since then, my professional context has changed in ways that enhanced my professional and practical knowledge of JC reform. This shift in context, and my time away, from the data, made me look at the data through a different lens during the analysis. A further excerpt from my biography describes this change:

Researching on a moving bus – my personal/professional journey through JC reform

My journey through JC reform has been like a bus tour, with various sights, passengers and drivers. I got on this tour bus in 2012, when I began researching JC reform in part 1 of the EdD programme. As a teacher and EdD student, I had an insider knowledge of Irish and international education. At this point, I was a backseat passenger. My awareness of the bus route was from obvious road signs and landmarks, such as the *Framework*, related policies, and relevant literature.

As I began data collection in 2014, I became curious about the other passengers' (research participants) experience of the bus journey. I became an inquirer, and took a seat near the front. I noticed a changing landscape, bumpy roads and potential 'dead end' signs. I brought my insider knowledge to bear as an inquirer, yet I was still an outsider to the other passengers and their school communities. I was both an insider and an outsider on the JC reform bus. However, I shared a common ground with participants, as we were all practitioners working in schools. I used this common ground as a currency in an exchange of shared positionality with the participants during data collection, in the hope of positively mediating power relations in the field. (Srivastava, 2006, p.211).

This changed for me in 2014/15. I was offered a full-time secondment to the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) Science Team. My changing role required me to take turns giving the bus tour. I was to work between the school and system levels, at the interface of research, policy and practice. What I anticipated as an exciting time in my professional life became a false start, as the bus became stuck at a crossroads and the passengers got off! An industrial relations impasse resulted in unionised

teachers withdrawing from CPD for JC reform. This undoubtedly left me disappointed and frustrated. As a CPD facilitator, I was disappointed not to work with teachers. As a researcher, I had to be ethically sensitive to the passengers on the research journey with me. They were off the bus too, and I could not compromise their position as teacher union members by asking them about their changed experience. Further, I was now, arguably, an outsider to these participants. Would they have viewed me differently? Would I have been able to positively negotiate a shared positionality with participants when their teacher unions had voted to reject engagement with a reform for which I wilfully advocated?

Thankfully, in 2015/16, the JC reform bus started to move again, albeit without a full complement of passengers. As TUI teachers came on board, the JCT programme for Science, Business Studies, English and Whole-School CPD provision began. Following the impasse, the signposts had shifted somewhat, and the landscape had changed. Most importantly though, we were moving, together. I continued giving the tour to passengers until October 2016, when I was promoted to national Subject Leader for JC Science. In ways, I was now responsible for driving the bus, engaging with the landscape and helping to develop and lead the tour.

Moving from backseat passenger, to inquirer, then tour guide and driver, I was exposed to a broad field of stakeholders in different contexts. This exposure brought with it a vast knowledge of the JC reform policy context at school and system levels. I worked with teachers in the subject of Science and whole staffs/school leaders in making sense of the enacted curriculum in their practice and school communities. Through this, I experienced first-hand the struggles, excitements and concerns regarding their enactment of JC reform. In other words, *I was gaining an awareness of the different contexts that were influencing their enactment*. Given my new position(s), I had opportunities to share this discourse with partners at a system level. Through CPD design and facilitation, my work with teachers and collaboration with various education partners, I began to look at JC reform through a different lens. I had shifted from being an outsider researcher with insider knowledge, to an insider of the system and (perhaps) an outsider to the participants. I moved from interpreting JC reform at the micro level of the school to working at the meso level,

recontextualising the mandated curriculum and developing ways to support schools to enact it. This provided me with a rounded insight to the contexts influencing teachers and schools from multiple perspectives – an insight I would not have had I remained in the backseat.

Reflecting on recent developments in my career allowed me to identify the influence of my tacit knowledge on the data analysis and subsequent theory generation. As my professional dealings with education stakeholders diversified, it reflected in my approach to the data analysis. I began to visit and revisit codes, exploring and confirming new conceptual ideas. I continually gained in confidence to test new ideas against constructed theory. That this research took a ‘context – turn’ is no accident. Given my expanded knowledge of JC reform, I felt the data ‘spoke’ to me in ways it had not before. My enhanced exposure to, and engagement with JC reform, heightened my awareness to contexts that influenced participants’ enactment of the curriculum. In short, my deepened understanding of JC reform enhanced my abductive reasoning when engaging with the data.

4.5.3. From data analysis to theory generation

Guided by the research questions, analysis of the data took place in three phases^{xi}:

4.5.3.1. Phase 1 - identifying the features of enactment

This phase involved open coding of the data to identify features of enactment within each school site. I went into this phase of the analysis with a theoretical framing of policy enactment informed by the work of Ball and Vidovich, as well as recent work by Ball, et al. (2012) on policy enactment in secondary schools. To distinguish between the initial interpretation of policy texts and their subsequent translation into practice (Ball, et al., 2012, pp.43-45), data was coded according to how participants were (i) **interpreting** JC reform and how they were (ii) **translating** it into practice. A number of codes were developed under each of these broad categories, initially using gerunds. During the first phase of coding notes, questions, comments and ideas were documented. These led to the development of diagrams used to reconcile the constructed categories. The data was then unified under two organising concepts. These concepts were developed during site 1 analysis and, through the constant comparative method and abductive reasoning, were adapted and refined during analysis of subsequent sites.

Under 'interpreting', the organising concept was **struggle**. This concept has both positive and negative connotations, as participants demonstrated their struggle to let go of the old curriculum and embrace change. It also reconciled interpretations of participants around a struggle for knowledge. Some actors struggled to know if they were 'doing' the new JC appropriately, however the greatest struggle for knowledge across the study was linked to national roll out of JC reform.

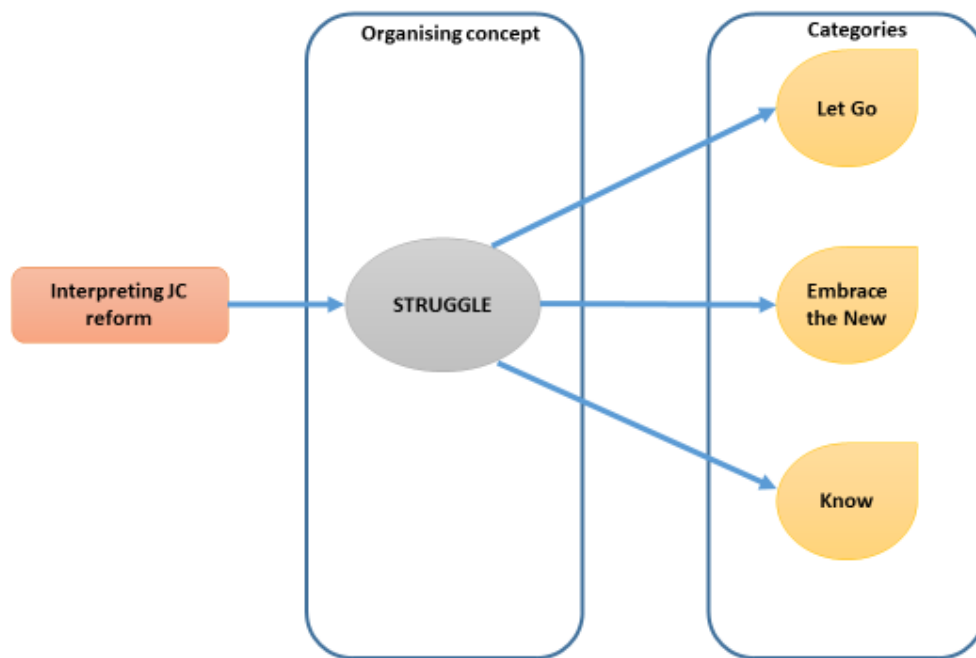


Fig. 12. Organising concepts and categories of interpreting JC reform

Under translating, the initial organising concept I conceived was **pace** of change. A number of categories were constructed to reflect how participants were planning for change, steps they were taking to translate JC reform into practice and ways in which they were reassuring themselves when a change in practice was perhaps not as evident as desired. However, as the analysis unfolded across school sites, I came to the realisation that 'pace' was not the ideal concept to reflect participants' translation of JC reform. To consider 'doing' enactment at a pace implies there may be an end point to which that pace of movement is bringing individual participants and the school, thereby negating the view that change is a process as opposed to an event. As such, the organising concept which seemed most suitable was **depth** of change. This concept was constructed to illustrate, from the participants' perspectives, the degree to which they and their school experienced a change in practice (or lack thereof) as a result of translating JC reform. In other words, how deep

have the changes in Junior Cycle permeated that “ocean floor” (Cuban, 1998) of the classroom? It also served to organise the ways in which this change in practice has been reflected, as well as organising the mechanisms that facilitated a certain depth of change. The rationale for depth of change for each school was evidenced under three categories – what participants were doing, what they were planning to do and finally what they were saying about why the change had (or had not) happened. This ranged from:

A deep change: “I’m reflecting now...I’m really challenged in my pedagogy and the way I teach and how I deliver and I’m flipping my teaching and I’m collaborating a lot more” (Stephen, JC Coordinator, St. Carthage’s, February 2014),

to..

A shallow change: “I think right now, you have to consider the culture of the school and the capacity of the school, and right now, I don't think we're ready for change, y'know? We've had too much change” (Liz, JC Coordinator, Woodville College, January 2014).

It is important to acknowledge that depth of change in this study can refer to both individual and school wide change. For comparison from school to school, depth of change is a relative scale. School wide, some sites demonstrated a shallow change relative to others. However, this is not to suggest that individual participants did not experience what they perceive to be a deep change in practice. I also acknowledge and honour that what may be assumed to be small changes in practice for an individual teacher could be monumentally deep changes for them personally and professionally^{xii}. However, as an organisational and comparative concept, depth of change is used to reflect the degree to which a school, or a group of individuals within that school, have (or have not) moved as a result of engaging with JC reform.

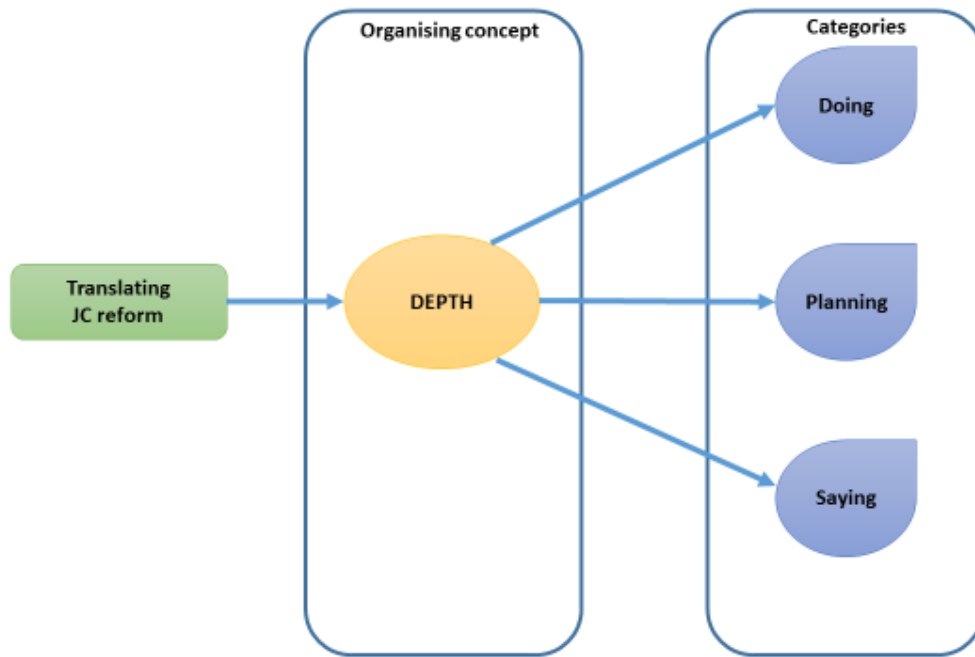


Fig. 13. Organising concept and categories evidencing translation of JC reform

4.5.3.2. Phase 2- cross site analysis and typology of policy positions

Through inductive and deductive analysis supported by code notes and theoretical memos (Appendix H), I moved onto a second round of coding. I developed a typology of policy positions^{xiii} to reflect the different ways JC reform was being interpreted. This was deemed necessary because in the making of meaning, different actors take up different positions in relation to their roles, actions and engagements with policy (Ball, 2012, p.49). Although one must exercise caution over “the seductive neatness of typologies” (ibid, p.49), I chose this approach to wield a coherent story of interpretation within and across school sites. Whilst it is accepted these types are tentative, based on a single researcher interpretation and that participants at times demonstrate qualities of different types all at once, policy positions were assigned to participants according to qualities they most exhibited at a given time. This approach allowed me to extrapolate categories and develop broad concepts from inductively coded data in a manageable way. It is important to be reminded that the purpose of these typologies is not to merely categorise people, but rather to illuminate differences in responses to JC reform. In other words, *how* different participants have responded to the policy process and, following this, *why* they have responded in these ways. Policy positions identified were:

- Enthusiasm
- Pragmatism
- Criticism

Evidence of the links between these positions and interpretations of JC reform will be outlined in chapter five.

4.5.3.3. Phase 3 – contextual dimensions of influence

To understand *why* different participants enacted in different ways, I moved to a theoretical phase of coding. I revisited the data from phases 1 and 2 but viewed them through a contextual lens. I identified contextual dimensions that both preceded and were created by the reform process. The interpretations and translations of participants were then considered according to the influences of these unique contexts (Appendices I, J). Nuances of how these contextual dimensions were realised (or not) within and across school sites were considered. Supported by refining of theoretical diagrams and memos (Appendices H, K), a context-centric theoretical model of JC enactment was developed. This model is presented in chapter six.

A conceptual map for the research design is presented below (Fig. 14). It illustrates the progression from individual sites to final theory generation. Key activities that took place at each stage of the research are displayed on the right, while the research questions being addressed are displayed on the left:

Conceptual map for data analysis

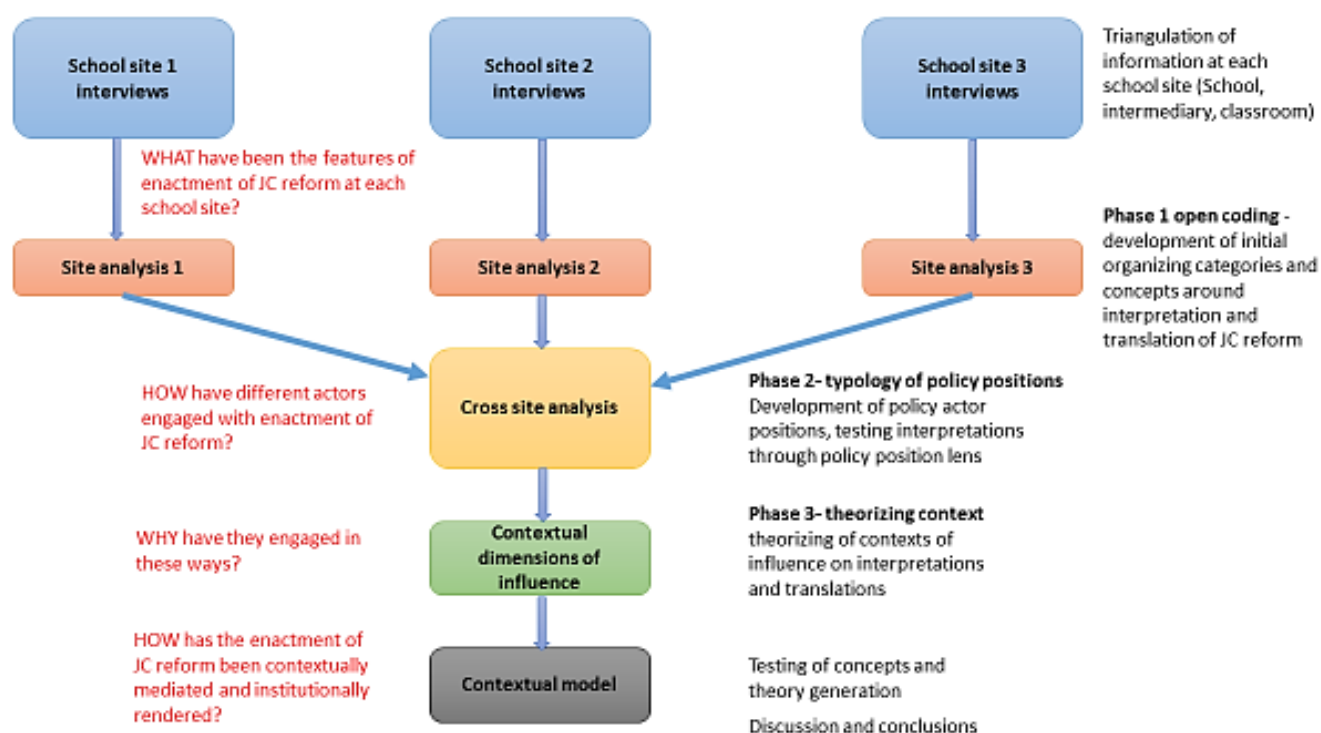


Fig. 14. Conceptual map for data analysis

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodological issues pertaining to the research reported in this thesis. Interpretivism, critical theory and grounded theory were justified as the paradigms and methodology guiding the research. The research approach was outlined in detail, from participant selection to the research instruments of interviews. Research ethics was reviewed, and steps to enhance the validity and reliability were outlined. Finally, I illustrated the progression of the data analysis from open coding of data to final theory generation. In chapter four, the results and analysis of the research shall be presented.

Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

5.0. Introduction

This chapter outlines the results obtained from data collection and analysis. It is presented in three parts. Firstly, I present a brief overview of each of school site, their area of JC enactment, participant demographics and a description of the depths of translation evident. Secondly, I outline the policy positions developed in phase 2. I then describe the struggle to interpret JC reform through the lens of these policy positions. The third section describes the contextual dimensions which influenced participants' interpretation and translation of JC reform.

Phases 1 and 2 are presented in a bricolage fashion. I dip into the results from both phases as I attempt to weave a coherent narrative. Throughout this chapter, quotes are used at relevant points to illustrate commonly held and (at times) nuanced viewpoints. Where necessary, emphasis is added in *italics*. Finally, I have provided a summary of key points throughout the chapter at regular intervals. These serve as a 'breadcrumbs' trail as I transition from phases 1 & 2 to phase 3 of the data analysis.

An important qualification, which I am at pains to make, concerns how readers may perceive some individuals and schools to be presented in a negative light during the results and discussion. This is most certainly not my intention. Each participant, each school, is on its own reform journey. I have attempted to honestly portray where they are in that journey, and to stay true to their data. If anything, I was overly impressed by the levels of professionalism, enthusiasm^{xiv} and competence evident amongst the participants.

Moreover, and emphasised in the theoretical model presented in chapter six, there are multiple contexts at play which influence actors' achievement of agency. The capacity of the individual and school are interconnected parts of a complex ecology.

I begin by presenting each school site and describing their depth of translation.

5.1. Woodville College

I don't know, I think right now, you have to consider the culture of the school and the capacity of the school, and right now, I don't think we're ready for change, y'know? We've had too much change.

(Liz, JC Coordinator)

Liz's quote astutely captures the feeling of many teachers from this school. Woodville College (Woodville), a type 1 school, adopted a school-wide approach to the Key Skill of 'Staying Well' as their focus for JC reform. This was in response to concerns over 3rd years demonstrating unusual stress from their studies; "Lot of students reporting anxiety, lot of good students breaking down and just not being able to cope and, kind of, big disciplinary flashpoints with students with model disciplinary records, where they would just literally lose it" (Principal).

Data collection took place during one school day in January 2014, five interviews were conducted. These varied in length and number according to participant availability. Teaching experience ranged from 4 to 24 years. Participant and interview details for Woodville are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Participant and interview details, Woodville.

Level of enactment	Participant	Interview type	Interview duration
School leadership	Principal	Individual interview	35 minutes
Intermediary	Liz	Individual interview	31 minutes
Classroom	Katie	Individual interview	25 minutes
	Fiona Jacinta	Group interviews	26 minutes
	Sharon Patricia		28 minutes

5.1.1. Translation – shallow change

Woodville demonstrated a shallow depth of translation of JC reform into practice. Liz, the JC Coordinator, said the school was making small efforts to activate the Key Skill of ‘Staying Well’ with their students, but not linking it back to the bigger picture of JC reform. As such, she felt ‘if you asked any five students, picked them out of the corridor at random, they would think that we aren't a JC network school...I don't think it's having any impact on them.’ This was further evidenced from other teachers who referred to small changes they made in practice, as their reassurances for a lack of deep change.

5.1.1.1. Small changes to practice

Teachers made different attempts to bring the Key Skill of ‘staying well’ into their practice. Three teachers had encouraged students to reflect upon learning at the end of lessons and units of work. One teacher in particular, although viewing this as harmonious with JC reform, did not see it as her changing practice:

But I suppose I'm a creature of habit and I'm kind of sticking with the things I've always done which really isn't what you're supposed to do, ehm, but because it's fitting in with the 'staying well'...And it sounds good so [...] *I don't see a huge change.*

(Katie, Teacher)

Another teacher activated ‘Staying Well’ by developing students’ organisational and study skills, and mentioned plans for healthy eating education. The school also took one class group on a ‘Staying Well’ day. Finally, the Principal alluded to the idea of introducing a spirituality programme for students. However, this was only at an idea stage.

5.1.1.2. Reassurances

Participants consistently referred to their “unique context” (Principal) accounting for a shallow translation. At the time of data collection, Woodville was in the process of moving to a new school building, which caused a significant upheaval. Coupled with its status as a young school, this meant staff struggled to find time for other initiatives:

It's just that there's so much else, *the situation we're in*, and I know you can make excuses forever, but there's just so much going on here, like, we're [going into] in a new school, we're moving buildings, there's just a lot of other stuff [...]. *There's just so much else to do.*

(Katie, Teacher)

The positive side to this situation, however, is teachers were more open to new initiatives as they were already in the change space; *“everything we were doing was from scratch anyhow [...] it isn't that big a change ‘cos we're not too settled into our ways”* (Sharon, Teacher).

However, as promising as the outlook may be, the reality at the time of data collection was that, compared to the other schools in the study, little JC change was evident at Woodville. This was attributed mostly to their inability to deal with JC reform in a time when they were moving buildings and establishing themselves as a school: *“I feel as a school we're firefighting. Whatever needs doing first”* (Liz, JC Coordinator).

A number of **key points** can be deduced about translation of JC reform into practice at Woodville:

- There have been small changes to practice
- This is linked to a lack of capacity brought about by the schools' unique context of change
- Given that the school is in the change space, there are positive hopes for the future

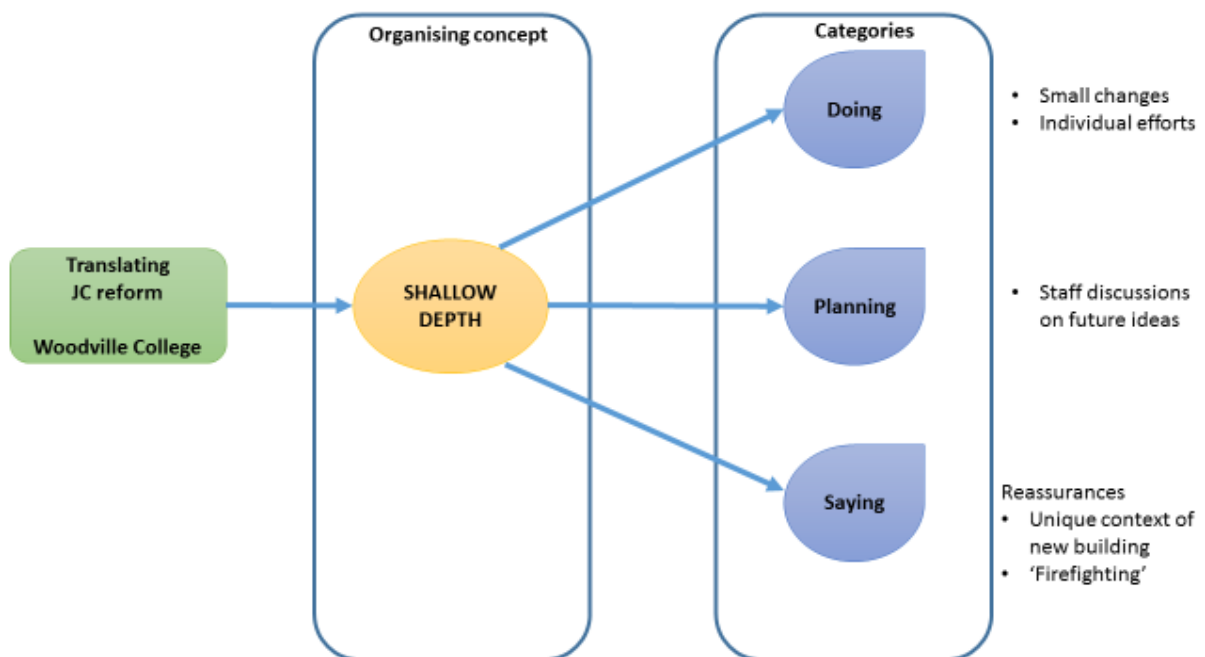


Fig. 15. Evidence of shallow depth of translation of JC reform into practice at Woodville

5.2. Kenwood Community School

We would have been a school that would have, from very early stages, looked at teaching and learning in the classroom...we would have engaged with the assessment for learning techniques and we would have advanced that quite considerably so when the opportunity to get involved with the [JC] network ...em....with the new JC...it matched quite well where we were at anyway....and it gave us an opportunity maybe just to give us a further impetus to continue to developso it made sense for us to go for what's happening in the classroom.

(Principal)

Kenwood Community School (Kenwood), a type 2 school, focused on enhancing teaching and learning approaches in ways that were sympathetic to a number of policy initiatives, including JC reform. Through an established school self-evaluation process, they identified a school-level need to develop their students' independent learning skills. Like all Irish schools, they were enacting the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011). To aid this development, they initially engaged with assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. Once the opportunity to join the Junior Cycle Network arose, they began a second iteration of AfL through the lens of activating Key Skills. Participants ranged in number of years teaching experience from 7 to 31 years. Data collection took place in February 2014 over one school day, three interviews were conducted. Participant and interview details are outlined below:

Table 3. Participant and interview details, Kenwood.

Level of enactment	Participant	Interview type	Interview duration
School leadership	Principal	Individual interview	50 minutes
Intermediary & Classroom	Joan ^{xv} Jackie	Group interviews	25 minutes
	Elaine Christine Joan		26 minutes

5.2.1. Translation – deep transformation

Across the whole school staff have experienced a **deep transformation** in translating JC into practice. The school has changed. This is clearly evidenced in the descriptions of changing practices as a result of JC enactment:

Our learning became more active and our classrooms became more dynamic [...] we went back to assessment for learning again, and started to re-visit it in a new context [of Key Skills], and it was completely different then, the way people embraced it.

(Joan, JC Coordinator)

Added to this change in practice, **epistemological assumptions** concerning participants' role in the classroom and their perceptions and expectations of their students as learners, have been challenged. They have found meaning for themselves and their students within JC reform, at a much deeper level than the interpretations of what the JC *could* do at Woodville. Here, they represent what the JC *has* done with regards to challenging epistemologies:

Yeah, I think you, you're more conscious of becoming like the facilitator rather than this, you know, regurgitating the curriculum and expecting them to pick up.

(Elaine, Teacher)

And I think what we realised very quickly was, we underestimated the students. We were very nervous about giving them free reign and letting them off [...] they just surpassed all our expectations...it's that thing, you know, are students engaged or are they occupied, [...] This process has made them engaged rather than occupied.

(Joan, JC Coordinator)

5.2.1.1. Mechanisms for deep transformation

Participants referred to a number of key **mechanisms** for facilitating the transformative changes, ranging from:

Adopting a 'ready-fire-aim' approach:

The teachers are not afraid to 'have a go' at new practices. These new practices range from something as small as moving furniture to encourage group work, to collaboratively trialling and modifying AfL toolkits. They embrace new approaches and are not afraid to try, to fail and to fail better:

Once you kind of try it [new teaching approaches], and you give it a go and you see that it's working, you'll go on [...] I think I feel excited because maybe I've taken away the scary part for myself because I've tried out some of the things [...] and if it all

goes wrong, it doesn't really matter, this is only a test to see and you'll be shocked that it will come back working, you know?

(Christine, Teacher)

Bringing the whole staff on the journey

It would be naïve to assume all teachers within the school changed at the same rate and with the same enthusiasm as the participants in this study. Indeed, Joan admitted 'we still have people who sit in the staff room and say there's not enough time, and it's too much, and it won't work'. However, there have been significant efforts by the JC Coordinator and Principal to bring the whole staff on a journey of transformative change. The mechanisms for facilitating this journey included:

Providing external opportunities:

The teachers referred to a number of active learning workshops they had been privileged to attend outside the school, and to report back to the staff. The Principal mentioned he was planning to bring some teaching staff to a leading learning workshop for school leaders, to "expose them to what I'm being exposed to as Principal [...] so that *then it's now out in the staffroom, it's not just in this office*" (Principal).

Accessing student voice:

In their initial phase of JC engagement, a small pilot group of teachers, led by Joan, trialled an AfL toolkit they received and modified from the NCCA. Following this, they gathered evidence from their own experiences of the various AfL strategies, but also of the students' perspectives on them. This was shared with the whole staff at a number of training days. Joan felt hearing what their students had to say was a powerful motivator to bring more staff on board:

We went with a credible toolkit and said, this works and we took some things out and we added new things in, and we *were able to say what the students had said*. So, there were some very early adopters who very, very quickly came on board and then we fed back a lot to staff [...] and we brought even more people on board [...] Because *the student voice is very powerful. I think we really recognise that*.

(Joan, JC Coordinator)

Promoting professional conversations:

The Principal designated planning time for whole-staff, teacher led discussions and sharing of ideas on active learning methodologies linked with their work on JC reform. The Principal was enthusiastic about getting involved in this conversation; he still taught a senior maths class as part of his weekly work commitment. He felt this afforded him an opportunity to be an active participant in the conversations the staff were having, as well as helping to break down classroom barriers. He often invited teachers to visit his room if he was trialling new approaches, and would encourage teachers to do the same.

Focusing on the classroom:

As opposed to taking on a specific aspect of JC reform, the staff were committed to focusing on changing their classroom practices and the ways they facilitate student learning. This allowed them to respond to a number of harmonious policy expectations, including JC reform. They took a broader focus than just assessment; they believed that active learning strategies were enhanced by innovative assessment approaches but they were also instrumental in activating Key Skills and empowering students to take ownership of their learning.

Key points:

- Epistemological assumptions concerning teachers' expectations of 1) themselves as educators, 2) themselves as learners, 3) their students as learners, have been challenged
- The Principal sees himself going through the changes with his staff and makes decisions based on this premise
- The Principal and JC Coordinator have made successful efforts to bring the whole staff on board through various mechanisms

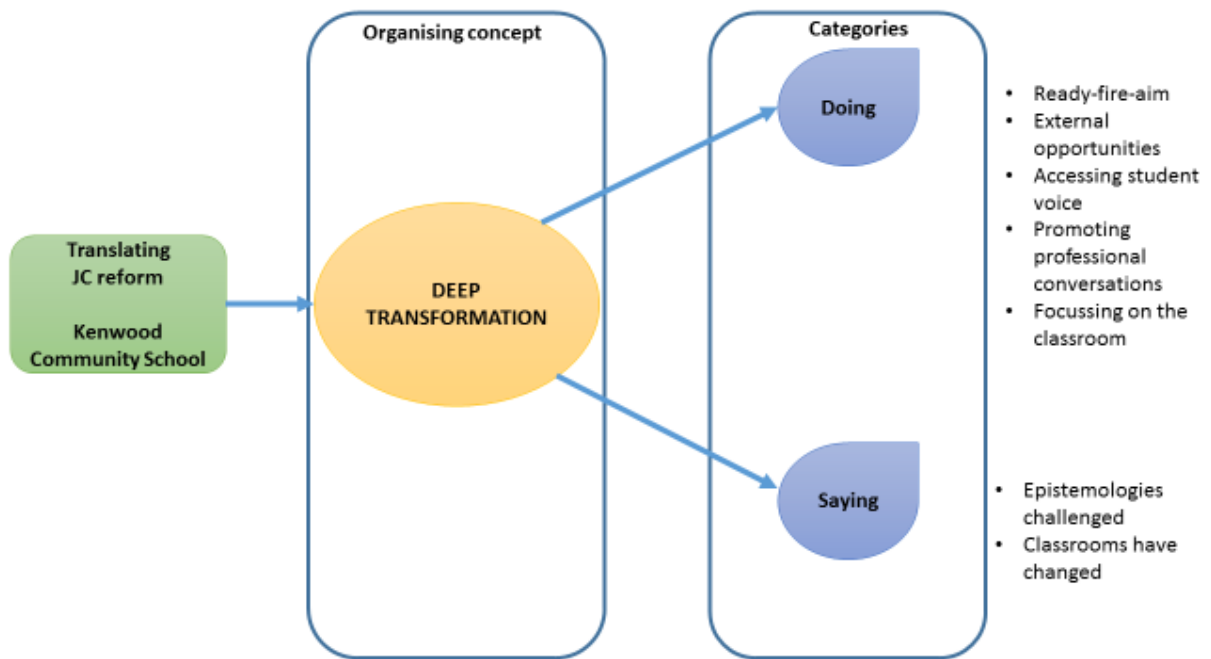


Fig. 16. Evidence of deep transformational change at Kenwood

5.3. St. Carthage’s Secondary School

St. Carthage’s Secondary School (St. Carthage’s) is a type 2 school, which chose to experiment with creative timetabling and curricular approaches. They focussed on teacher-led curricular developments that promoted cross-subject collaboration. They had a number of collaborations across subjects such as Science, Business Studies, Geography and Modern Foreign Languages. Students and teachers were invited to work with each other on pilot projects that drew on knowledge and skills from different disciplines^{xvi}. They were allocated common class time to work on these areas. Participants ranged from 9 to 27 years teaching experience. At the time of data collection, 6 participants were interviewed. During the course of writing this thesis, one participant from this site withdrew. Another participant was excluded due to external issues beyond the scope of the research that it was felt may compromise the integrity of the thesis. Participant and interview details are as follows:

Table 4. Participant and interview details, St. Carthage’s.

Level of enactment	Participant	Interview type	Interview duration
Intermediary	Stephen	Individual interview	35 minutes
Classroom	Frank	Individual interviews	26 minutes
	Sarah-Jane		25 minutes
	John		20 minutes

5.3.1. Translation – personal deep change

As part of their engagement with JC reform, the Principal and JC Coordinator invited all teachers from St. Carthage’s to work on the pilot project. Relative to the size of the staff, there was a small uptake of teachers. These teachers demonstrated a **personal, deep change** in practice as a result of their involvement.

Similar to the teachers of Kenwood, these participants have **changed their practice** following their engagement with the project. Stephen, the JC Coordinator said the process had forced him to collaborate more with colleagues, to consider flipping his classroom practice and to reflect upon his teaching more. Whilst he felt this initiative was challenging (“this is putting me to the pin of my collar”) he affirmed it was an extremely positive change. Sarah-Jane claims to teach her project classes much differently with “not as much chalk and talk”, and this change has suffused her other classes.

In all cases, **epistemological assumptions were challenged** through engaging with this way of teaching, learning and collaborating. By negotiating and developing their own curricular content, some participants felt great freedom and enthusiasm:

You’re not bound by the set curriculum, and it’s having that flexibility is, is nice [..] And freedom of the course, that’s what’s exciting, because teachers need that too [..]I’d hate to do 30 years teaching the same stuff.

(Frank, Teacher)

Stephen refers to the importance teachers have placed on collaboration in the project:

I had teachers come up to me and say...only for collaboration...I think it's the key....*the kids are buzzedthe teachers are buzzed....*if you ever hit a wall [...] then you talk to another teacher who said well actually I was there last week and [...] Suddenly you're rejuvenated and suddenly things start happening for you.

(Stephen, JC Coordinator)

5.3.1.1. Mechanisms for deep individual change

Whilst there are some common mechanisms for change across Kenwood and St. Carthage's, there are also acute differences.

Promoting professional conversations:

Unlike Kenwood, there were no formal meeting times amongst the whole staff. However, due to the integrated nature of their project work, teachers and students were obliged to work together in planning and classroom work. This prompted a collaborative culture amongst students and allowed space for informal professional conversations amongst teachers, leading to a sense of reassurance:

They [students] had to work with each other, whether they were students they never worked with before, they were actually made work with each other. Now initially they were a bit daunted by it but by the end of it [...] they found it very difficult [...] to go back and work individually. They found it very strange. That made it a lot much easier for me personally because *I knew then we weren't on our own, that other teachers were feeling the same way.* We'd the same concerns and with, with, it, there was good communication between us.

(Frank, Teacher)

Availing of opportunities:

Whilst external opportunities in Kenwood were offered and provided by the Principal, the teachers at St. Carthages, in many ways, created their own opportunities for developing the initiative. A number of teachers liaised with centres of excellence in their chosen field for advice and confirmation on the approaches they were taking. Some worked with teachers from other schools, as well as the NCCA in devising their project work.

A journey of few – run with the runners

*[*Whispers*]...I think it could have been done better [...] just brought in more teachers and said lookyou're working with Sarah Janeand they had said it at the start of the year [...] but then that was kind of thrown to the side [...] it's just...I think there's a divide...*

(Sarah-Jane, Teacher)

The pilot project was offered to all staff by invite. Stephen, as JC Coordinator, addressed the whole staff with an outline of the initiative and the commitment involved. From this, 12 teachers came forward for the initial phase. At the time of data collection, this had increased to 28. Although this demonstrated successful growth, Stephen cautioned this approach 'a dangerous thing' given the potential lack of whole-staff buy-in. Sarah-Jane reinforces his view, claiming that non-involved staff felt left out and isolated. Both participants frequently refer to staff outside the project as "*The Others*", whilst project members are "*One of Them*". The original participants were jokingly named "*The 12 Apostles*" by some, or '*The Special Kids*'. There are suggestions from Sarah-Jane that some members of the pilot were hand-picked for the role, and there was an awareness of this amongst "*The Others*".

Sarah-Jane bemoans a lost opportunity to bring more staff into the project and to diversify with regards to expertise and gender. Added to the negativity associated with the project due to the select involvement, she confirms a sense of isolation on both sides of the divide. The majority of the teaching staff, whether by choice or disassociation, are separated from the initiative, whilst the '*Special Kids*' are isolated in their endeavours to enact JC reform. As such, any changes they have experienced through the project, though admittedly profound, must be treated in isolation as they are not part of a school wide effort at JC enactment. This has led to a sense of doubt amongst participants about the directions to take their curricular developments. Even though they have commendably worked together in refining curricular ideas in the project group, they lack the opinions of others:

...we're in this bubble...and we're...I suppose what you'd call [...] the front runners...*but when you're out in the front [...] It's all behind you [...]* We're the only people in the kitchen here...

(Stephen, JC Coordinator)

I think it would be nice *to actually have the, do you know, criticism of the people*, and say, look I think that maybe you're doing this right or you're doing this wrong

(John, Teacher)

Key points:

- Epistemological assumptions concerning teachers' expectations of the system, and the affordances it can offer them, have been challenged for teachers in the pilot project. In this case, a less constrained system can offer them curricular freedom, ownership and excitement
- The model of selective innovation, whilst having a positive impact on those involved in the project, comes with the danger of isolationism and resentment

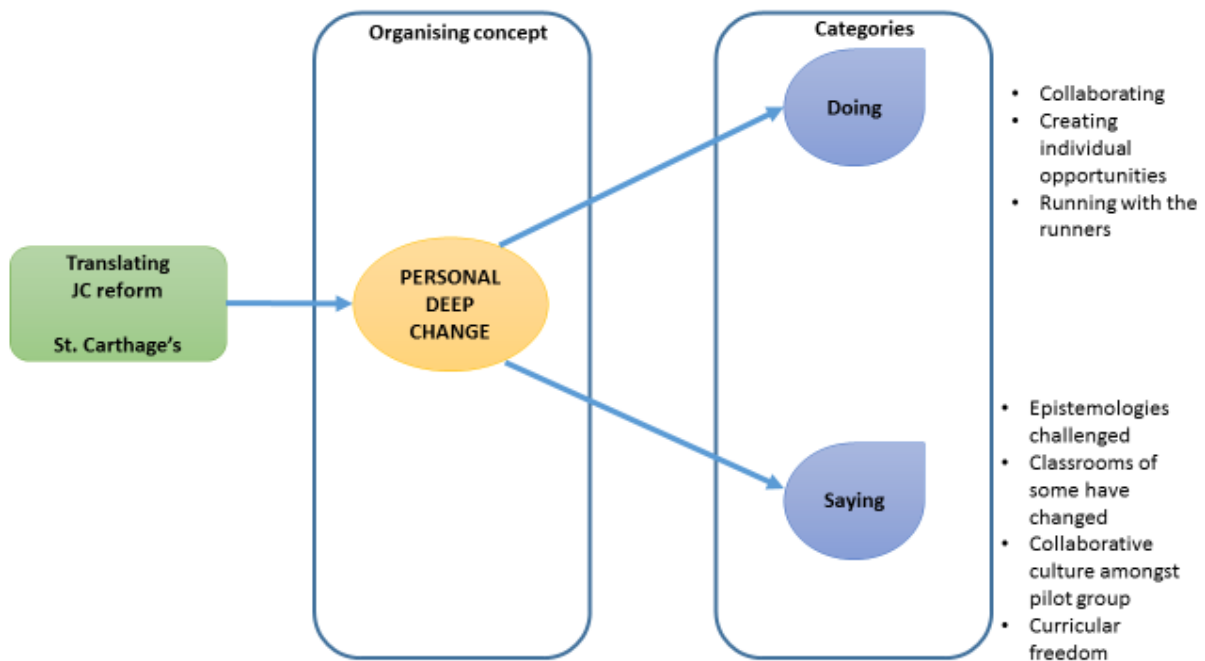


Fig. 17. Evidence of personal deep change at St. Carthage's

The first two research questions were:

What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site?

How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform?

The above sections address one feature of enactment, translation, under the organising concept of depth. I have introduced the three schools in the study, and outlined their depth of translation of JC reform into practice. A number of key points have been extrapolated from the analysis, which shall be revisited in presenting phase 3 of the results.

Next, I consider these research questions with regards to another feature of enactment – interpretation. I present the policy positions constructed and consider, through the lens of these positions, how JC reform has been interpreted by participants within and across the school sites.

5.4. Policy positions and interpretation of JC reform

Participants' interpretations of JC reform were reconciled under the organising concept of struggle and the categories of struggle to let go of the old, embrace the new and to 'know'. It is important to remind ourselves that this struggle can be both positive and negative. I initially attempted to assign participants a specific policy actor type to organise their struggle as either positive, negative or something else. This was difficult to reconcile from the data. The reason for this difficulty is, in itself, somewhat of a 'result' of the research and something which helps in understanding the theoretical model developed in Chapter six. Through comparing interpretations within and across school sites, a number of policy positions were constructed from the data:

- When interpreting their involvement with JC reform at school level, the majority of participants took one perspective. This was the policy position of **enthusiasm**.
- When interpreting development/progression of JC reform nationally, many participants adopted a position of **criticism**.
- There was also a third position which participants took in this research – **pragmatism**.

I shall now present the features of each policy position and the interpretive struggle experienced by participants in these positions.

5.4.1. Internal enthusiasm for JC reform

5.4.1.1. Embracing the new – student and teacher benefits

I think it's a really needed change and I think it's a really positive change

(Elaine, Teacher, Kenwood)

Actors within the enthusiastic space experience a positive struggle to engage with JC reform. This positive struggle, for the most part, is made sense of by participants through their own practice at school level. They look to embrace the new JC in their schools as they see it having a positive impact:

On students:

Teachers see the affordances JC reform offers their students. In many cases, they refer to JC reform as promoting development of vital skills. Students are more reflective in their learning, are able to collaborate better and learn from each other. They are becoming

critical thinkers, which some teachers consider to parlay into improved academic performance:

I'm seeing it especially in second year, em, they're developing, they're really developing, like, a *huge critical thinking, and that's crucial*. I had projects with my students actually last week, some of them were just fantastic. I've, I actually wouldn't be scared to say *they were probably at college level*, to be honest.

(John, Teacher, St. Carthage's)

Teachers see opportunities for students to be creative and free in classroom activities when engaging in the types of student-centred work involved in the new JC. Sarah-Jane recognised this potential when working with students on a cross-curricular project:

I think they have *more* freedom to be creative and to voice opinions and just for not to be...you know very regimental.....em and I do think it's good....I think kids develop greatly with it.

(Sarah-Jane, Teacher, St. Carthage's)

Many teachers described how student engagement with JC reform had led to a love of learning; as students took more responsibility and ownership of their own learning it was reflected in their positive disposition in the classroom. Joan, JC Coordinator at Kenwood, marvelled that "It has been the most fascinating journey. It has been unbelievable with the students".

On teachers:

From the enthusiastic position, teachers are happy the new JC provides opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, both within and beyond their subject departments. This was particularly seen in Kenwood and St. Carthage's, where cross-departmental collaboration had happened in different ways:

What I really like, the idea of the cross-curricular [...] I love the idea of coming together with another department and kind of, either reinforcing something or working together to get a topic across. I love that idea, I just think it's going to be so interesting, and it will make, you know, *not that it's all about me, it will make my job a lot, you know, more fulfilling I think than the current curriculum*.

(Elaine, Teacher, Kenwood)

It's the secret of the success...is that *no one teaches a subject anymore*...you do not teach a subject...you're an expert in an area and that area needs other knowledge okay? [...] we had 5 different people collaborate....the buzz...the success of this...I can't say enough...between the teachers....*there are no more classroom doors*.

(Stephen, JC Coordinator, St. Carthage's)

As alluded to by Stephen and other participants, the classroom dynamic has changed. At Kenwood, this has contributed to a perceived easier workload than with the current curriculum:

At the minute, like, you know, you're prepping and eh, you're still very involved in the class, and you're wearing yourself out before the class and you're wearing yourself out during the class, but really with the proper implementation of the Key Skills, you should do your prep before and not really wearing yourself out in the class, you know, you're in the class, you're there, you're facilitating, but you're not there doling out, communicating the content. They're finding out the content, and it shouldn't be a burden.

(Jackie, Teacher, Kenwood).

Whilst there is a critical struggle to know whether they are doing a good job (outlined below), teachers are reassured by the support they receive from their JC Coordinators. Across all schools, the JC Coordinators are highly praised. Referred to as the driving and steering forces behind JC reform in their schools, these individuals support the staff in a knowledgeable, gentle and positive way. They liaise with the NCCA on behalf of the school, feeding back to staff and feeding forward to the JC Network. They keep teachers reminded of their commitments to the JC Network, challenge them to stay on task and support where necessary:

And I do think the person we have leading it all [Liz], like the main liaison person is excellent and like, we're really lucky to have her [...] And I think it's really important you have somebody who's passionate about it and knows her stuff, like anything in life [...] She really is now, y'know, it's not firing things at you, she gently reminds you, I think the staff like that manner y'know, gentle reminders of when things are needed, really, any question that you have, she's brilliant.

(Katie, Teacher, Woodville)

At Kenwood, the JC Coordinator also spoke admirably about the support from her Principal. She highlighted that the dynamism and leadership shown from school management was instrumental to her success as a coordinator, and was an important support mechanism for her in the role.

Key points:

- Teachers (like Elaine) have a sense of humility in their enthusiasm
- The current curriculum has a number of problems (lack of fulfilment, lack of freedom for teachers and students, hard work in preparing for classes). Engagement with JC reform alleviates these problems
- Teachers value and know they are being supported by JC Coordinators

5.4.1.2. Letting go of the old – assessment and subjects

The Junior Cert is a meaningless piece of paper now for the broad amount of students who get one.

(Principal, Woodville)

From the enthusiastic position, actors are not struggling to let go of the previous assessment dominated system (Junior Cert) and its terminal exam focus. Again, they cite the potential for the new JC to develop the whole person, but also that a de-emphasis on the terminal exam is fairer on the student overall. They affirm that bolting on an assessment at the end of three years of learning does not capture that learning in a rich and full way, and leads to unnecessary pressure:

We've been saying for years and years and everybody since I was doing my Junior Cert which is a long time ago that, people were saying '*God if you had one bad day*' [...]. So like, you've to look at the positive here [...] will we get a better reflection of what our kids are capable of and, like, we see children here who work really really hard for three years and deserve so much and go into a [Junior Cert] exam and don't do well? And that's very disappointing. But *it's less likely to happen with the new JC I think*.

(Sharon, Teacher, Woodville)

The idea behind it [the new JC] is excellent, it's great, it's fantastic, em, *I don't really believe in exams, I don't really believe in em, big days where you go there and you have to speak at an oral exam and if you fail it, you fail it, you know, I don't believe in that*. I believe in, do you know, continuous assessment and I believe that, I don't know, like, I suppose probably myself, I was bad in school, I didn't really like exams and so I think that a student can produce better, em, in a relaxed environment.

(John, Teacher, St. Carthage's)

Framework 2012 proposed teachers would, for the first time, engage in continuous assessment of their own students for certification. This represents a significant shift in the practice of Irish teachers, from a position where assessment of student exam work has been historically outsourced to an independent examinations body. Now, the classroom teacher would have a hand in directly informing the certified achievements of their JC students. Liz, the JC Coordinator at Woodville, sees this as a positive step in freeing the teacher to direct classroom teaching and learning in ways not previously possible:

I think getting rid of assessment is the best thing, and that's what people are most fearful of. Because getting rid of assessment *you have the freedom now to actually think about what you're going to teach*.

Finally, participants are enthusiastic about letting go of the subject focussed system as it does not reward the breadth and depth of student experience at JC. Compartmentalising students into discrete subject units is not reflective of the holistic school experience, nor is it reflective of wider society:

Well I think it's a good thing because first of all...boxing ...em ...off subjects in their individual box [...] *life isn't all boxed off* in home economics today and something else [...] You see it with the kids growing up ...from when they come in as different first years....and you see them growing...now...so for me it's not about home economics or maths orthese are side-line issues...you know...eh...now I don't mean to be dismissive because all the subject areas are in their own part of the jigsaw essential elements of ...of the development and growth...we wouldn't have them in the curriculum if they weren't [...] But it's...*it's about the total growth of the child.*

(Principal, Kenwood)

Key points:

- The current assessment system is not fair on students. The proposals in JC reform are fairer
- Removing the emphasis on assessment as an event at the end of third year frees the teacher to teach
- Subject ownership comes second to the holistic development of the student
- Actors are making these assumptions based on their own values around assessment and education, but also based on their perspectives of the current system

5.4.2. External criticism for JC reform

5.4.2.1. Embracing the new – capacity and support

Nobody likes a change.

(Patricia, Teacher, Woodville)

When in the critical space, teachers are uncertain that the capacity currently exists in the system to successfully embrace JC reform. One suggested reason is that teachers are fearful of change; the sense of uncertainty around the reform proposals only serving to fuel this fear. A further aspect of capacity, alluded to by Stephen (JC Coordinator, St. Carthage's) is the need for a greater sense of professionalism in the system. He calls for a shift from a managerial model of professionalism to a more democratic approach, where teachers are given more autonomy than is currently offered:

Democratic professionalism has to come into play ...where they're the people in charge [teachers]...if we're that great and if this ...if this....if this eh Junior Cycle is going from the ground up ...okay fair enough but *leave us to it as professionals.*

Teachers stressed their need for support when enacting JC reform. They hope for meaningful CPD that provides clarity around their concerns, particularly in the area of assessment. Their need for support also extends to advocacy of champions within the system. Elaine, Christine and Joan from Kenwood are critical of the representation of JC reform at a national level. They emphasise the need for the voice of those in favour of reform to be heard. Expanding on Elaine's comment cited earlier, the following discussion is of interest:

- Elaine: I think it's a really needed change and I think it's a really positive change, but em, you know, I feel *that voice isn't heard* and you know, *there's nobody saying that out there*, and I think that would be a concern [...] the unions are probably being spoken to and the NCCA but *they're not talking to teachers*, they really aren't speaking directly to teachers, or to network schools, who've had the opportunity, who probably know maybe a little bit more about that than others. Like, there's no, we don't seem to have, *I don't know who our voice would be*.
- Joan: The media wants ...
- Christine: *The media[*rolls her eyes*]*
- Elaine: Yeah, the negative.
- Joan: The negative voice. *I think that's powered by unions* [...]They do tend to hype things.

Key points:

- Capacity in the system is lacking due to a perceived fear of change and lack of teacher autonomy
- There is an apparent tension between a desire for autonomy in enacting JC reform and support, at a system level, for champions of change. Actors are critical of the lack of support they are receiving in terms of information, training and advocacy
- Lack of advocacy has been linked to negativity in the media and teacher union influence

5.4.2.2. Letting go – assessment, subjects, 'the exam'

Actors struggling to let go of external assessment for certification are critical for a number of reasons. Firstly, they believe teachers responsible for assessing students' work could be biased, and this could lead to undue pressure from different groups. In particular, they cited the potential influence of school leaders and parents:

It's really easy for a teacher to go, just to add, just fifteen percent on and make them all in the forties and fifties instead of the twenties and pop them into a new band,

and I won't like, I've had kids sitting on eighty four and thirty nine percent before and I will not give somebody a pass, if they are not deserving it [...] Will we end up like going, *your Vice Principal is coming in and he's saying*, eh, 'Sharon, the Science [grades] down the road and the Science overall are really high and yours are really low and', sure here, I'll bump them up by ten percent?

(Sharon, Teacher, Woodville)

I feel *I'm very exposed personally*, em, like for example, you know, we're a very small community here and I feel if I was down at the local supermarket or whatever, picking my lunch, that I could be approached and say, why was my son a 'B' and not an 'A', you know, and I feel very personally exposed, *it's not like the Department [of Education] this kind of anonymous person* who has graded your son or daughter[...] I think that's the bit that makes me the most nervous, that I think I, em, as I said, *I'm just very exposed, I think, to parents.*

(Elaine, Teacher, Kenwood)

The fragmented introduction of JC subjects is criticised. Liz, JC Coordinator at Woodville, thinks this approach will bolster the already high level of subject ownership in the system. As new subjects come on stream, with reduced hours, teachers may fight to preserve the knowledge of their disciplines. They may argue to hold onto their subject knowledge in new specifications, to the detriment of reform efforts aimed at incorporating skills and knowledge into the curriculum:

But you go back to subjects - Home Economics, we won't get rid of the science of nutrition or the food science because then, God forbid, people might think we're not an academic subject up there with Science and all the others, y'know, so we teach that well and we'll hang onto that. Science the same will say they don't want to get rid of stuff to Geography, Geography'll say, y'know, and that's what happens, *everybody just goes into their corners* and they say 'we're not getting rid of anything'.

There is a struggle amongst some teachers to lose the emphasis on the final exam. Fiona and Jacinta, teachers from Woodville, are particularly critical of the proposals for continuous assessment. They argue the Junior Cert exam is a useful preparation for the Leaving Cert and a shift away from this could damage this preparation. In an interesting conversation, both teachers reveal a lot about their perspectives on the outgoing system and its assessment structures:

Interviewer: Is there anything that isn't there [*points to flash cards*] that concerns you about the new JC coming in?

Fiona: I think my main concern is the impact it will have when we move up to Leaving Cert.

Interviewer: OK...

Fiona: That would be the big concern for me, in terms of like, exam preparedness and the kind of expectations that are there. Because, *the Junior Cert [exam] is great practice for the Leaving Cert*, the actual, the whole process of the thing, y'know it is good practice and I would worry that might get lost and then students coming to Leaving Cert might be overwhelmed by the fact that *it all comes down to the final exam* and they're not going to get by on work done throughout the year as well. That really concerns me.

Jacinta: Yes....that is a big concern and it's great for the kids who are struggling to have that 40% in the new JC reform, y'know, continuous assessment, *40% in the bag and then do the rest as an exam*. But when it comes to the LC, *they are going to be absolutely thrown by all these exams*, state exams, y'know, and all that pressure and at LC level, they never will have had a practice before and they will find that difficult to not have *that continuous assessment as a safety net*.

Fiona: I think, like, what the Junior Cert, personally I think prepares them well for is *sitting in an exam situation and having to write for, y'know quite a long period of time* [..] I understand like there will be assessments in that, fit into the new JC, but I would be worried about the, maybe forming a habit of writing for, I suppose for long periods of time. Like I know it's something we've talked about ourselves [looks to Jacinta]...

Jacinta: Yeah, yeah...

Fiona: That you know then when it comes down the LC exam that you have to sit and write for three hours that getting out of that habit might, *it might just overwhelm them again*.

Key points:

- The current system separates the teacher from assessment for certification. The proposed changes in *Framework 2012* would bring the teacher into this process and reduce the focus on 'the exam'. Teachers fear this could leave them exposed. They also feel it could leave students overwhelmed
- Changes in JC reform may lead to further compartmentalising of teachers into subject specialisms, as they try to justify and hold onto their subject knowledge. Introducing new subjects in a fragmented way has not helped in this regard

5.4.2.3. The struggle to ‘know’ – national roll out of JC reform

Participants are critical of the management of JC reform at a national level. They are struggling to know whether appropriate action has been taken by:

The DES – teachers are uncertain whether the DES took the right approach introducing JC reform. They are concerned aspects of the reform have been rushed, without necessary time and space for consultation with and by teachers. They are struggling to know whether JC reform will work in practice. This is inextricably linked to criticisms of lack of clarity, mixed messages and the fragmented introduction of the *Framework*:

I have this real concern that people are going to see Junior Cycle reform next year as being, only the English teachers have to worry about it, and then, only the Irish teachers, and only the Science teachers. It'll move away from being a change of kind of, in methodology and the way we teach, to *just something that individual departments need to worry about* [...], I've always had a concern about this [...] *it's so fragmented that I wonder will we be able to keep everybody on board.*

(Joan, JC Coordinator, Kenwood)

Teacher Unions – actors are critical of the influence of teacher unions within the policy process. They feel teacher unions are holding up the introduction of JC reform, resulting in a loss of momentum for the pilot schools as teachers began to disengage. They believe unions are reacting to ‘a minister who really wants to drive a change through the way in which we do our work’ (Principal, Woodville). They also argue that unions are acting to gain clarity for their members and appropriate supports, particularly in the area of CPD training. Finally, as previously alluded to, teachers feel exposed in assessing their own students for certification. Teacher unions are advocating for their members against this.

Key points:

- Actors are struggling to know if the introduction of JC reform will work in practice. This perspective is influenced in no small part by the national management of JC reform by the DES and teacher unions and promulgated by the media
- The fragmented introduction of JC reform, loss of momentum due to union influence, high levels of contestation over assessment, lack of clarity and support have fuelled criticism

5.4.3. Pragmatism – accession with subversion

Actors within the pragmatic space were neither fully for nor against JC reform. In some cases, they are neither excited enough to be enthusiastic or care enough to be critical. What distinguishes them is that they are not necessarily philosophically on-side, but see it makes sense to go along with things. This could be qualified by them having, at the back of their mind, the likelihood of being quietly and discretely subversive in their enactment of JC reform. It could also be qualified by such actors having a sense of being subversive to the reform process at a national level. Excluding some minor exceptions which shall be presented below, pragmatism was predominantly evident at Woodville.

5.4.3.1. Embracing the new –get on with it, but...

Fiona and Jacinta displayed pragmatic behaviour in their attempts to embrace JC reform. Due to their experiences teaching in the UK, they see JC reform as all about skills, and stress they ‘wouldn’t be intimidated by them [the Key Skills]’. They suggest they will approach teaching of the new course with a bit more freedom, thanks to a perceived reduction in exam pressure. However, their commentary and its tone, suggest a subversion to change:

Fiona: Well I think I'll probably approach it differently in that I won't have the Junior Cert [exam] pressure hanging over, y'know and *I feel like now so much of what I teach I almost have to justify whether it's relevant to the Junior Cert.*

Jacinta: Yeah...

Fiona: So [*shrugs*] *I suppose it'll probably give us a bit more freedom to an extent* [*Jacinta nods in agreement*] *in terms of what we can actually teach to an extent but the problem lies with the teachers trying to shift from all the terminal exams at the end of the year, the exams being corrected by a state body to actually correcting it themselves. Y'know, that's gonna be a big change and that's gonna be, it's gonna be hard to kind of loosen that tie.*

Coupled with Fiona’s interpretations of the exam as serving to develop a habit of sitting and writing, one could argue that although she speaks generally for teachers trying to ‘shift’, she perhaps will have a problem in shifting her own practice to align with the espoused aims of the *Framework*?

Fiona justifies her classroom practice based on relevance to the Junior Cert exam. It is suggested this justification also extends to the student. Elaine, who was enthusiastic about changes in JC, still resigns to the view that students would define their success by grades:

Students want to know where they are [in their learning] and I know you've other forms of assessment and not a final grade like, you've got assessment for learning and things like that but *I think really, students need to be kind of screened, [...] I think in our culture, it's embedded in us, like, from an early age, that A, B, C, [...] it's always been that way.*

(Elaine, teacher, Kenwood)

Others expressed an acceptance of JC reform. Whilst critical of various aspects, they referred to it as something to get on with:

I assume everybody is going to go there, eventually *it will be just the way it's done and that's it, y'know?* (Sharon)

I don't think the capacity is there, which is unfortunate but *it'll have to be there* because.. (Liz)

It's very hard. But, y'know, *it's here, and we have to deal with it, get on with it.*

(Katie)

5.4.3.2. Letting go – assessment...get over it

In the position of pragmatism, one teacher (Katie) stressed similar views on assessment to many others. Although concerned, there was an air of compliance to her views. She did not feel strong enough to outright reject JC reform, and felt this issue was hers to get over, as opposed to something to be addressed at a system level:

Katie: Ehm, I suppose the assessing your own students, personally I would think would be a bit of an issue.

Interviewer: And why would you say that Katie?

Katie: I suppose just the basic things like if you were in like, a rural enough, small enough town, you're going to bump into parents, the usual story, they're knowing you're assessing their students or you could be living on the road near some of the students and *I know that's something you have to get over... it would be something that would be in the back of my mind now, [...]* and *it mightn't be an issue*, but it's just something that I would be thinking of.

There is a sense of accession from Katie when discussing something that, to others, was a very emotive issue. Whilst Katie may not be philosophically on side with assessment changes, she sees this as her issue and is accepting of what may come.

5.4.3.3. Know – external monitoring valued

In the struggle to know whether they were ‘doing’ JC reform correctly, there were a number of teachers who acquiesced towards external monitoring to affirm their work. They placed a value on being observed and inspected, and saw DES intervention as a safety net against biased practices. Whilst seeming to go along with the idea of continuous assessment, Fiona still expresses a desire for an external influence to let her know that she is conforming to a standard:

Well I think it's fair enough to, y'know, regular assessment in class, which is what we would do anyway I suppose [J agrees] and, y'know, I'm happy enough to do that and maybe if there was some work going towards a final overall grade, like something along the lines of coursework or a project or something, then I would be happy to assess those sorts of things but I wouldn't want the students' final, like, outcome to be all my assessment. I would want, y'know, input from somebody else and...I suppose moderation really.

Teachers also put value on moderation for reassurance. Elaine (Kenwood) emphasised that “we’re very professional in this school and I think, you know we would look, whatever the Department decides, *I think we would look at moderating amongst ourselves*”. She values moderation as a means to removing any biases teachers would have in grading. Some teachers valued DES intervention to keep them on track as teachers. Katie was grateful to have recently received a DES subject inspection in another school, as she believed “*You sort yourself out when you have a subject inspection*”.

Key points:

- In the pragmatic space, actors may be subversive, due to not being aligned with the meaning of proposed changes in JC reform
- This lack of alignment is pointedly noted vis a vis the benefits of teachers engaging with assessment for certification
- ‘The exam’ is an ever-pervasive lens through which teachers justify classroom practice and students justify success
- Actors in the pragmatic space are happy to ‘get on’ with JC reform. They could arguably be ‘swayed’ towards positive enactment with JC reform if they are supported through, for example, monitoring. Conversely, they may subvert towards criticism if they perceive they are being left alone to set standards around assessment

5.4.4. Anomalous interpretations

In a small number of cases, the interpretations of participants did not neatly 'fit' when seen through the lenses of internal enthusiasm, external criticism and pragmatism. However, these anomalous positions provide an important layer of illumination in theorising JC enactment.

5.4.4.1. External enthusiasm

Some participants showed enthusiasm for JC reform at a system level. Their enthusiasm was mostly linked to changes in assessment. The Principal and JC Coordinator from Woodville were enthusiastic about a move away from the current system, saying it would free teachers from 'teaching to the exam' and, given the lesser importance of the Junior Cert in modern society, this was acceptable. Another teacher attributed his excitement about continuous assessment to his own beliefs that continuous assessment is fairer on students (John, St. Carthage's). Finally, there was a sense of enthusiasm for being at the forefront of educational innovation. Stephen (JC Coordinator, St. Carthage's), scintillatingly captured this feeling: "the buzz...because this is something new....this is pioneering ...this is going somewhere do you know what I mean? And I want to be part of that". The aspirations of these actors reflect a greater level of shared meaning with the underlying principles of the *Framework* than others in the study. The principles of choice and flexibility, engagement and participation, inclusive education and creativity and innovation are reflected in their opinions.

5.4.4.2. Confused and fixed educational discourses

Throughout data collection, a number of statements by participants somewhat 'jarred' with my analysis. Different participants, although seeming to advocate for JC reform and its possibilities, seemed to hold very fixed perspectives on the student that perhaps conflict with the underlying principles of JC. Elaine (Kenwood) sees great potential for JC reform to develop students with special educational needs at the weak and gifted ends of the spectrum:

...the Key Skills are just ideal for students with special needs and they're really going to, you know, like, say for example working with others for a student who is on the ASD spectrum, autism spectrum, they're really going to benefit from that [...] but also for my sixth years [...] I notice the gifted end of my sixth year higher level English class, they don't work well together, you know, so I, it's not just *the lowest*, you know, or *weakest*, it's also the kind of, the *really strong* students.

Whilst Elaine speaks enthusiastically about JC reform, her descriptions of maximum benefit for ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ students suggest fixed views on ability. There is a tension between this view and the underlying principle of ‘inclusion’ in the *Framework*, which says “the educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all” (DES, 2012, p.4).

There was evidence of confused discourses around the purpose of examinations, as represented by Fiona and Jacinta (Woodville). There was also evidence of confused discourses from the Principal of Woodville, who in describing their strategy for establishing a public image, said:

So we were driving, we kept talking about academic excellence, that was a mantra for us and for teachers when they were recruited, *we want academic excellence, to achieve high standards, and we were going to send out the message that this is a really good school, that kids will achieve high* and, that was part of our, ehm, part of our kind of marketing drive if you like, part of our philosophy in starting up.

This value for academic excellence resonates with the beliefs of Fiona and Jacinta that the current system helps improve exam performance. Aligning academic excellence solely with ‘goodness’ in schooling suggests a tension between the purpose of schooling as seen by the Principal and the underlying principles of JC reform. Whilst pursuit of excellence is enshrined in the principles of the *Framework*, this is not limited to academic excellence.

Key points:

- Some actors demonstrate a belief in the system. This belief is by dint of their desire to move away from the current structures. There is an innate desire amongst some to be involved in a meaningful and pioneering change
- A number of fixed and confused educational discourses around student abilities and the purposes of schooling were evident. These conflict with the underlying principles of JC reform

The first two research questions were:

What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site?

How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform?

The previous section addressed the second feature of enactment, interpretation, under the organising concept of struggle. I have introduced three policy positions and demonstrated

how actors have interpreted JC reform from the positions of enthusiasm, criticism and pragmatism. A summary of their interpretations is provided in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Summary of interpretations of JC reform from different policy positions

	Policy positions	Criticism (External)	Pragmatism	Enthusiasm (Internal)
Struggle to	Let go	<p>Assessment: vulnerability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposing the teacher - Unfair on the student, leaving them overwhelmed <p>Subject ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compartmentalising teachers - Subject knowledge over skills 	<p>Assessment: get over it, sense of accession/compliance</p>	<p>Assessment: autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freeing the teacher - Fairer on the student <p>Subject ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total growth of the child is what matters
	Embrace the new	<p>Capacity in the system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear of change - Not enough autonomy for teachers from top-down <p>Lack of support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaningful training - Clarity <p>Advocacy for champions at a national level</p>	<p>Get on with it but exam speaks all</p>	<p>Student benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills development - Creativity - Love of learning <p>Teacher benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration - Positive classroom dynamic
	'Know'	<p>National policy management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DES: fragmented introduction, lack of clarity and consultation <p>Teacher unions: slowing momentum</p>	<p>External monitoring valued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DES interventions - Moderation 	<p>In-school management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feel supported by JC Coordinator

The third research question was:

Why have they engaged in these ways?

It is to this question we now turn. Next, I present the contexts that have influenced actors' interpretations of JC reform and its translation into practice.

5.5. Contextual dimensions of influence

The Oxford English Dictionary (2016) defines context as:

“The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood”.

With regards to enactment of JC reform, context is taken to mean the circumstances that form the setting for the interpreting of JC reform and its translation into practice. Further, it is in terms of these circumstances that we can fully understand participants' engagement (or lack thereof) with JC reform. In this study, two contextual dimensions have influenced the enactment of JC reform. These dimensions, and the specific associated contexts, were:

School contexts— These influenced, for the most part, translation of JC reform into practice. Of most influence were the contexts of practitioner values and 'in-school' policy management.

System contexts – These influenced, for the most part, interpretations of JC reform. Of most influence were curriculum policy and 'national' management of policy in the JC reform process.

Each of these contexts are now considered in turn. I offer an account of what makes each of them a context, i.e. how they have influenced interpretations and translations of JC reform. I consider some unique features of each context, including nuances identified at different points in the data. Whilst I present each of them individually, I do acknowledge an inherent difficulty in separating contexts. Contexts, and their inter-relationships, exist in a state of dynamism (Ball et al, 2012, p.21). For example, policy decisions at school level can be value-driven, values are often revealed through reactions to curriculum policy, and so on. However, to attempt to heuristically view the contexts, and leading to a theoretical model which demonstrates why they 'matter', I treat each as stand-alone.

5.5.1. Contextual dimensions influencing translation – school contexts

5.5.1.1. Values

Values were probably the most difficult of the contexts to separate, for they permeated many aspects of JC enactment. However, they were most influential on translation of JC reform in schools.

Values of actors became evident when considering the purpose of the curriculum and its associated structures. Values informed criticism and enthusiasm towards changes in assessment. Liz, who advocated for assessment as freeing teachers to teach and students to experience a less constrained JC education, reveals her own educational values, aligned with these views:

I would have been thinking, y'know, a teacher who teaches a person gets good results for the students. Whereas now I'm very much of the opinion that *a good teacher is a teacher who brings about the development in all aspects for that student.*

(Liz, JC Coordinator, Woodville)

In St. Carthage's, John identified a belief in continuous assessment informing his enthusiasm for the changes proposed. Stephen talks of his belief that JC reform is a pioneering system change and also for the experience of his colleagues and students in school. All of these participants, amongst others, advocate for the benefits to students and teachers in JC reform. Conversely, there were instances when values informed criticisms of JC reform. Fiona and Jacinta (Woodville) speak of the value of developing a habit of writing for Leaving Cert through completing the Junior Cert exam, and the demerits of continuous assessment. Whether in reference to the current or new curriculum, belief in the system is a powerful value.

A strong service orientation is evident as a value. This sense of service is extended by teachers to their students. Elaine's humility in asserting that JC reform is not all about her demonstrates a selfless value that it is more about her students and colleagues. Frank and Jackie share this value:

My motto in all the classes is, is a duty of service. It's what, how do I serve the students today? How do I serve them tomorrow?

(Frank, Teacher, St. Carthage's)

It's important to do the maximum [for students], no matter how much effort it takes on the part of the teacher.

(Jackie, Teacher Kenwood)

Sharon and Patricia are critical of the potential for biased assessment by teachers and lack of fairness for students, but affirming of a fairer way for assessing students than a one day exam event. Even in their criticisms of the current system and proposed changes, they are demonstrating a value of service to students.

A service orientation is evident amongst school leaders and JC Coordinators. Liz's sense of disappointment at Woodville's shallow depth of translation is evidence of her desire to serve the staff and students to the best of her ability. Stephen speaks passionately about the "buzz" of getting staff and students collaborating at St. Carthage's. Joan speaks about her love of the changes she is experiencing as JC Coordinator and how "the things that are really important to me are making a difference for the students and making a difference for your colleagues (sic)" (Joan, JC Coordinator, Kenwood). The Principal reveals the joy he feels from seeing the growth of his staff and students:

My main focus is children.. my life is about...em...you know it's *about enjoying the growth of children in front of your eyes* and development but now, as Principal, em...I have a double joy which is *to see young teachers grow and develop* [...] and I'm looking at these people growing up and maturing as phenomenal ...in front of my eyes....and...and....you can't understand the...*the joy that's in your heart to see these people grow in front of you....your own people*...you know, it's a lovely thing.

(Principal, Kenwood)

Fiona and Jacinta (Woodville) also demonstrated a sense of service to students, but they believe the outgoing system supports students best. Their values serve to reinforce the policy intentions of the Junior Cert curriculum versus the principles of JC.

Nuances of values and depth of translation

From these examples, and many others, it is clear that values of actors permeate their interpretations and translation of JC reform. They value and are committed to serving students and teachers in their school communities. However, this does not ensure they have experienced a deep translation. The one school which experienced a deep, transformative change of practice was Kenwood. What is interesting here is the evidence which suggests the values of the Principal, JC Coordinator and teachers all inform a shared

meaning regarding the purpose of curriculum. All are aligned on the affordances of JC reform for students and teachers. All are in agreement with the importance of service to teachers through developing a professional culture of collaboration and conversations about teaching and learning, as well as service in developing the student as a whole person. There was also a sense of shared meaning amongst the JC Coordinator and teachers of St. Carthage's, as they see the importance of serving students and teachers through engagement and collaboration. However, there was less of a school-wide transformation at this school. Why?

The answer lies in the mechanisms for sharing of meaning (or lack thereof) that were evident at each school site. These mechanisms differed from school to school, but were most evident for sharing meaning between the school Principal and teachers of Kenwood. This, along with other examples across school sites, shall be considered in the context of 'In-school' Policy Management.

5.5.1.2. 'In-school' policy management

The context of in-school policy management has directly influenced depth of translation. All teachers demonstrated a willingness and desire to engage with JC reform. Part of this desire can be attributed to the influence of the JC Coordinators. At each school, the support they provided to colleagues and school management is commendable. However, this support alone was not enough to result in deep translation of JC reform.

In the case of Kenwood, the in-school management of policy, at all levels, was inextricably linked with values. The Principal is full in his praise of teachers and their willingness to engage with change. He affirms the importance of bringing all the staff on a journey:

The ground is fertile it's just a matter of getting the seeds to grow and there's loads of them growing but *it's trying to get them all up at this stage do you know?*

The JC Coordinator and Principal both recognise the importance of leadership at all levels in the school for this to happen:

You can't underestimate the value of *a little bit of leadership* going on around the place...you know...now I'm not saying that that leadership has to come from the top...it doesn't really matter where it comes from.

(Principal)

He's been very, the Principal is great. He is a very, *this school is a great model of distributed leadership* [...] He's kind of given me the *autonomy* and whatever *supports* I've needed to roll this out across the staff and has allowed us to, I mean, we've been asked to speak at a lot of things, and *to share our journey* with a lot of other schools, and *he's facilitated that for us* which has been great.

(Joan, JC Coordinator)

Through the mechanisms outlined previously, The Principal and JC Coordinator have managed to move all of the staff towards a deep translation of JC reform. The circumstances they created through in-school policy management inspired a learning culture of openness, of willingness to try and share and enthusiasm for change, built on a foundation of service to the students and each other.

At St. Carthage's, the model for in-school policy management has been based on selective innovation. This led to positive outcomes for those involved in terms of their own personal changes in practice and their perspectives on JC reform. However, it has also led to a sense of isolationism for these teachers, and marginalised those who didn't engage.

In summary, the evidence suggests when the management of in-school policy leads to a shared meaning of the purposes of the curriculum across school levels of policy enactment, a deep translation occurs. When this management of policy applies to the whole school, this leads to a school-wide deep translation. If applied to a select group, the depth of translation applies only to that group. This idea shall be revisited in Chapter Six.

5.5.2. Contextual dimensions influencing interpretation – system contexts

5.5.2.1 National policy management

The national management of JC reform has evoked criticisms from many participants in this study. Actors, who were otherwise enthusiastic about JC reform in their own schools, became highly critical when considering its management at a macro level. Claims of fragmentation, lack of advocacy for champions in the system and negativity levelled at the reform process in the media left many participants wanting with regards to the future of JC reform. Even participants such as Liz and Stephen, who demonstrate belief in the system and what it is trying to achieve, are critical of the national management of JC reform. It seems participants require significant convincing from the macro level before they can register enthusiasm in this regard.

5.5.2.2. Curriculum policy

The curriculum policy context has had one of the biggest influences on interpretations of JC reform. Many criticisms of the outgoing system relate to assessment structures, whilst enthusiasm for changes proposed in JC are positively described vis a vis a departure from these structures.

The Junior Cert curriculum is criticised as constraining teachers and students due to an overburdened knowledge workload leaving no time for valuable skills development. It is also seen as constraining and compartmentalising teachers within subject specialisms.

Conversely, moving away from this system enthuses actors, as they recognise the potential for curricular freedom and a fairer system for teachers and students. This perspective is also informed by participants' values regarding the purposes of education. In these instances, there is evidence of the values of certain actors informing a meaning of the purpose of JC that reflects some of the underlying principles of the *Framework*.

The strongest curricular influence on the interpretations of actors relates to 'the exam'. Teachers define their practice by it and, by proxy, their students' success. Many criticisms of the current system are in relation to the undue pressure put on students and teachers by the exam. For many, enthusiasm for JC reform stems from a desire to move away from this. However, this departure also raises grave concerns. A new context, which has been constructed from the JC reform process, is the duality of autonomy/vulnerability teachers feel when faced with assessing their own students for certification. Some of the most enthusiastic teachers see this as a bridge too far. Bringing teachers into this process leaves them exposed and vulnerable, as well as leaving the profession vulnerable to poor and biased practices of untrustworthy teachers. The outgoing Junior Cert, whilst arguably negative in various ways, does not pose these threats. This vulnerability serves as a disabling context, preventing an enthusiastic interpretation of JC reform for many participants.

5.6. Summary of chapter

The first three research questions for this study were:

- ***What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site?***
- ***How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform?***
- ***Why have they engaged in these ways?***

These questions have been addressed in this chapter. I have identified the features of enactment as interpretation and translation of JC reform (the *what*). The concept of depth was used to represent the varying levels of translation of JC reform into practice. The policy positions of enthusiasm, criticism and pragmatism were constructed as a means of representing the varied interpretations of JC reform described under the organising concept of struggle (the *how*). Finally, I have presented a number of contextual dimensions that have influenced the interpretations and translations of actors within and across school sites (the *why*). School contexts were identified as influencing depth of translation, whilst system contexts influenced the interpretive struggle. Nuances of context were considered, with suggestions that in certain instances, values influence the development of a shared meaning regarding the purposes of the curriculum. There is evidence to support this occurrence in places at a school and system level. A disabling aspect of the curriculum policy context, autonomy/vulnerability in assessment, has also been proffered.

The final research question for this study was - ***how has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered?*** In chapter six, I present a theoretical model constructed from the analysis of the results which attempts to answer this question. This model serves to unify participant's interpretation and translation of JC reform in context through a final organising concept – *contextual leverage*.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion on the results and analysis presented in Chapter 5. The review of literature in Chapter 3 identified the need to understand how agents at the micro level of policy enactment engage with the complexity of curriculum change. The value of applying a contextual lens to this engagement was considered, and pursued in the presentation of the results and analysis. The discussion chapter is presented in three overarching parts. In the first part, the final research question is addressed through presenting a context-centric theoretical model for JC enactment. In the second part, spaces for negotiation and movement within the model are discussed, as I consider the potential to make context work for teachers and schools in realising transformative change. Finally, the model is tested in light of system responses since the time of data collection.

6.1. A context-centric model of JC enactment

Strauss & Corbin define a theory as “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integral framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (1998, p.15). In Chapter 5, I presented the results from three phases of data analysis, considering the features of enactment, the different policy positions taken up by participants and the contextual dimensions influencing JC enactment within and across school sites. A number of categories were formed during analysis and unified under several organising concepts. These organising concepts are presented below and linked to the espoused research questions for this study:

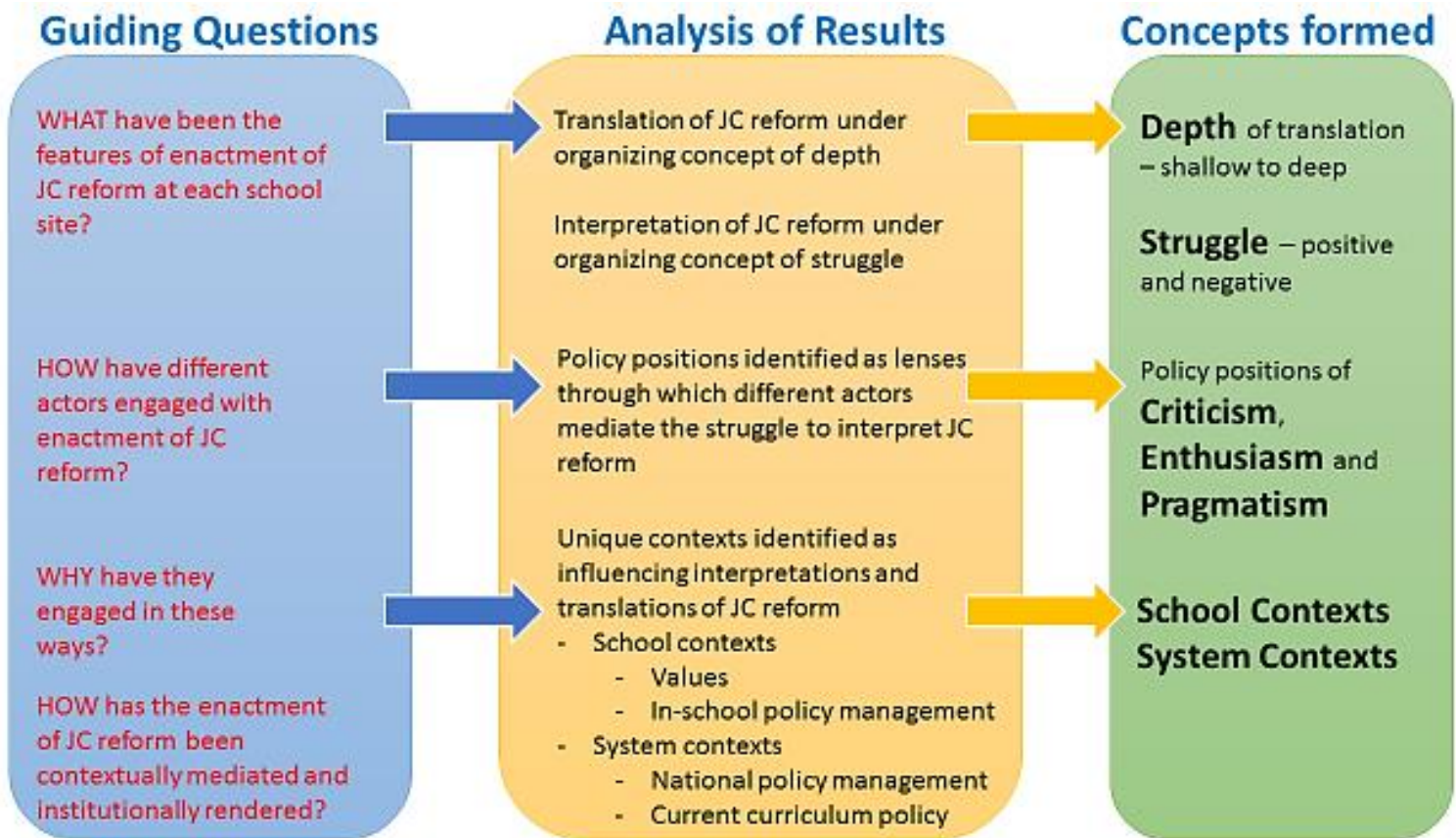


Fig. 18. From guiding questions to concepts formed

The final research question for the study is *how has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered?* To answer this, I applied a level of abduction to the analysis that required both logic and imagination. I had to apply a new rule to the concepts, one that would provide clarity on a type or case that served to answer the research question in a way that drew on the already developed concepts. This process happened at a theoretical level, engendering a new concept through a creative process (Reichertz, 2007, p.219). This final concept served to connect, interconnect, and unify the above concepts into a theoretical framework to understand how JC reform has been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered. That is, the concept of *contextual leverage*.

6.1.1. What does 'leverage' mean?

Context is defined as *“the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood”* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). The challenge in the policy enactment literature, to which this research responds, is the dematerialising of these circumstances when reporting on policy processes. Or as Thrupp & Lupton (2006) refer to, the “bleaching of context”. To realise societal aspirations for our educational system, reform strategies must address the context of teaching and learning, build capacity in schools and encompass strong system leadership (Hopkins, 2009). I suggest attending to context at a school and system level as a positive way to realise reform strategies. According to Ball et al. (2012), and confirmed by this study, context is not just a backdrop against which policy work ‘happens’. It is ever present as an active force, which can be used to shift, or ‘leverage’ individuals and schools towards transformative change. It is in terms of context being a force that leverage can be fully understood.

The two greatest contextual dimensions influencing JC enactment were:

- School contexts
- System contexts

Next, I consider what it means to ‘leverage’ school and system contexts. I summarise with a definition for contextual leverage.

6.1.1.1. Leveraging of school contexts

School contexts activated the translation of JC reform into practice. The specific school contexts influencing this translation included:

- In-school policy management
- Values

The concept of ‘leverage’ refers to how these contextual dimensions can be manipulated, shaped and moulded to encourage movement of teachers towards changing their practice and challenging their epistemological assumptions. In other words, how different mechanisms can be used to change the circumstances in which policy is ‘done’. In the right circumstances, actors achieve agency to ‘do’ policy in deep and meaningful ways.

Positive leveraging of school contexts occurs when the management of in-school policy, either perceived or actual, leads to a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum within

and across levels of micro enactment. This is pointedly evidenced in Kenwood wherein the Principal, JC coordinator and teachers, all have engaged with the reform process as part of a common journey. They are aligned in their positive thinking on their schools' enactment of JC reform. They recognise potential for teachers and students, and are positively affirming of the schools' capacity to enact this change. A shared meaning has been realised. A number of key mechanisms have been in play at Kenwood to facilitate this shift, linked to how policy is managed at school level. For these reasons, the staff of Kenwood have experienced a deep translation of JC reform into practice. This effect has been less pronounced for the other two schools in the study, for reasons considered later.

6.1.1.2. Leveraging of system contexts

The system contexts influencing participants' interpretations of JC reform were:

- Curriculum policy
- National policy management of the reform process

The concept of 'leverage' in this case refers to how one influences movement towards a position of enthusiasm, criticism or pragmatism when interpreting JC reform. These interpretations are inextricably linked with the translation of the *Framework* into practice, as teachers see their personal capacity, their schools' capacity and the capacity of the system for change through the lens of these interpretations. Conversely, their translation of the *Framework* at times serves to inform their interpretations, as they see the affordances and pitfalls of JC reform, posited at a system level, played out in the crucible of practice. Positive leveraging of system contexts occurs when the management of policy at a national level leads to a shared meaning between policy actors and the system regarding the purposes of JC curriculum.

A positive leveraging of system contexts moves participants towards a belief in the changes proposed in JC reform. Whilst this does not suggest a direct translation of the intended curriculum into practice, it does support an alignment between the underlying principles of the intended curriculum at a macro level and the epistemologies of actors at a micro level. This could potentially lead to a richer engagement with what it means to educate. A lack of positive leveraging of system contexts sees participants critical of JC reform. They cannot

align the vision for changes in the system with their own views on how JC reform has been, and will be, played out.

In summary, a definition for contextual leverage is offered:

The management of policy to bring about a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum at a school and system level.

Grounded in the data, the constructed concepts and the unifying concept of leverage, a theoretical model for contextual mediation and institutional rendering of JC reform is proposed:

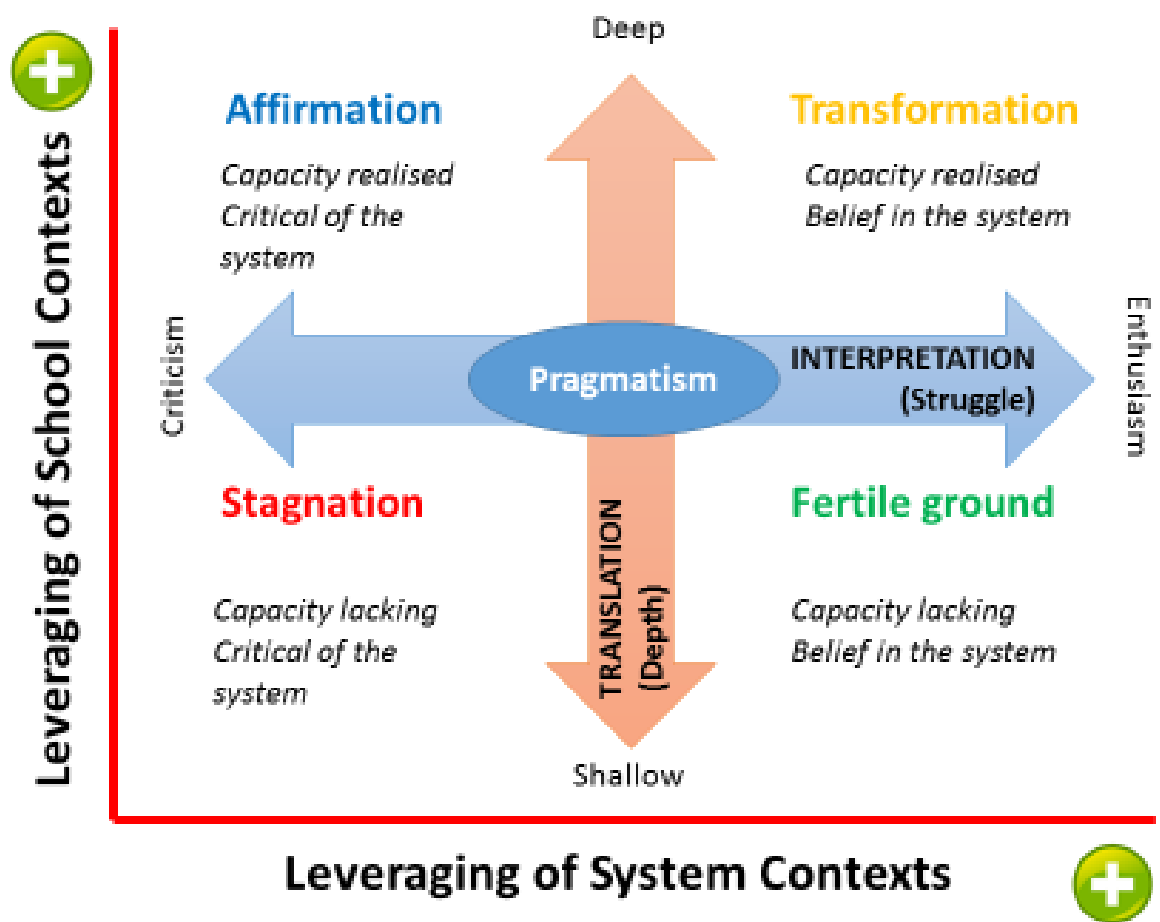


Fig. 19. Theoretical model for contextual mediation and institutional rendering of JC reform

Every concept constructed from the data earns relevance in this theoretical model. As a core concept, 'leverage' serves to integrate the theory of enactment of JC reform in context and render it dense and saturated (Holton, 2007, p.279). Leverage not only serves to reinforce that context matters, but explains *how* it matters and *why*. The connections, and interconnection, between the concepts are as follows:

- ✓ Depth of translation is connected to the concept of leverage as the more positively school contexts are leveraged, the deeper the translation and vice versa.
- ✓ Policy positions are connected to the organising concept of struggle to interpret JC reform, as they are the lens through which the struggle is both positively and negatively realised. Pragmatism is a fluid state; a position from which actors can be 'swayed' left or right, depending on the leveraging of system contexts. Struggle and policy positions are connected with the concept of leverage as the more positive the leveraging of system contexts, the more positive the struggle and the greater the enthusiasm for JC reform, and vice versa.

Priestley et al. (2013, p.188-189) present a view of agency as achieved within context which resonates with the outcomes of this thesis:

Agency, in other words, is not to be understood as something people can have; it is something that people do. It denotes a 'quality' of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves. Viewing agency in such terms helps us to understand how humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints, but also how individuals are enabled and constrained by their social and material environments.

The model presented offers a theory, grounded in the experience of participants, about their quality of engagement with the contexts influencing JC enactment. The differences in the quality of engagement with contexts across the four quadrants illuminates how teachers can act as creative agents of change in their interpretation and translation of policy. Further, it demonstrates how a lack of positive leveraging results in an agency that serves to reinforce the policy intentions of the current curriculum, as opposed to the underlying principles of the new JC. The model attempts to demonstrate achievement of agency by certain actors in spaces where positive leveraging of context across the levels of micro enactment has occurred. It also attempts to explain how others are inhibited when this positive leveraging does not happen.

6.1.2. Spaces of policy enactment within the model

There are four distinct enactment spaces within the model. These are

- Stagnation
- Affirmation
- Fertile Ground
- Transformation

I now describe each quadrant as seen through the lens of school and system contexts. I describe the characteristic nature of each quadrant, with respect the degree of contextual leverage occurring in each case. I consider how, given the (lack of) positive leverage occurring, actors have engaged with context in ways that both enable and constrain the realisation of the principles of JC reform.

6.1.2.1. Stagnation

On balance, Woodville as a school is in *Stagnation*^{xvii}. The defining feature of those in *Stagnation* is a lack of capacity and a low belief in the system. Teachers in *Stagnation* have experienced a minimal and insular enactment of JC reform. They have differing ideas and takes on what 'Staying Well' means for them and their students, and have introduced their own small measures in practice. However, there seems to be a lack of cross-fertilisation of ideas and counter-ideas as evidenced in other schools. This resonates with previous findings on teacher enactment of reforms involving changing practices (Spillane, 1999). When teacher enactment is private and individual, this reduces potential for ongoing inquiry into putting reformers' ideas into practice and thus a lack of capacity for change. Reasons for the lack of capacity include the presence of material contexts that may preoccupy the management of in-school policy at all levels. Policy decisions, in the immediate sense, have become less about opportunities and more about priorities. Previous research (Lupton, 2004; Thrupp, 1999) revealed similar instances where school managers and teachers, responding to perceived disadvantaged contexts, traded-off new initiatives for other valuable activities. This confirms Koyama's view that "human-actor mediators do not act alone" (2010, p.41); the material context joins with human agents in the doing of policy. The physical infrastructure of Woodville, combined with the priorities of establishing the school, have meant the in-school management of policy is focussed on dealing with the immediate rather than aspiring to the purpose of JC curriculum.

Whilst not in every case, many actors at Woodville demonstrate a lack of belief in the system. Reasons for this lack of belief include a perspective of poor policy management at a national level, coupled with a values-driven interpretation of the curriculum. Caught within the history of prior discourses of curriculum and exam structures, or a “cemetery of past truths” (Veyne, 2010, p.39), these actors struggle to contemplate a space in which learning and teaching could be different. They cannot imagine a future in which they or their students are no longer driven to perform in a system built on “insistence of a particular mechanics of objectification and visibility” (Ball et al, 2012, p.139). To conceive this leaves them distrustful of their fellow professionals to assess with integrity, fearful for their students as they progress to Senior Cycle ill-prepared, vulnerable to the weighty expectations to perform from parents, school management and themselves. The influence of curriculum policy is a strong contextual dimension for those in *Stagnation*, leading them to achieve agency which reinforces the policy intentions of the Junior Cert as opposed to the principles of JC. Similar to the findings of Spillane (1999, p. 152), the salience of assessment policy underscores the approaches to teaching for many of these teachers, amplified by the influence of school Principals. Individuals within this quadrant have experienced the least amount of positive leveraging of school and system contexts.

6.1.2.2. Affirmation

For reasons similar to those in *Stagnation*, teachers in this space struggle to accept the changes to assessment proposed and are critical in ways of the management of policy at a national level. However, unlike in *Stagnation*, they are realising their capacity at school level. They positively affirm the practice within their own schools, as evidenced by their deep translation of JC reform. The defining feature of schools and individual’s within this quadrant is that while they see and value the meaning of change lived out within the crucible of practice, they question its management beyond their schools. As pointed out in Chapter 1, “concerns *out there* need to be translated into concerns *in here* if change is to be successful” (Timperley and Parr, 2005, p.245, emphasis added). For those in *Affirmation*, the concerns ‘in here’ have been identified, positively engaged with and there have been successful outcomes, in spite of the still apparent concerns “out there”. Whilst Looney found little empowerment associated with previous Irish curriculum (2001), the experience of actors in *Affirmation* would counter this view at a school level. The epistemologies of these actors have been challenged. Having engaged with JC reform, their expectations of

their students and themselves in the classroom have changed. They are empowered by the curricular freedom afforded to them and their students. Similar to experiences in CfE, JC reform has presented these teachers with an opportunity to reclaim aspects of their professionalism (Mentor & Hulme, 2013, p.176). Their values reflect a strong sense of service towards their students and each other, and they believe they are facilitators of student learning. This is congruent with findings from Biesta et al (2014, p. 629) who found that teachers engaging with CfE held strong beliefs about doing the best by students and maximising their potential, as well as acknowledging their role as teachers had changed. On balance, St. Carthage’s and Kenwood are both in this quadrant but in different respects. Considering the space within the quadrant, a symbolic map for their positions would look as follows:

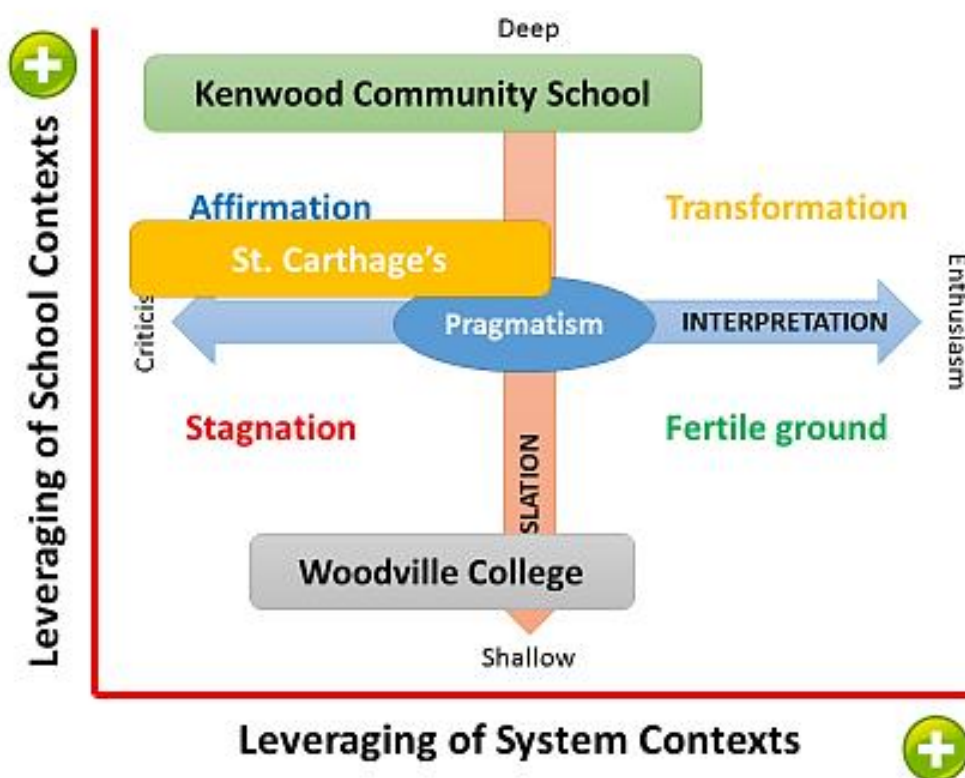


Fig. 20. Positioning of schools within the theoretical model

Due to the positive leveraging of school contexts at Kenwood, they are more strongly positioned within *Affirmation*, possibly even leaning towards *Transformation* (outlined below). The management of in-school policy has served to bring all the staff on the same

journey, resulting in a shared meaning across the different levels of school enactment. A blurring of levels has occurred or, as Drew, Priestley & Michael (2016, p.9) similarly found, “an apparent flattening of hierarchies”. Staff members have been provided with leadership opportunities beyond the classroom, which has had a positive washback. These approaches find resonance in Hayward et al (2004, p.409), where changes in classroom practice were attributed to a sense of synergy stimulated through engagement of several teachers across a school and through an enabling of their autonomy by supportive senior management. These significant “contextual catalysts” (ibid) promote genuine changes in classroom practice. With selective innovation taking place at St. Carthage’s, this leveraging did not take place to the same degree, with unintended consequences arising for teachers both in and outside the project. Emphasis on changing pedagogy, collaborative work, and capacity building through flattening of hierarchies are reflective of a number of the “right drivers” for system reform (Fullan, 2011, p.4). It is not surprising that Kenwood staff are positively affirming of their practice, as these drivers directly influence the culture of the school and the professionalism of teachers. Another right driver, a sense of “systemness” is lacking for those in *Affirmation*, due to less positive leveraging of system contexts.

6.1.2.3. Transformation

Schools or individuals within the space of *Transformation* are realising their capacity and demonstrate a belief in the system for change. The defining feature of this quadrant is a clarity of meaning around the changes in JC reform at both a school and system level. This clarity extends from a lived experience through deep translation at school, and from a values-informed alignment with the principles of the JC curriculum. On balance, there is no full school in this space, however there are a number of individuals. Stephen and Frank from St. Carthage’s, and Joan and the Principal from Kenwood, are in *Transformation*. All these individuals have experienced a transformative change in practice, whether as individuals or as part of a whole-school drive for translation of JC reform. What unites them is their belief in the changes proposed, as they have seen this belief realised in practice. Similar to their colleagues in *Affirmation*, they value service of their students and have shifted in their epistemological assumptions. What sets them apart, however, is their ability to link the positives they see in the school with the broader purpose of JC curriculum. They see JC reform as a necessary, exciting and pioneering change which allows for the total growth of the child and rich development of knowledge and skills. These actors have a personal

conviction regarding the proposed changes in JC, a conviction similarly found in teachers changing their assessment practices in Scotland (Hayward & Spencer, 2010, p.167) – “what they were doing really mattered, [they] were not simply responding to someone else’s priorities”.

Individuals in *Transformation* have experienced the most positive leveraging of school and system contexts. Consequentially, they achieve agency that aligns their values-informed meaning of JC with that of the underlying principles of the *Framework* more than other actors in the study. They also demonstrate less preoccupation with the management of change, which pointedly defines those in *Affirmation* and *Stagnation*. Granted, the individuals within *Transformation* do share some of the concerns of their colleagues around the management of JC reform nationally, but they predominantly have a belief in the system for change.

6.1.2.4. The Fertile Ground

Inspired by the words of the Principal of Kenwood, in this space the ground is fertile and the seeds are sown. It is just a matter of creating the conditions for germination and growth. There was no single school within the *Fertile Ground*, but there were a number of individuals. Liz, Katie and the Principal from Woodville are in this space. The defining feature of the *Fertile Ground* is a sense of belief in change but a lacking of capacity within the school to enact this change. Actors within this space have not experienced positive leveraging of school contexts but, to varying degrees, have experienced a positive leveraging of system contexts. This positive leveraging has stemmed from their own values and experiences, which are aligned with the principles of the JC curriculum. In particular, they are positive regarding the affordances of the JC curriculum for them and their students. Liz and the Principal are particularly enthused about movement away from the trappings of the Junior Cert. Katie, whilst still positive about change, is conservative when it comes to assessment. However, within the pragmatic space, she could potentially be ‘swayed’ if system contexts were appropriately leveraged for her. Fiona and Jacinta, from the same pragmatic position, are less compliant and more subversive in their views on assessment, and are not yet within the *Fertile Ground*. Their views on the purpose of a final examination are deeply rooted in the Junior Cert curriculum and a sense of performance-driven value. For them, more

leveraging is required. Pragmatism is a fluid state, within which the right mechanisms can serve to positively leverage system contexts and root actors firmly within the *Fertile Ground*.

The final research question for the study was ***how has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered?*** The above section has outlined the various quadrants of the theoretical model for contextual mediation and institutional rendering of JC reform. Individual actors and schools have been located within the model, with a rationale for leveraging provided in each quadrant. The potential for further leveraging has also been alluded to. In the next section, I test the model as I consider how leveraging of context could lead to movement of actors and schools within the model.

6.2. Movement within the model

I think the greatest obstacle for bringing in this reform will be the quality of talk we have around it and discussion, and meaningful inservice and training, and trying for people to open up and see the broader things.

(Liz, JC Coordinator, Woodville)

This quote saliently captures the potential to be realised by movement within the theoretical model. Having considered the various quadrants, I now wish to theorise the potential for movement of actors in two directions – horizontally and vertically. I compare and contrast the different spaces, looking at opportunities for contestation and negotiation. In other words, how is it possible to make context work for policy actors as they mediate change processes?

I preface this discussion by concurring with Ball et al (2012, p.148), amongst others, who found that “theorising policy enactment was always going to be complex and slippery and in many ways an incomplete and impossible project”. Whilst this research is closely focussed on contexts that form the setting for JC enactment, I affirm the sense of “slipperiness” felt by others endeavouring to come to terms with policy enactment in schools. Nonetheless, I attempt to use the theoretical model as a heuristic device in considering possibilities for bringing teachers and schools towards a place of transformative change. Whilst it is not the job of this study to provide silver bullets for JC enactment^{xviii}, it is hoped the evidence presented will offer ideas, grounded in the experience of the participants, that others may find relatable when considering ways to leverage context at a school and system level.

6.2.1. Moving vertically

Moving vertically involves a positive leveraging of school contexts. That is, the management of in-school policy to bring about a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum within and across levels of micro enactment. To understand the potential for movement vertically within the model, it is first important to consider the nature of the values position of actors within the bottom half of the model, as well as the modes of policy management that have led to the positioning of those schools within the top and bottom halves.

Teacher values are informed by a number of factors, including but notwithstanding, their beliefs and aspirations. Whilst this study did not attend to the beliefs of teachers in its analysis, a number of aspirational factors identified in the data were congruent with the findings in the literature on teacher agency. For instance, Lasky (2005) found teacher aspirations often focus on the development and welfare of students, and that could lead to agency supportive of student interests (Osborn et al, 1997). Pupils are a powerful motivator for teachers to either accept the status quo or engage with new curricular innovations (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993, Spillane and Jennings, 1997). The sense of service many participants showed to their students is reflective of their aspirations. For example, many teachers saw JC reform as serving the betterment of students, whilst others such as Fiona and Jacinta (Woodville) valued the potential of the Junior Cert to serve students preparing for an exam-heavy Senior Cycle. This reflects how aspirations can lead to agency that can either support policy intentions or run counter to them (Ladwig, 2010).

The Principal of Woodville aspired for the school to be known for academic excellence, to which he equated being a “good school”. Tending towards discourses of excellence (Keddie, Mills & Prendergast, 2011) is another example of aspirational influence on agency. What separates Woodville from other schools is the lack of symmetry in the aspirations and values of actors at school leadership and classroom levels of enactment. Discourses of excellence was not something that strongly resonated with the teachers and JC Coordinator at Woodville (beyond Fiona and Jacinta), but was prevalent in the Principal’s aspirations.

Conversely, the Principal and teachers of Kenwood have a shared meaning of the purpose of JC reform as serving the total development of their students. They also agree that JC reform compliments other worthwhile innovations in the school. Teachers at St. Carthage’s also demonstrate a shared meaning with the JC Coordinator. They see their curricular

innovations developing collegiality amongst participating teachers and curricular freedom for teachers and students.

It is evident, then, that a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum across leadership, intermediary and classroom levels of micro enactment may help to facilitate agency towards a deep translation of JC reform. It is also evident that, when this shared meaning does not exist across levels, there is a lesser quality of engagement of actors with the contexts at play and thus a lower degree of agency for deep translation. This is the case for actors within the spaces of *Stagnation* and *The Fertile Ground*. Finally, it is evident that the meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum arrived at by actors can be informed by their values.

To facilitate vertical movement within the model, one might try to influence the values of actors across levels through policy management. The right type of in-school policy management, serving to achieve actor agency in developing a values-influenced meaning of JC curriculum, shared across levels of enactment is, in essence, positive leveraging of school contexts. To consider how this may occur, it is helpful to explore the characteristics of the schools where it has taken place.

A number of political strategies and actions occurred at the different school sites which, from a critical theory perspective, situated policy actors in both repressive and productive relationships of power. At Kenwood and St. Carthage's, there was a strong sense of innovation, collegiality, sharing of ideas and a sense of comfort around risk-taking, pointedly evidenced in the 'ready-fire-aim' approach amongst the Kenwood staff. Similar characteristics were observed by Priestley et al. (2013) in their studies of teacher agency in schools engaging with CfE. However, they caution against the assumption that teacher agency is solely attributed to these structures, for they found similar dimensions of professional relationships in other schools where teachers did not have the same level of agency. This resonates with the experiences of Kenwood as compared to St. Carthage's. Despite a deeper level of translation evident in the former, there was similar evidence of positive relationships, innovation and sharing of ideas in the latter. However, the difference between these schools, and alluded to by Priestley et al. (ibid) is in the social structures within each school.

At Kenwood, strong emphasis was placed on the blurring of levels within micro enactment. Teachers were given leadership opportunities throughout the school and exposed to

external influences only leaders may experience at other schools. These experiences fed back into the classroom and school, thereby disturbing habitual practices. This disturbance was encouraged by the Principal and supported at intermediary level by the JC Coordinator. This practice brings to mind the compelling commentary of Leithwood et al (1999, p.3), that “outstanding leadership is exquisitely sensitive to the context in which it is exercised”.

As described by Priestley, Biesta & Robinson (2013), a number of relational aspects can enable teachers to achieve agency. These include the orientation of relationships, the degree of symmetry within levels of enactment and the reciprocity across levels. At St. Carthage's, there was a lack of reciprocity across levels and, whilst there was symmetry of support across horizontal ties, this did not extend to the whole staff. At Kenwood, there was a strong sense of reciprocity and symmetry in relationships, with strong horizontal ties forged, bolstered and maintained by the JC Coordinator. In keeping with the axes of the theoretical model, the positive leveraging of school contexts at Kenwood not only attends to the translation of policy in a direct way, but also to the relational structures that may in the future allow teachers to achieve agency leading to a sustained deep translation. All the staff were on the journey. Tapping into staff values will arguably encourage symmetry in relationships and enhance engagement. At St. Carthage's, whilst there has been a certain degree of positive leveraging of school contexts within their pilot project, their select nature of policy management does not provide as strong a scaffold for future -proofing a deep translation of JC reform amongst all staff.

The blurring of levels at Kenwood, as well as the sense of collegiality experienced by actors in Kenwood and St. Carthage's are evidence that actors in these schools have *power to* act as opposed to actions, interactions and negotiations in which *power over* actors is exercised (Stone, 2001). There is an acknowledgement that through collaboration, goals can be achieved. This empowerment was evident at both schools named, but less so at St. Carthage's. The micropolitics at this school resulted in an inclusive environment for those involved in curricular innovations, whilst other staff were marginalised. Although this was not consciously motivated, it has had political significance. An environment exists where some are privileged and others are oppressed (Blase, 1991), and the potential for successful reform efforts is less promising than at Kenwood. This is not to demean the efforts of St.

Carthage's; their curricular innovations were very positive. Also, this was their first effort at JC reform and Kenwood had more established systems of leading innovations at a school wide level. They are at different points in the reform journey (as are Woodville). However, the distinction is important if we are to consider the types of strategies that may help to positively leverage context in ways that will sustain JC reform efforts and avoid the "tragedy of polarized groups" (Briskin et al., 2009, p.193).

At Woodville, there is currently a lack of evidence to suggest empowerment associated with JC reform. Given that staff are in a change space and open to new ideas, there is promise they may experience *power to* act in the future (Blase, 2001). However, some teachers express future concerns of school leadership exercising *power over* them (ibid) through accountability pressures in assessing students. Coupled with the Principals' desire for academic excellence, these may not be ideal ingredients for JC enactment. It might be beneficial for the staff of this school to engage with JC reform through a micropolitics that empowers a broader conception of change than merely adherence to academic excellence. One first step could be to follow the example of the micropolitical strategies and actions evident at Kenwood. These shall be considered next.

A number of practical strategies were evident at Kenwood which, arguably, supported a positive leveraging of context. These included official meeting time for sharing of professional learning around changing practices, coupled with accessing the student and teacher voice at these meetings. Further practical strategies included a decision to **complement other school initiatives** with JC reform and to keep the **focus on the classroom experience**. This serves a double benefit with regards to JC enactment. Firstly, by focusing on the classroom, teachers aim to introduce fundamental changes in their teaching practice. Not only is this seen as necessary in *Framework '15*, but research also tells us that as a core technology of schooling particularly resilient to change (Cohen, 1998, Cuban, 1993), teaching practice needs to be addressed for reform efforts to be successful. Teachers' attention to this aspect of reform efforts is complex (Spillane, 1999). If they are to have a meaningful engagement with the underlying principles of JC reform, research tells us teachers need opportunities to "question, unlearn and discard much of their current, deeply rooted understandings of teaching, learning and subject matter" (Cohen & Barnes, 1993, in

Spillane, 1999, p.154). The classroom focus enables this, as teachers use ideas as policy instruments (Weiss, 1990) for thinking differently about practice. The second benefit of a classroom focus is a de-emphasis on summative assessment. By shifting their focus away from summative assessment, it is likely that Kenwood were less preoccupied with the accountability and vulnerabilities linked to the examination structures of the Junior Cert curriculum. This was evidenced in their lack of concern regarding JC enactment at a school level, however at a system level issues around vulnerability due to summative assessment were raised. This shall be considered in the next section on moving horizontally through the model.

Whilst these may seem like small measures, it is possible that schools within the bottom half of the model could make great strides by adopting some of these strategies. Akin to the building of the ancient pyramids, it is possible to move heavy loads with light apparatus. Whilst it would be naïve to attribute the positive leveraging of context at Kenwood to these strategies alone, it is notable that their usage has led to powerful outcomes in JC enactment. Through structures such as official meeting times, **space for professional conversations** is created. These structures and spaces situate leaders, intermediary and classroom level actors within positive relationships of power. A sense of **openness** is evident amongst staff; a comfort with taking risks and sharing teaching and learning ideas borne out of practice and shared from external opportunities. In this openness, a culture of ideas and counter-ideas of JC practice can flourish. Teachers have the opportunity and authority to speak about curriculum matters at the level of enactment. Giving teachers a voice in this regard positively influences curriculum change (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). Teachers are empowered to find their voice as they embark on a common journey of change with their JC Coordinator and Principal.

Finally, it is important to reference the crucial of the JC Coordinator at the intermediary level of enactment. In all schools, their supporting role was acknowledged and praised. They served as a bridge between levels in terms of communication, management and leadership. Through engaging with the NCCA and other schools at network events, they shared and recontextualised the discourse of JC reform at a level of enactment beyond their own school. They shared and reproduced this discourse with colleagues in school. As agents

within the recontextualising and reproducing fields of discourse, JC Coordinators have opportunities to be partners in the reform process but also to foster this partnership with their colleagues and Principals. Through effective leadership strategies they and their colleagues could find an authoritative voice in this curriculum change (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). Through provision of opportunities across levels, JC Coordinators are uniquely located to engage in and promote a culture of enquiry in their schools and the JC Network. This culture of enquiry attends to school micro-politics, positively shifting the tension between top-down and bottom-up curriculum innovation towards the micro level, whilst respecting teacher voice and professional knowledge (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Zeichner, 2002, in Drew & Priestley, 2016). Also, given their unique positions as intermediary level actors straddling the teacher-leadership divide, JC Coordinators help promote an enquiry where the notion of hierarchical leadership in curriculum change is questioned and challenged (ibid).

This section has presented a number of strategies, decisions and actions that support a vertical movement through the model (Fig.21). These occur at the level of micropolitics and support empowerment of actors through a positive leveraging of school contexts.

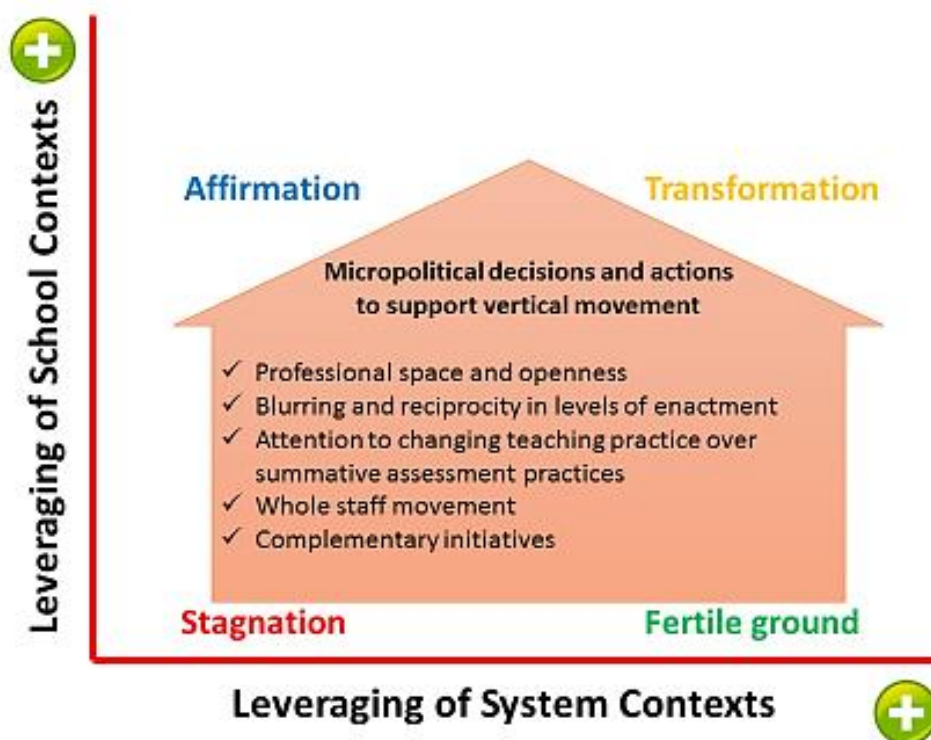


Fig. 21. Vertical movement within the theoretical model

The role of the JC Coordinator in facilitating this leverage within and across levels has been highlighted as significant, and central. However, this role is also demanding and, as evidenced from Liz in Woodville, may not come without its own pressures and frustrations. Further, JC reform is being introduced in an environment where many teachers and Principals express job dissatisfaction due to heavy workloads and a reduction in school posts of responsibility^{xix}. Given the central importance of the JC Coordinator as evidenced in this study, it is not a role that could be foisted upon a teacher without some official recognition. It is a recommendation of this research that a designated, paid post of responsibility for JC Coordinator, would benefit schools looking to enact JC reform. If a level of officialdom was afforded to this role, the person responsible would have autonomy and authority to opt in, without feeling the burden of unnecessary workload. The evidence from this research offers advice on strategies a JC Coordinator could employ to positively leverage context. However, it is also recommended a JC Coordinator would facilitate conversations on the purpose and values of JC reform in the professional space and openness they engender.

In facilitating enquiry amongst colleagues, coordinators need to attend to JC curriculum from a number of perspectives. Firstly, there is a need for teachers to be supported in trying and sharing experience regarding the approaches to teaching, learning and assessment advocated in the *Framework*. However, if this is where the conversation begins and ends, then the professional space becomes one of technical mastery and proficiency, negating the educational purpose and values underpinning the changes. In this case, professional enquiry becomes an instrumental and narrow mechanism for implementing technical approaches (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Kemmis, 2006). This lack of sense-making during the introduction of CfE was highlighted (Priestley & Minty, 2013). Teachers reported renewed engagement with CfE once provided with adequate space for structured dialogue regarding the purposes of the curriculum. Learning from these lessons, it would be beneficial for coordinators to create a space for discussion around underlying principles as well as mastery of approaches. This may not only serve to foster engagement with JC reform, but also responds to the meaning of JC curriculum from a social justice perspective. Through bringing discussion on the underlying principles of JC reform into the professional space, the principles are no longer assumed as given. They are challenged, questioned and contested in the lived experience of the practitioner. Most importantly, they are *owned*. Through

“asking critical questions that matter” (Drew & Priestley, 2016, p.94) of JC policy, a deep and shared meaning of the purposes of JC curriculum can be realised at school level. This may serve to shift teachers and schools beyond the level of reform rhetoric, as they consider different futures and possibilities. This may help to build on the evidence of shifting epistemologies in this study, and challenge the assumptions of confused and fixed educational discourses. As teachers immerse themselves in the types of metacognitive practices the *Framework* advocates, it may serve to challenge their epistemologies on student ability and how we describe school excellence. Then, given the space and openness a JC Coordinator could engender, a shared dialogue of experience could serve to further drive an epistemological shift on what it means to educate and to learn. Across a school community, this could be a rising tide that lifts all boats.

Through facilitating discussion on epistemological assumptions of education and the principles of JC reform as experienced in practice, JC Coordinators could help develop a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum in their school. This could be fed forward at networking events, wherein the discourse is recontextualised based on school practice. Through this exercise, the reform discourse at micro and meso level intertwines. This supports a shared meaning of the purposes of JC curriculum, which can be perpetuated at multiple levels through appropriate policy management. Thus the JC Coordinator, as facilitator and supporter at school level, communicator, recontextualiser, and agent of discourse reproduction, serves to support the positive leveraging of school and system contexts in unison.

Fullan & Hargreaves (2012, p.31) say that “If you want to change teachers, you have to change the job that teachers do and then bring in good and well-prepared people to do it”. JC reform envisages a change to teachers’ work through significant changes in the technology of teaching and learning and, coupled with this, assessment structures. This research contends that the “good and well prepared people” (ibid) needed to successfully enact JC reform already exist in the system and that, in many ways, the *Framework* is policy catching up with the pockets of good teaching practice that exist in Ireland. However, if we are to get the profession on the move, all teachers need to be supported in enacting this

change and on multiple fronts. In this case, the important role of JC Coordinator cannot be understated.

6.2.2. Moving horizontally

Movement horizontally involves a positive leveraging of system contexts. That is, the right type of policy management at a system level to bring about a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum between the system and schools. Whilst in ways linked to leveraging of school contexts, this is a different task. There are a number of discourses, both previous and emerging from JC reform, linked to the context of curriculum policy that have positively and negatively influenced actors' perspectives on JC reform at a macro level. There have also been criticisms expressed at the management of policy at a system level. To understand the potential for movement horizontally within the model, I consider the contexts that evoked criticism for system reform by actors on the left, and then the characteristics of those on the right of the model. A number of challenges for movement to the right are presented, with an indication of how the system has responded to these challenges. This research was conducted at a time when the 2012 *Framework* was the policy document schools were interpreting and translating. Where relevant, I make reference to the policy intentions of *Framework '15* below, for this represents changes and responses by the system.

6.2.2.1 Moving on assessment

One of the biggest influences on actors' interpretations of JC reform was assessment. Actors on the left-hand side of the model were distrustful of assessing their own students for certification. Some were concerned about a move away from the current Junior Cert, as it served as a reliable and rigorous standard in preparing students for the Leaving Cert. A strong sense of accountability, coupled with professional vulnerability, is prevalent when considering assessment. Teachers feel exposed, and see unnecessary pressures from parents and school management to perform to their expectations. There is also an element of distrust amongst teachers on the left for other teachers. They believe some of their fellow professionals would conform to these weighty expectations; bumping up grades in response to school competition or familiarity with parents, rather than retain the integrity of their assessment practice. This again reflects "the pervasive influence of the neoliberal thrust that seems to be driving contemporary education policy across a wide range of

international contexts. This policy orientation tends to be characterised by [...] the marketised environment of schooling” (Clarke and O’Donoghue, 2016, p.9).

The influence of distrust amongst teachers has the potential to engender weak relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This is characterised by a limitation in the regard held for, amongst other things, the competency of others. This echoes the concerns raised in this research. Conversely, high levels of relational trust helps to allay uncertainties and vulnerabilities of teachers during times of educational change. The challenge, then is to build trust amongst teachers and school leaders in the changes proposed.

Evidence of concerns over assessment accountability was pointed in regard to a fear of public exposure, particularly amongst parents. This fear of public exposure when introducing change finds support in the work of Le Fevre (2014), who found that teachers felt moves to de-privatise their practice was too great a risk and as such they were reluctant to engage. Teachers were more likely to try innovative practices if they could fly below the public radar. Given the changes proposed in JC reform around assessment, and the perceived nature of local communities in Ireland, this may not be so easy. To many actors on the left, regardless of their enthusiasm for JC reform in practice, the new model of assessment is a disabling context posing too great a risk for them to believe in the changes. Their response reflects what Marris (1986) describes as the “conservative impulse” in teachers. The changes in assessment carry a high level of risk with regards to uncertainty for pupil outcomes and changes in teacher practice. As such, the conservative reaction is to default to the status quo.

In this regard, teachers are caught within a market and managerialist driven performativity, subject to governance manifest as a form of self-steering (Ball, 1994). Their engagement with the context of curriculum policy is such that they achieve agency to act back against JC assessment proposals. Through the lens of the Junior Cert curriculum and its assessment structures, they cannot perceive of a future in which they as professionals are brought into a decision-making process that was heretofore independent of teachers’ work. Whilst this is only a small-scale relatable study, evidence suggests this type of action is counter-productive to system wide change. System accountability that affects deep change is built on a transparency of practice, capacity building, engagement and trust building. This

supports the development of lateral accountability amongst the profession (Fullan, 2011, p.9).

This is not to suggest that teachers on the left are deficit in any way. If anything, they reflect a harsh truth (not so) evident in the day-to-day life of schools:

...we do not 'blame' the teacher for a failure of political insight, indeed we recognise, only too immediately, the ways in which we are all deeply implicated in, and bound up into, the contemporary neo-liberal and globalising settlement and its triumph is that most of the time we do not even notice it is there.

(Ball et al, 2012, p. 139)

Irish teachers are used to Junior Cert examination performance as the main accountability measure shaping their work. As a system of "governing knowledge", the Junior Cert exam is a "resource through which surveillance can be exercised" (Ozga, 2008, p. 264). In the case of the teachers in this study, this surveillance is manifest from parents, school management and (perhaps) even themselves. Such is the landscape of examination accountability for teachers, as they are "wrapped up in powerful discourses of being the 'good' teacher and producing the 'good' student and making the 'good' school'" (Ball et al, 2012, p.145). When asked to consider a vast change to this landscape, their reactions are understandable. Whilst I agree with the premise of the above statement from Ball et al, I reject the term "failure of political insight". Actors engage with policy through achieving agency in context. For actors on the left, their position on assessment is in itself a measure of the weighty influence of the Junior Cert curriculum. It is not a failure, but rather an illumination of the policy landscape that must be understood and changed to successfully enact JC reform.

Actors on the right of the model see the move away from Junior Cert assessment structures as positive. They see JC assessment offering curricular freedom for teachers to teach, and for students to learn. They see a fairer system for students when the focus on a single assessment instrument (the Junior Cert) is lessened. They see the proposed continuous assessment structures contributing to a more holistic educational experience. These actor meanings of the purpose of the new assessment structures are most closely aligned to the meaning of assessment espoused in *Framework '15* (DES, p.35, emphasis added):

There is a substantial body of research evidence to show that educational outcomes for students can be improved by *broadening the approach to assessment*. There is also a recognition that *no single assessment event can provide evidence of the full*

range of student achievement. All assessment in Junior Cycle, formative or summative, moment-in-time or ongoing, SEC, NCCA or teacher-designed, should have as its primary purpose, the *support of student learning* [..] A dual approach to assessment, involving classroom-based assessment across the three years and a final externally-assessed, state-certified examination can enable the *appropriate balance between preparing students for examinations and also facilitating creative thinking, engaged learning and better outcomes for students.* This approach will recognise and value the different types of learning that take place in schools and will allow for a *more rounded assessment of the educational achievements of each young person.*

Thus, the evidence suggests that moving on assessment requires a communication of meaning which represents the purpose of JC assessment in a way that demonstrates the benefits adumbrated by *Framework '15* and the actors on the right, whilst allaying the concerns of those on the left.

Challenge 1 - Reduce teacher concerns around rigour, vulnerability and professional trust in the context of assessment.

Challenge 2 – Communicate the positive message of JC assessment in a meaningful way

6.2.2.2. [Moving on perspectives of policy management](#)

A number of criticisms coming from actors on the left and right of the model focus on the fragmented introduction of JC and, predominantly, change management trumps change meaning in the discourse. At this point in time, there is nothing that can be done about the past. And, if anything, teachers themselves need to take some ownership of the fragmentation and contestation that has occurred, and is still continuing, between the DES and teacher unions. However, there is much to be learned. What may help to positively leverage the system context, is policy management that advocates for teachers. It would be a positive move to see a system response that advocates for teachers, like Elaine, who are embracing JC reform but do not know if they have a national voice.

It would be beneficial to see the education partners do more to celebrate the significance of the teacher in enacting this reform. Teachers are embarking on a learning journey as well as students, and some public acknowledgement for this journey by the education partners would be meritorious.

Challenge 3 – Advocacy for teachers

6.2.2.3. How the system has responded to the challenges

A number of challenges for the system have been identified to facilitate movement to the right of the model. They are summarised in Fig. 22 below:

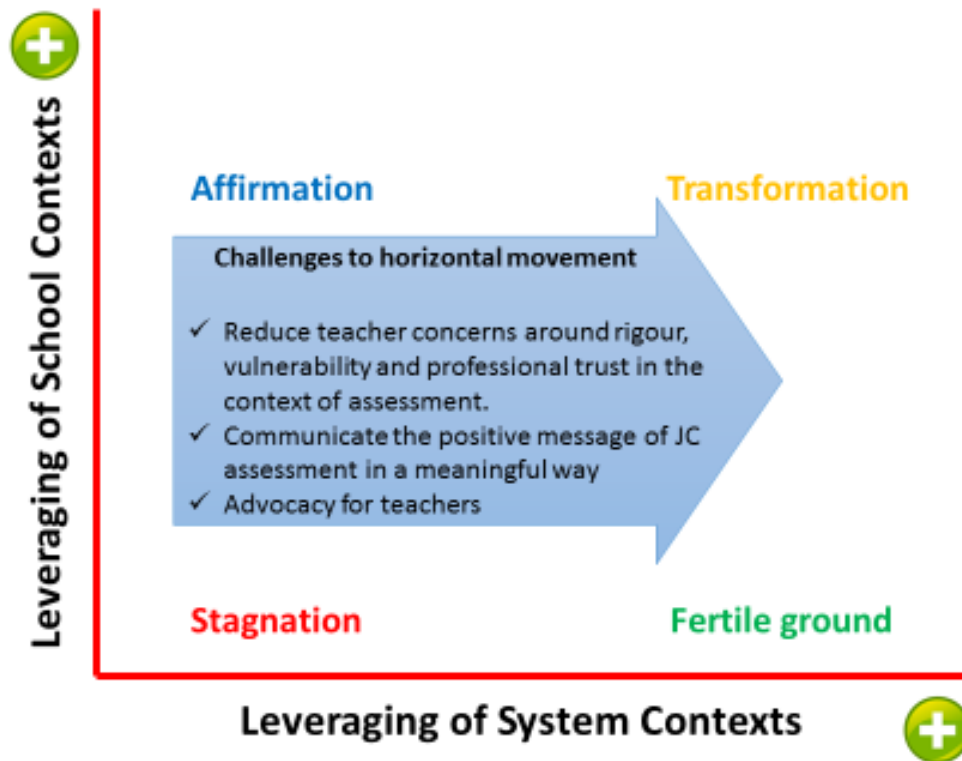


Fig. 22. Horizontal movement within the theoretical model

There have been a number of system responses to these challenges.

Resistance Leading to Re-innovation

Such is the disabling nature of the changes in assessment that a marked teacher union action against them has occurred since data collection. Due to concerns over lack of prescription in the *Framework* and policy (mis)interpretations of bureaucracy and the wrong types of accountability, there was (and continues to be) a sustained period of industrial unrest. As described in Chapter 3, The *Framework* was rewritten and the disabling context of assessment was addressed. *Framework '15* maintains the privatisation of state assessment. Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) shall no longer contribute to the SEC certified grades students achieve in their JC subjects, but rather shall be documented on the JCPA.

Another outcome of the negotiations addressed bureaucracy concerns through allocation of professional time. The *Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation of Junior Cycle Reform*, agreed by heads of teacher unions and the DES, stipulates:

It is agreed that the reforms will not impose additional workload and time demands on teachers. It is also acknowledged that teachers' professional practice will adapt and develop significantly as a result of these reforms.

(DES, ASTI, TUI, 2015, p.5)

Teachers are provided with professional time out of the classroom to engage in activities to support their enactment of the JC. This pro rata time allowance, to be introduced in 2017, equates to 40 minutes per school week for a teacher employed on a full timetable of 22 hours.

The ever shifting policy process of JC reform is symptomatic of assessment reforms in Scotland (Hayward, 2015). What began with a strong rationale and gained initial support from teachers became confounded by issues of pay and working conditions. This led to re-innovations of the original policy aspirations to relieve tensions, which became over-complicated and burdensome. The messages from Ireland are very similar. There is a sense of distortion to the changes that have occurred since *Framework 2012*. There is a risk of complications arising from re-innovation of JC reform, rather than the hoped-for clarity. The egregious actions of the ASTI to withdraw from negotiations at crucial times have only added to these complications and have truly impeded any form of positive resolution.

So, how does JC reform avoid becoming a Sisyphean task^{xx}? The challenge for the system at this juncture is to provide clarity to the profession through a **communication of meaning** which speaks to the vision for JC reform as opposed to its manageability. A meaning of JC reform that instils a sense of professionalism in teachers as opposed to compliance with overly complicated and overburdened work. Finally, the challenge for the system is to ensure that that the right types of accountability are used as a positive driver for change rather than a lever. For this to happen, this research contends that any communication of meaning from the system has to be clear in its message and, fundamentally, acknowledge the central and important role of teacher professionalism:

So the very first thing, as a system, and as a state or country, is to know who you are, where you are going, and why, and to understand and articulate with relentless

inspiration that a high-quality educational system and high-quality teachers are an inalienable part of this [...] Public statements of where you are going have to include building the teaching profession and its professional capital. Teachers, all 100% of them, are your nation builders.

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.174)

There are multiple ways this message can be, and needs to be, communicated. Two methods for the communication of meaning by the system include policy intentions in official documentation and actions to realise these intentions in the crucible of practice. A number of outcomes of re-innovation in JC reform have emerged that show promise in this regard. Two of these outcomes - SLAR meetings, and emergent CPD supports for teachers, shall be considered.

SLAR Meetings

One of the ways relational trust could be engendered amongst teachers, as evidenced in Kenwood and St. Carthage's, is to provide space and openness for collegiality and professional conversations. At a system level, there has been a positive response in this regard. The Joint Statement (DES, ASTI, TUI, 2015, p.5) identified greater professional collaboration amongst teachers as a core principle of JC reform. In developing a shared meaning amongst teachers of JC teaching, learning and assessment practices, *Framework '15* introduced *Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR)* meetings after each CBA.

SLAR meetings present an opportunity to use accountability as a driver for positive change as opposed to a lever. Teachers will be provided structured meeting times to engage in professional conversations concerning their judgements of student work and the quality of student learning. *Framework '15* reflects a strong system level trust in teacher collegiality and professional judgements:

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* recognises the importance of professional development and collaboration between teachers for informing their understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and their practice in the classroom. All teachers of each subject involved in teaching and assessing the classroom-based components in the school will engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings [...] to ensure consistency and fairness within and across schools in the appraisal of student learning [...] The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* reflects our *shared understanding of, and trust in, the many positive features of educational practice currently in our post-primary schools.*

(DES, 2015, p.9, emphasis added)

The decision to introduce the structures, time^{xxi} and supports for SLAR meetings represents a positive step in the national management of JC policy. The system has responded to allow teachers the space and openness for professional conversations, the likes of which were seen to have such a positive impact in this research. *Framework '15* answers the call from Stephen (St. Carthage's) for democratic professionalism. SLAR meetings have the potential to give teachers *power to* (Blase, 2001) engage with JC reform as autonomous professionals whose judgement truly matters. However, this may not be easily seen under an accountability shroud, the legacy of the Junior Cert, which some teachers and schools may find difficult to remove. This is a delicate tightrope that must be navigated carefully by all in the system.

SLAR meetings have the potential to allay concerns of trust amongst colleagues, as they are engaging in shared discussion and agreement on the quality of student learning. There is potential for the development of strong social capital amongst colleagues in the SLAR process:

Moderated marking [...] enables teachers to learn from each other with expert facilitation as they examine student work according to standards-based criteria. These expressions of social capital are an asset that keeps on giving. They are a kind of 'collective capacity' that can extend to whole system reform.

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.91)

Finally, decisions on the level of student achievement in CBAs are now part of a collective set of professional judgements amongst a department, rather than the decisions of one teacher. This has the potential to allay concerns over individual pressure from parents and school management.

Given my professional context, I am inclined to see the positives of CBAs and the SLAR process. I am sure they shall not be without their challenges. For example, practical concerns have already been raised regarding their timing in the school day, as well as the number of samples of student work to be presented^{xxii}. Further, there is the concern of missing the purpose of the SLAR. The challenge for CPD facilitators and teachers on the ground will be to acknowledge and instil that CBAs and SLARs represent part of an assessment process as opposed to performance for an event. There may be tension for teachers here, who are so used to preparing for assessment events at the end of Junior Cert.

The challenge for teachers will be, when it comes to trust, to follow the attitude of Kenwood in adopting a 'ready-fire-aim' approach. Rather than see the potential negatives, teachers need to embrace that "if you want to break the cycle of distrust you have to respect others before they have earned the right to be respected....and then do the things that build competencies and trust over time" (Fullan, 2011, p.16).

CPD Supports

Curriculum alignment ensures coherence between the intended and enacted curriculum (Porter et al., 2007; Webb, 1990; Ziebell et al., 2017). Currently, *Framework '15* is being enacted in a portion of schools nationwide^{xxiii}. Drew, Priestley and Michael (2016) have identified concerns over the 'implementation gap' that occurs between the intentions of policy and classroom enactment. A number of measures have emerged which both acknowledge and help to narrow this gap in JC reform.

The CPD space is where policy intentions meet the practice of the classroom; where system responses intertwine with the values and aspirations of teachers; with the material and policy contexts of the school. In light of the theory presented in this study, three challenges for JC CPD support emerge:

- Aligning the purposes of the curriculum
- Providing sustained and prolonged involvement with the changes through ongoing support and collaborative structures
- Reducing concerns of uncertainty and fear of change

The challenge for CPD providers in JC reform will be to provide support that develops the capacity of the individual, but also supports development of social capital within schools. There is acceptance that the one-day CPD workshop, without sustained collaboration and support, does not do enough to ruffle the ocean floor of the classroom:

What is crucial is what happens between workshops. Who tries things out? Who supports you? Who gives you feedback? Who picks you up when you make a mistake the first time? [...] Learning is the work, and social capital is the fuel. If social capital is weak, everything is destined for failure.

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.92)

The experiences of the schools in this study, suggest that actors' perceptions of changes in assessment are not aligned with their experiences of JC reform in practice. This highlights a

concern for CPD – “Prospects for teacher development are diminished when curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are only weakly or mal-aligned” (Wyse et al., 2012). Previous studies (Hayward et al., 2004) suggest rich opportunities for teacher engagement, sustained involvement and support for teacher learning are integral when introducing system reforms. Teacher development at school and system level should promote alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment through teacher CPD approaches that engage, support and offer sustained involvement with JC reform. Further, CPD supports must reduce the risk for teachers who feel they are entering the void of vulnerability and uncertainty, rather than embarking on a journey of professional freedom and autonomy:

Can we reform something to which we have been for so long deeply attached? Do we want to? Altering the way we have always done things carries costs of not only risk and failure but also sadness and loss. In order to change and move to the new, we must accept and grieve the loss of the old.

(Le Fevre 2014, p. 57)

The evidence from this research points to teachers in this space, particularly regarding assessment. Policymakers, CPD providers and school leaders need to not only have an awareness of this context, but be sympathetic towards the plight of teachers. The changes proposed are such a shift from the norm; the likes of which have not been seen in Irish education on this scale. Support for teachers, whether in-school, from DES, NCCA, or in the form of CPD from JCT, must have at their core an empathy with and awareness of the landscape teachers are coming from, as much as the one we are trying to get to.

Initial CPD supports have, in this regard, been positive. The NCCA has developed a suite of *Focus on Learning* booklets, intended to support in-school CPD on teaching, learning and assessment practices. They recommend the booklets and materials to be used and adapted to suit the context of the school, but advise where possible on “using the material on a school-wide basis as research evidence indicates that changes in assessment practice are more likely to become embedded if they are introduced on a systematic basis across a whole school” (NCCA, 2015, p.3). This policy intention is sympathetic with the constructed theory in this research, which suggests the most positive leveraging of school contexts occurs when the whole staff are taken on a journey of change. The use of the NCCA resources for in-school CPD support this result from the study.

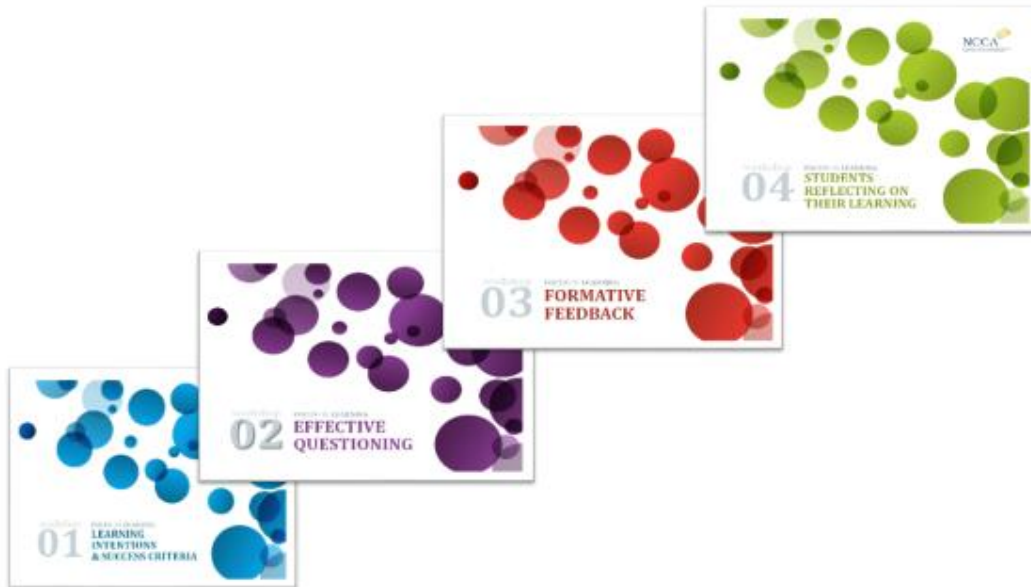


Fig. 23. 'Focus on Learning' booklets, from NCCA

The DES have also put sufficient structures in place to support the positive leveraging of school contexts not just in one school, but in many. In a first for Irish education, schools across the country were clustered together for subject-specific and generic JC CPD^{xxiv} from December 2016. This 'cluster model' saw schools in a locality (typically 6-10 schools) close on the same day to facilitate CPD provision. From a subject perspective, this meant whole subject departments from neighbouring schools could attend the same CPD day. The benefit of this in the subject space is resonant with the desires of actors in this study. This unique opportunity allowed JCT to incorporate space and openness for professional conversations into their CPD design at a level deeper than heretofore was possible. In my intimate experience of leading CPD for Science, I found space could be created for collaborative opportunities within and across schools in localities to be explored. With whole subject departments and neighbouring schools in attendance, the possibility existed to inculcate a rich, context-specific dialogue. This is a fruitful route to positive leveraging of context, curricular sense-making and sustained and prolonged involvement with JC reform. These measures may serve to support an achievement of agency amongst teachers in the ways advocated by Priestley et al (2015, p.31) – through a focus on capacity building, within and across schools, to develop agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum. However, the supportive and dialogic nature of this professional development, as manifest

in a local/regional context, may also help to develop the right types of structural, cultural and relational conditions to enable achievement of teacher agency to engage with educational purpose and principles of curriculum development. Hopefully these local CPD possibilities will help to reduce uncertainty and fear of change as teachers engage in the collaborative process of curricular sense-making.

In summary, macro and meso policy responses have shown promise for positive leveraging of system contexts. They represent policy decisions and actions at a system level that aim to engender a shared meaning of the purposes of JC curriculum between schools and the principles of *Framework '15*. The CPD supports advocate for teachers and school leaders through promoting collaboration, space and openness and accessing of the authoritative professional voice. The approach to JC CPD, in terms of intentions and actions, shows potential to move actors horizontally within the model.

The above section has considered horizontal movement through the model. A number of emergent challenges have been presented and tested against responses by the system. Whilst there is promise for the positive leveraging of system context, the evidence from this research points to a delicate tension between management and meaning in JC change, and the need to advocate for the professionalism of the teacher.

6.3. Theoretical tensions

The theorising in the above sections raises two interrelated tensions. The first relates to the potency of the definition for contextual leverage, i.e. “the management of policy to bring about a shared meaning of the purpose of JC curriculum at a school and system level”. It is questionable whether a shared meaning between the school and system is desirable. This is not the intention of the definition nor the concept of contextual leverage. To suggest that the school and system are trying to realise an imaginary of common meaning assumes a monochromatic policy landscape with no space for curricular contestation. This brings me to the second tension – the space of *Transformation*. The espoused values of participants in *Transformation* are, to a certain extent, tautological and tending towards the rhetoric of reform policy language. References to skills development, reflecting on learning, AfL, holistic development, and so on are common. Teachers within the transformative space

demonstrate their enthusiasm for JC reform through the language of JC policy. This finding supports the concerns of Biesta et al (2014, pp.635-636), that:

...teachers seem to lack a set of professional discourses over and above those provided by the language of policy. This potentially reduces their agency in developing the curriculum through limiting their potential to envisage different futures, and through denying them the language to engage critically with policy.

This raises an important question regarding the space of *Transformation* – is *Transformation* possible without curricular contestation?

Curriculum often varies in practice from the intentions of those who developed it (Pinar et al, 1995, van den Akker, 1998). Diversity of perspectives within and across levels of enactment is beneficial. This diversity, leading to curriculum renewal, is what Pepin & Nieveen, (2013, in Walshe, 2016, p.143) call the trilemma of different worlds:

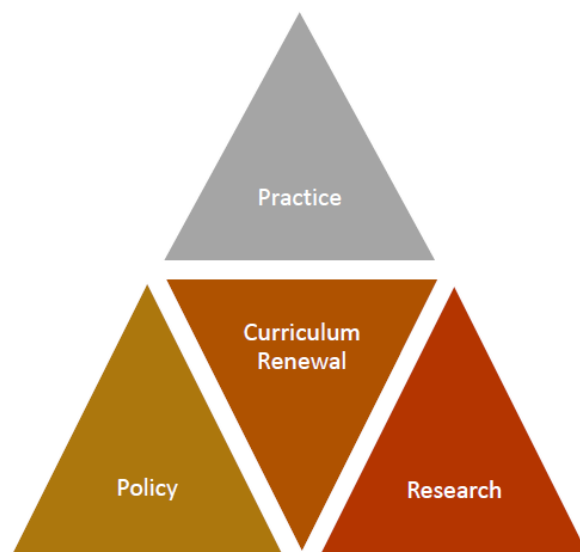


Fig. 24. Trilemma of different worlds (Pepin & Nieveen, 2013, in Walshe, 2016, p.143)

Based on the evidence from this research I think developing a shared meaning of the purposes of JC curriculum within schools and linking this to the principles of JC reform may help to develop an initial level of curricular coherence. This may help to lay a foundation in terms of professional knowledge, professional and social structures as teachers develop the curriculum narrative. This foundation could support future mastery and contestation of the

curriculum as different futures are imagined. In this context, divergence of meaning between the school and the system is not only acceptable, it is necessary. A shared meaning in a school that fosters contestation of principles and practices of JC reform could potentially feed back to the system through various routes, such as the JC network in this study or through CPD providers. This may inform policy and even contribute (like this thesis) to research, meaning a positive washback for practice. This interplay of school and system paves the way for positive curriculum renewal with, by and through context. Thus, leveraging context may not necessarily be about transforming the individual and school to realise capacity and believe in the system. Rather, shared meaning may be transformative in facilitating a better engagement with what it means to educate.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter addresses the 4th research question of the study. A context-centric model of JC enactment is presented, illustrating how JC reform has been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered. The positions of schools and actors according to the degree of contextual leverage experienced and the potential for movement within the model, has been interrogated. In the final chapter, I revisit the guiding aim for this research, as I consider why context matters in the enactment of JC reform.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. First, I look back on the research process and reflect upon the degree to which my chosen methodology has allowed me to address the research questions. Secondly, I consider the strengths and limitations of the theoretical model proposed. Thirdly, I address the significance of the research to reform studies in Ireland and beyond. Returning to the guiding aim, I consider *why context matters* in the enactment of JC reform. In closing, I offer suggestions for further research in the field.

7.1. Looking back on the research process

7.1.1. Methodology reviewed

The initial aim of this research was to generate theory regarding the enactment of a new curriculum in lower-secondary Irish education. The rationale for this was to support the ever-growing need to understand how practitioners respond to educational change to support successful reform efforts (Hargreaves, 2005). The research theorised enactment of JC reform through the lens of school and system contexts. This satisfied a further rationale, in responding to the dearth of contextualised policy responses in the literature (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016, Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). In doing so, I wanted to illuminate those factors influencing curriculum enactment beyond teacher capacity (Drew, Priestley & Michael, 2015, p.2). Given that JC reform looks to position teachers as agents of change, there was a motivation to understand the contexts in which teachers achieved this agency, in order to support successful enactment of the curriculum.

The methodology employed was grounded theory, underpinned by a constructivist epistemology. Personal reflection on my own context in Chapter 2 helped to reveal my interests in supporting educational change through influencing policy in practice and curriculum in context. In my experiences as a young professional, I was neglectful of contextual influences on the teacher and their practice, and dismissed those who I saw as less innovative. This was in part due to my own values and practices, shaped by neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2003) within a technical rational discourse of curriculum that dominated the Irish education landscape (Gleeson, 2010). My commitment to the teaching profession since then, demonstrated by my own shifting contexts in Chapter 3 and this

research endeavour, is my way of 'giving back' to the system, and to those teachers I may have marginalised.

Drawing upon the contributions of Stephen Ball (1994) and Lesley Vidovich (2007), I developed a conceptual framework which informed my understanding of policy enactment. This framework served as a toolkit of ideas from which I drew when considering how participants were enacting JC reform at the micro level. It allowed me to situate this enactment within a number of dynamic and interrelated contexts across the macro, meso and micro policy trajectory. Arising from this, I began research on the experiences of participants enacting JC reform in three Network Schools. As time progressed, the research took a context-specific focus. I wanted to understand the contexts at play in the enactment of JC reform beyond the level of rhetoric. In other words, how they were influencing actors' engagement with the curriculum, why this was the case, and what were the spaces for negotiation. The four research questions (RQ) for this study were related to the *what*, the *why* and the *how* of JC policy enactment:

1. What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site?
2. How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform?
3. Why have they engaged in these ways?
4. How has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered?

These questions framed the analysis and discussion of the results of this research through Chapters 5 and 6. In concluding, I now summarise how these questions were answered in the study. The particular questions being referenced are identified through the insertion of [RQ1, 2, 3 or 4] to orientate the reader.

Ball et al. (2012, p.43) developed a heuristic distinction between interpretation and translation of policy. Through this lens, I wanted to understand the ways in which actors were interpreting JC reform and translating it into practice. By articulating things they were doing, planning to do and expressing how their enactment had (not) changed things for them, their students, their school, participants conveyed how they translated the *Framework* into practice [RQ1]. The degree to which this translation happened was differentiated using the organising concept of depth [RQ2]. Those who experienced a

shallow depth of translation made small changes to practice due to unique material contexts such as moving into a new school building. Those who experienced a deeper translation had done so through various mechanisms of school policy management. These ranged from creating space and openness for professional dialogue, reciprocity of leadership and fostering a collaborative environment in which experimentation/failure and student voice were promoted [RQ3]. Based on the evidence, I think deeper translation into practice is facilitated by bringing the whole staff on a journey rather than selective innovation. In all cases of deep translation, epistemological assumptions were challenged. These challenges concerned learning, the learner, collaborative practice and curricular freedom [RQ2].

Participants' engaged with an interpretive struggle to let go of the Junior Cert curriculum, embrace JC reform and know whether reform efforts were successful at macro and micro levels. This struggle was both positive and negative, negotiated from different policy positions of external criticism for the system and internal enthusiasm for school practice [RQ1, 2]. System level contexts of national policy management and curriculum policy influenced actors' interpretations [RQ3]. The duality of autonomy/accountability in assessment was a strong influence and a context that, since, has driven a significant amount of acting back against JC reform leading to re-innovation.

The interconnecting concepts of depth of translation, interpretive struggle from different policy positions and finally contextual influences served to answer questions 1, 2 and 3. Through abduction, I developed a new concept, contextual leverage, leading to the development of a context-centric model of JC enactment. This illuminated how engagement by actors with the features of enactment was contextually mediated, rendering them and/or their schools into different positions within the model [RQ4]. Two spaces of enactment were *Stagnation* and *Affirmation*, with movement between these determined by the leveraging of school contexts. When school policy management helped to align values on the purpose of curriculum between teachers, JC Coordinators and school leaders, positive leveraging occurred, allowing actors to move vertically. Schools and teachers contextually mediated JC reform through realising their capacity on a school or individual level. Belief in the system was facilitated through positive leveraging of system contexts. Actors who had a belief in JC reform occupied the *Fertile Ground* or *Transformation*.

Challenges to move actors into these spaces were considered. These included a positive communication of meaning around JC reform that reduced assessment concerns over rigour and professional trust.

7.1.1.1. Research methods

The methods of semi-structured interviewing allowed for a rich engagement with participants and their perspectives on the enactment of JC reform in context. Giving participants the space to talk about their practice in school but also wider reform issues facilitated a rich dialogue that illuminated how policy processes at the macro level were influencing micro level enactment [RQ1, 2, 3]. Grounded in these ideas, the constructed theory illuminated how enactment was contextually mediated and institutionally rendered [RQ4]. Whilst I am satisfied with the employment of the research methods to this end, I have a number of concerns around sampling. These concerns pertain to the sample group, ongoing access and timing.

My first concern regarding the employment of the research methods is the polarised group from which participants were sampled. The 49 Network Schools volunteered to engage with the NCCA. Similarly, the 3 schools in this study participated voluntarily. As such, there was a high probability of the sample constituting enthusiastic schools, leaders and teachers. Admittedly, I as a researcher am also enthusiastic about JC reform, as pointedly seen in my recent career progression. Thus, I acknowledge the lack of a dissenting voice in the study.

My second concern relates to lack of access to participants following data collection. Due to political unrest, I chose to withdraw from participant engagement. Whilst I was able to engage in member-checking of original transcripts and, with some participants, developing codes and concepts, I did not carry out theoretical sampling. This was a necessary sacrifice to remain ethically sensitive to my participants, who may have felt they were violating union directives through further involvement. Related to this, my final concern is the time lapse between data collection and submission of this thesis. In this interim, the policy landscape has changed dramatically at all levels. Had I theoretically sampled, I imagine there would have been other contextual factors influencing JC enactment as a result of the political unrest which ensued.

These concerns leave me with a sense of personal unease. As a leader of JC CPD and a fellow teacher, I have had significant engagement with Irish teachers and school leaders since the time of data collection. I am aware, first-hand, of the shifting contexts that have influenced their enactment of JC reform. Teachers feeling they have not been listened to, perceptions of extra workload and lack of time, loss of quality in subject disciplines through outcomes-based curricula. These are just some of the concerns teachers have raised, which are not reflected in the outcomes of this research. As such, I am conflicted on the receptiveness and timely relevance of this work to teachers. In my attempts to reconcile these tensions, I agree that “no attempt at ever capturing a range of contextual factors can ever be exhaustive” (Clarke and O’Donoghue, 2016, p.6). It was never the intention of this research to present the full gamut of contextual influence on JC reform, if this is at all possible. The intention was to illuminate *why context matters* through accessing the voices of those participants who willingly partook. As such, I hope people would see this thesis as a commitment to staying true to the data at a moment-in-time, rather than a naïve reading of an ever-changing reform process.

7.1.2. Strengths and limitations of the theoretical model

7.1.2.1 Theoretical support for the model

The model allows for theorising of JC enactment at a school and system level, grounded in the experiences of teachers and school leaders. The explanatory power of the model is demonstrated through the description of the four quadrants and the mechanisms for positive leveraging of school contexts described in the thesis. The predictive power of the model is suggested through testing the challenges for horizontal movement against the policy shifts that have occurred in the interim of data collection and submission of this thesis.

The model is sympathetic to the analysis of policy at multiple levels of the policy process, as advocated by Lesley Vidovich (2007). I have endeavoured to show how the model recognises the dynamism and inter-relationship of contextual factors influencing the macro, meso, and micro levels of enactment. This research is congruent with the concept of a “trajectory study” (Ball, 1993) of policy enactment with a central focus on the dynamism and inter-relationships of context. It considers the contexts that influence responses to policy ranging from interpretive struggle to depth of translation. These contexts are

considered in totality – from the state apparatus to the recipients of policy at the chalk face, vice versa and intertwining [RQ1, 2, 3, 4].

The model gains theoretical support from research on enactment zones (Spillane, 1999). Teachers in this study who experienced space and openness to discuss attempts at changing practice experienced a deeper translation of JC reform [RQ1, 2, 3, 4]. Spillane would describe these teachers as having broad zones of enactment beyond the level of insular practice and experimentation. He conjectures that the potency of reform initiatives to enable these teachers to engender a change in practice is dependent on their enactment zones. The model is affirming of this conjecture, but goes one step further to propose how enactment zones are influenced by leveraging of context [RQ4]. Spillane's research offers illustrations of the circumstances in which enactment zones can enable and constrain changes in practice. The concept of contextual leverage illuminates ways these circumstances can be changed and the possible implications for enactment.

The model finds theoretical support in the work of Ball et al (2012) on enactment theory. Contextual factors are represented in their tentative framework of how schools “do policy”. The contexts of policy management at school and system level, values and curriculum policy [RQ3] reflect what Ball et al describe as ‘professional cultures’ and “external contexts” (ibid, p.21). This research has endeavoured to represent the dynamics of these contexts; how they serve as enablers, constraints and (sometimes hidden) pressures in JC enactment. The model proposed in this study has also tried to reflect the dynamism of context through looking at how, and why, contexts can change [RQ4] and the potential for this contextual leverage at a school and system level.

One can also draw parallels between the context-centric model of curriculum policy enactment in this study and the ecological approach to teacher agency as recently proposed by Priestley et al (2015, p.30). The theory constructed in this research looks to illuminate how school and system contexts both enable and constrain actors’ engagement with JC reform. Looking at this from a teacher agency perspective, Priestley et al would contend that agency is achieved through an engagement with temporal –relational contexts for action. Specifically in the practical-evaluative dimension of their teacher agency model (ibid,

pp.33-34), material, cultural and structural resources can influence achievement of agency, rendering the assumption that agency is solely dependent on personal capacity as invalid. This research supports their view, as it has illuminated how various material, structural and cultural conditions, manifest through school contexts of in-school policy management and values, supported an engagement with curricular enactment in a practical sense but also in an evaluative sense, as actors considered further possibilities for action [RQ 1,2,3,4]. The influence of system contexts of curriculum policy and national policy management further resonated with the practical-evaluative dimension of the teacher agency model. Ideas, discourses and possibilities of power evidenced in practitioners' perspectives on these system contexts offer further examples of how structural and cultural aspects can both constrain and support teacher agency in concrete and specific situations.

Finally, considering enactment of policy through a contextual lens is justified by group interaction theory. The professional learning experienced by actors in this study is meaningful insofar as it has influenced their behaviour regarding their practice. In order for this to effectively occur, their professional learning must be linked to the contexts in which it is applied (Resnick, 1998, 1991; Brown et al, 1989). Leveraging of school contexts develops positive social structures within the school to support professional learning which challenges beliefs, enhances knowledge and changes dispositions. This has the potential to engender a deep translation of JC reform into practice now and in the future [RQ4].

7.1.2.2. Limitations of the model

It is difficult to represent ideas about context without acknowledgement of their *uniqueness*. In their decisions on areas of JC reform to focus on, the schools in the study acted in context. Woodville focussed on 'Staying Well' in a unique social context where students suffered from stress. Kenwood had a unique political context. Their established school self-evaluation procedures influenced JC enactment complimentary to other policy initiatives. These contexts are situated, temporal, and unique.

Ball et al (2012, p. 40, emphasis added) argue that "context is a mediating factor in the policy enactment work done in schools – *and it is unique to each school*, however similar they initially seem to be". The same authors send out a repeated request that context be

taken more seriously in making sense of policy enactment. Whilst not generalizable, this study has presented unique contexts, but also illuminated some common ideas for individual and systemic learning. Drawing on the wisdom of some theorists who framed my thinking for this research (ibid, p.142), I contend that trying to simplistically represent policy enactment is a near impossible task. In the case of the context-centric model, I wish for it to be seen as an incomplete exercise, open to further interpretations and challenge. However, I also hope it stimulates thinking on the complex process of enactment, in which interpretation and translation of policy is contextually mediated and institutionally rendered (Braun et al, 2011). If anything, a conversation on contextual uniqueness, transference, and dynamism would be a welcome contribution to the field.

Another limitation of the model lies in its political naivety. Representing policy enactment as a simplified map with linear pathways may seductively suggest silver bullets for change. This would be the antithesis of what I am trying to achieve. Whilst the model endeavours to simplify and demystify a tumultuous reform process, it cannot be divorced from the inherent complexity from which it developed. Movement through the model is not as simple as moving horizontally, vertically or diagonally. It is hard to separate the influence of school contexts from system contexts, and vice versa. In the real world of policy enactment, at the chalk face and at system level, the axes of the model would fold in upon each other, overlap even, like the strands of fabric that weave together to form a rope. Drawing on Wittgenstein's rope metaphor - the strength of a rope is not determined by the length of each individual strand, but rather the degree to which they overlap. And so it is when attending to context in policy enactment. At the core of the theoretical understanding, empirical grounding and my own personal experience of reform is the fact that it is a complex, messy, unpredictable and a (sometimes) creative rather than (always) restrictive process. Nonetheless, it is important to live with and understand complexity when introducing significant changes to how teachers work (Hayward & Spencer, 2010, p.173). This study acknowledges this view, and hopes to offer some ideas that will help further our understanding of the complexity of change.

My final concern is the generation of 'grounded theory'. I am conflicted on whether I have generated a grounded theory of JC enactment in context or, rather, a set of concepts with

varying degrees of depth. Holton (2007, p.272) succinctly describes the features of a grounded theory:

A grounded theory must offer a conceptually abstract explanation for a latent pattern of behaviour (an issue or concern) in the social setting under study. It must explain, not merely describe, what happens in a social setting.

I believe this study and the theoretical model constructed goes beyond description of JC enactment to explain the behaviour involved as influenced by context. I have not only asked questions regarding *what* is going on from the data, but also *how* and *why*.

The study also carries many of the hallmarks of grounded theory in the procedures followed in developing the model. I began with open coding, which led to the construction of core categories and concepts. Following this, I engaged in selective coding of data and abduction which allowed me to theoretically saturate and unify the core concepts.

One gap in the process is the lack of theoretical sampling. This, combined with the lack of a dissenting voice, makes me question if I have offered a grounded theory. I draw some comfort in this regard from the importance of (ironically) context in theory development:

The relevance of context, like any other variable, must be earned in the emergent theory; it is not determined in advance by the analyst calling upon extant theoretical frameworks.

(Holton, 2007, p.270)

My own context has shifted dramatically throughout the life of this research. This has influenced my analysis of the data, as my understanding of JC reform from engagement across levels of enactment has deepened. My practical wisdom has enhanced my theoretical sensitivity (ibid) as my contextual and theoretical insight deepened. This enabled a greater level of conceptual depth to be achieved. It also allowed me to look at the data in imaginative ways and apply a high level of abduction to unify the concepts developed into a salient frame.

7.2. Implications of the research

Framework '15 seeks to position teachers as agents of change, with schools leading JC reform. Rich and meaningful enactment will require, at all levels of the system, the right drivers for change to be centralised. These include personalised learning, professionalised teaching, intelligent accountability and networking and collaboration amongst schools and

teachers (Hopkins, 2009). A review of the literature has identified challenges for introduction of JC reform in the neoliberal context of the Junior Cert curriculum where visible accountability measures are prevalent. The outcomes of this research and the evolving reform process illustrate the effects such economic framings can have on curricular enactment. Policy does not translate directly into practice, but is mediated by, with and through context. Further understanding of how this mediation happens, and why it matters, may inform change management at multiple levels of the system which supports realising of policy intentions instead of running counter to them. This has implications for research, policy and practice.

7.2.1. My contribution to knowledge – contextual claims

I now return to the central aim that guided this research, which was to understand the following:

Taking context as an active force that mediates the enactment of policy, and with regards to the stakeholders within and across the school sites – why does context matter in the enactment of JC reform?

I offer a view of contextual policy mediation that moves beyond truisms. To this end, I am making three claims about why context matters. These claims, when viewed collectively, suffuse the worlds of policy, practice and research and are intended to support curriculum renewal through the lens of context. It is hoped these claims will allow for a greater level of “contextual intelligence” (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2016, p.13) to be applied to the enactment of JC reform at all levels of the system.

Claim 1: Context matters for schools

There is an expectation in *Framework ’15* that the classroom dynamic and roles of teacher and learner will transform. This will require an epistemological shift, wherein practice and dialogue support a better engagement with what it means to educate. Whilst policy documents envisage best possible scenarios for enactment (Ball et al, 2011, p.585), schools deal in everyday contextual realities. These realities can both enable and constrain practitioners’ in enacting the curriculum. As Eisner says (1992, p.167, in Priestley et al, 2015, p.151) – “ if a bird has been in a cage for a decade and suddenly finds the door open, it

should not be surprising if the bird does not wish to leave". Whilst it could be argued that recent curriculum policy reforms have *opened the door* for teachers to be agentic professionals and curriculum developers, it is understandable that some teachers fail to venture outside the bird cage if the external conditions are not addressed (Priestley et al, 2015, p.162). Through a greater understanding of the influence of contextual factors on the nuances of teacher enactment, we develop an appreciation of which factors can and should be positively leveraged. Teachers are committed to seeing their students succeed, regardless of the curriculum of the day. The importance of empowering professionals in this commitment cannot be understated. To support JC enactment, the context of school policy management needs to support teacher commitment in a way that aligns their perceptions of student success with the underlying principles of *Framework '15*. This can be achieved through exceptional leadership across levels which promotes professional space, openness, and collegiality, and prioritises changing classroom practice, not just assessment practice.

Claim 2: Context matters for system level governance

The introduction of JC reform has been far from ideal. The ever-shifting policy landscape has left practitioners doubtful of the system. The legacy of this process, as we leave the Junior Cert curriculum, is felt heavily in the assessment context. System governance would support successful enactment of JC reform if it served to reduce this doubt. The structural changes and actions of the system in addressing this context have been promising, and need to continue showing promise. This is particularly important, for "if agency is achieved rather than being solely about the capacity of actors, then the importance of context should be taken more seriously by public policy makers and leaders in public organisations, as such contexts may serve to disable individuals with otherwise high agentic capacity" (Priestley et al, 2015, p.25). Meso level CPD supports and Macro level structures such as SLAR meetings should provide teachers with dialogic space. To build capacity in the profession and support lateral accountability (Fullan, 2011, p.9), these spaces need to give teachers opportunities to make and share professional judgements. This will support another necessary epistemological shift concerning what it means to be an educator in a system where professional judgement truly matters; where trust is placed in the practitioner to navigate the curriculum narrative. Such a landscape did not exist in the Junior Cert curriculum, but the opportunity is there in JC reform. The system must seize this opportunity. There is also

a national need to manage policy in a way which is seen to advocate for teachers who believe in the system; who are passionate about JC reform despite their voices being drowned out by the noise of ongoing contestation. Based on the evidence of this research, and the shifting reform context since, I think this advocacy is still lacking in an explicit way. However, maybe the greatest advocacy lies in the richness of the supportive and dialogic spaces created for teachers, either by system level dictate or through CPD support? For my part this is a hope, and a commitment, which I pursue relentlessly.

Claim 3: Context matters for curriculum policy analysis

I claim that curriculum policy analysis benefits through the application of a contextual lens to the study of enactment, and the research defends why this should be a central focus rather than an afterthought. As such, it is responsive to the dearth of contextual considerations in reporting of policy processes (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). Application of a contextual lens is another mechanism to support curricular alignment between the intended and enacted curriculum; to reduce the “implementation gap between policy intention and classroom practice” (Drew, Priestley and Michael, 2016). Through engaging with the contexts that influence macro, meso and micro curriculum enactment, we go further towards honouring the implementation gap, and understanding ways to narrow it. The model put forward in this thesis is a heuristic contribution for supporting this engagement by researchers. Context, in this regard, is not bleached into the background of the policy landscape, but is an active force through which we understand and mediate curriculum change.

7.3. Further research – contextual leverage in practice

This study presents an early snapshot of how practitioners within and across schools contextually mediated educational change. It theorised ways in which contexts could be leveraged to facilitate a richer engagement with JC reform, challenging assumptions around what it means to educate through policy management which supports practice and dialogue. The system contexts influencing practitioners’ enactment have now changed significantly. As a leader of JC CPD, I am committed to understanding the evolving contexts that influence teachers’ enactment of *Framework ’15*, and ways in which those contexts can be positively leveraged to support curricular alignment. I think the context conversation

could be richly enhanced by revisiting each of the schools in this study to test the theoretical model against their experiences to now. As an example of leveraging of system contexts, SLAR meetings also raise an interesting research prospect. It would be beneficial to understand the degree (or lack thereof) to which SLARs engender relational trust and promote lateral accountability.

Finally, in my macro and meso experiences of JC reform, I am aware of various endeavours in place to understand the Irish context of curricular change. These include measures by the NCCA to interrogate the contexts in which systems of school reporting might reform, and JCT efforts to understand the contexts that enable and constrain teacher collaboration within and across schools, and activation of student voice in the classroom. It would enhance the level of contextual intelligence in Irish education to understand the nature of these varying contexts and how they could be positively leveraged to support an authentic reform of JC education. If this reform comes from a place of contextual intelligence, it may allow actors at multiple levels of the system to see context in an opportunistic, rather than a cautious light. Further knowledge of contextual leverage in practice may support an understanding of *The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* not merely as an amalgam of internationally merged and borrowed policy initiatives, in which context must be managed and overcome. Rather, the JC curriculum may become a context rich, cultural artefact that represents our story of the good life, told by the teachers and students of Ireland, for the teachers and students of Ireland.

Concluding hopes – advocacy for teachers, for change, for scholarship

I now come to the conclusion of my doctoral thesis and, one might say, my research journey. Such a moment calls for a comment like “I thoroughly enjoyed conducting my research and have learned so much about the process”. To finish on such a note would, I feel, be both reductive and dismissive of the life – transforming experience of being, and becoming, a doctor. Further, it is reductive because, for me, this process of being and becoming will never end. Instead, I wish to conclude with reflections on my journey and my ongoing commitments to advocacy.

As a teacher who has watched, researched on, guided and driven the JC reform bus, I am excited for the future. The participants of this research have furthered my belief in the

potential of the teaching profession to rise the tide of Irish education. It is my wish that this thesis will serve as a relatable corpus of knowledge to help them and others in this important task. I also believe in the potential of the system to be responsive to this endeavour, both at a macro and meso level. JC reform is still in its infancy. In the commitment to advocacy for teachers as agents of JC change (in context), it is my hope that in the fullness of time, teachers will come to see JCT as their advocates. It is also my wish that my organisation can support teachers to be advocates for each other and for their craft. I believe this will be achieved by a combination of giving teachers a voice but also developing capacities so we can, as Stephen (St. Carthage's) suggested, leave them to it as (agentic) professionals.

As a leader of JC CPD, I take this responsibility very seriously. My professional journey has not just been one of advocacy for teachers, but also of the process of educational change. I have realised that achieving teacher agency "can not be resolved by putting the responsibility 'one level up'" (Priestley et al, 2015, p.164). Everyone in the system, whilst potentially making different contributions, all work under their own specific and complex ecological conditions, and promotion of meaningful agency within and across levels of the system is an important task. In my role, I operate within the meso-level of the system, supporting teachers and macro-level actors through recontextualisation of discourses (Bernstein, 1990, In Kirk & MacDonald, 2001) at the interface of research, policy and practice. I am acutely aware that the ways in which practice is (re)constructed in my field has the potential to impact on practice at the micro level of the school. I have learned that, in this space, I must be conscious of my own agency and that of my JCT colleagues. One enduring worry about teachers concerns their (in) ability to engage with research. The potential of meso-level supports in facilitating collaborative professional enquiry in a purposeful and research-informed manner has been documented (Drew et al, 2016), and the agency of meso-level actors to facilitate such processes has been problematized. In as much as teachers do, meso-level actors (such as JCT secondees) have different capacities for research engagement. However, there is also the issue of culture. In the Scottish context, Priestley et al (2015, p.161) argued that "a change to the culture of the meso-level organisations that support schools in developing the curriculum is needed to further support the achievement of teacher agency". JCT is a young and growing organisation, with

an evolving culture. We see ourselves as a support service 'by teachers, for teachers'. I am continually impressed and inspired by the dedication, vision and desire of my JCT colleagues to be the very best they can be so that we can do the best for the profession. My commitment to advocacy for educational change is reflected (amongst other ways) in how I continually endeavour to work with my colleagues to positively influence our organisational culture. It is my wish that our evolving culture of research-informed practice will help to permeate within and across Irish education, serving to support a necessary re-invention of the teaching profession.

This connects, and brings me to, my final commitment of advocacy for scholarship. My initial motivation for pursuing a doctorate was for altruistic, maybe even selfish, reasons. I wanted to 'be educated'. This motivation changed as the years progressed; the doctoral degree became a 'currency' which I used in part to further my career. However, underlying my changing motivations, I never lost sight of what I saw the doctoral journey as - an invitation to scholarship. I would like to believe that as a classmate, as a professional, and as a growing academic, I honoured this invitation with fervour. I fully embraced that this was an invitation to a community – a community of practitioners, of EdD colleagues, of researchers. I am pleased, and proud, to have become part of these communities and I am grateful for the life-altering experiences that these communities have offered me. The bus does not stop for me. I look forward, with gratitude and anticipation, to the continued journey with new passengers on board, changing landscapes and exciting new adventures.

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Appendices

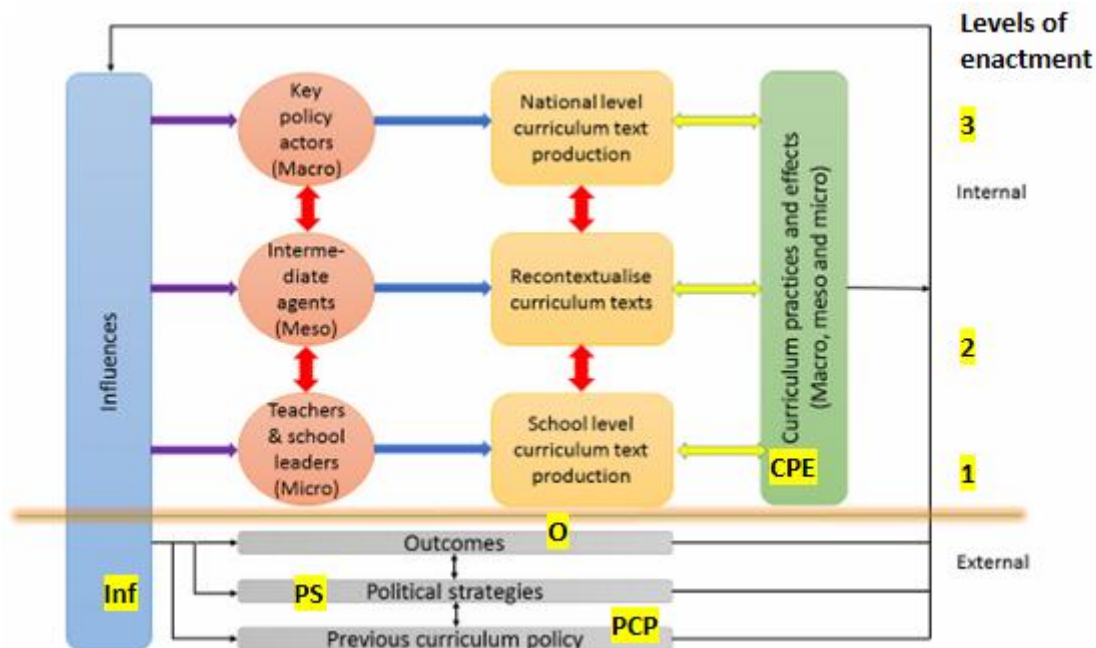
Appendix A. Evolution of aim and research questions

Date	Overall aim	Research questions	Outcome
2013	What are the perspectives of key stakeholders in Irish education on the enactment of the <i>Framework</i> ?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the intentions of key stakeholders regarding the <i>Framework</i>? What reasons do they give for these intentions? 2. What are their strategies for realising their intentions regarding the <i>Framework</i>? What reasons do they give for these strategies? 3. What significance do they attach to the <i>Framework</i>? What reasons do they give for their significance? 4. What outcomes do they expect from the <i>Framework</i>? What reasons do they give for expecting these outcomes? 	Rejected due to lack of theoretical fit between symbolic interactionism and the direction of the research
2014	How has the 2012 'Framework for Junior Cycle' been enacted?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have the stakeholders interpreted JC reform? 2. How have the stakeholders translated the <i>Framework</i> text? 3. What lessons can this enactment offer for national roll-out of the <i>Framework</i> over the coming years? 	<p>Modified to reflect concepts constructed from the data</p> <p>Challenge: The last research question was too broad, and was more reflective of something I was trying to understand as part of the overall aim</p> <p>Not enough to consider just how interpretation and translation is happening without consideration of why. Research aim did not reflect the process enough</p> <p>As data analysis progressed, context-centric theory construction led to a refocussing of aim and questions</p>

2016	Taking context as an active force that mediates the enactment of policy, and with regards to the stakeholders within and across the school sites – why does context matter in the enactment of JC reform?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have been the features of enactment of JC reform at each school site? 2. How have different actors engaged with the enactment of JC reform? 3. Why have they engaged in these ways? 4. How has the enactment of JC reform been contextually mediated and institutionally rendered? 	<p>Final guiding aim and research questions</p> <p>Aim and questions reflect the process of contextualised enactment of JC reform</p>
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Appendix B. Example schedule of potential questions

Questions are audited according to their potential to address the following aspects of the JC policy trajectory:

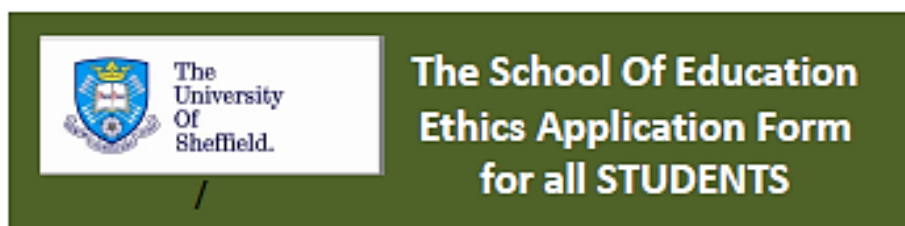


1. Tell me about the work you've been doing on _____ (aspect of focus for JC reform)
1, CPE, O
2. Why did you feel _____ was the way to go for your school? **Inf 1,3**
3. Describe the work you have done on these aspects? Why? **1,2 (due to network schools work)**
CPE, O, PS
4. Are there any other things that you have worked on? What are they? Why? **1,3CPE, O**
5. How has the new JC been received in your school? **1, Inf, PS**
 - By staff? Why? **1, Inf**
 - By parents? Why? **1, Inf**
 - By students? Why? **1, Inf**
6. Have you seen a change in your practice as a result of working on these things? Why? What changes? **1, CPE, O, PCP (define change by comparison to how things were)**
7. Has anything changed for you that you didn't anticipate? What? Why? **1, CPE, O, PCP (define change by comparison to how things were)**
8. Have you seen any changes for the students? What? Why? **1, CPE, O, PCP (define change by comparison to how things were)**
9. Has there been any resistance to the changes introduced? **1,3,PS, PCP, O, Inf**
 - By who?
 - Collective or individual?
 - Why?
10. (Flash cards) - these are some of the issues that seem to have emerged in the debates surrounding JC reform –
 - Teacher union ballots on non-cooperation
 - Teachers assessing their own students
 - JCPA - School Certificate Vs State certificate
 - Breaking down of subject barriers
 - DES slowing down the introduction of the JC
 Which of these cause you most concern? Why? **3, Inf, PCP**

Open questions:

- Are there any other things that are not on these cards that are concerns for you? What are they? Why?
- What advice would you offer to teachers who are starting to think about introducing the new JC in their practice? Why this advice?
- Have you enjoyed working on the new JC? Why?

Appendix C. Application for ethical approval and letter of approval from University Ethics Review Committee



This form has been adapted for The School Of Education, and agreed with The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Complete this form if you are a **student** who plans to undertake a research project which requires ethics approval via the University Ethics Review Procedure. If you are a member of staff or are submitting an en bloc ethical review, this is the wrong form.

Your Supervisor decides if ethics approval is required and, if required, which ethics review procedure (e.g. University, NHS, Alternative) applies.

If the University's procedure applies, your Supervisor decides if your proposed project should be classed as 'low risk' or potentially 'high risk'. For the purpose of ethical review all research with "vulnerable people" is considered to be High Risk (eg children under 18 years of age).

Date:	21/9/13
Name & Registration No of applicant:	David King, Reg No – 110100100
Contact details (University email address & telephone number):	Edo11dk@sheffield.ac.uk , +353876140905
Applicant's signature:	<i>David King</i>
Research project title:	EdD thesis – 'An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education'
Programme of study:	Professional doctorate (EdD) in educational studies DL,
Module code:	ORACLE code = EDUR15
Is the research ESRC Funded?	No
Is the research project High or Low risk (please tick as appropriate)?	<u>High</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/>
What type of student are you (please tick as appropriate):	Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Taught <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Postgraduate Research, EdD</u> <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/> MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I have ethically approved the above named project.	Supervisor's name: Prof. Elizabeth A. Wood Signature: <i>Elizabeth Wood</i> Date: 3.11.13

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by all Information Sheets/Covering Letters/Written Scripts which you propose to use to inform the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form where you need to use one.

David King
EdD Educational Studies

Head of School
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

26th November 2013

Telephone: +44 (0)114 222 8096
Email: edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear David

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

‘An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in ‘Irish Secondary Education’

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

We recommend you refer to the reviewers’ additional comments (please see attached). You should discuss how you are going to respond to these comments with your supervisor BEFORE you proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dan Goodley

Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc Prof E Wood

Enc Ethical Review Feedback Sheet

ETHICS REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM

This form is for use by members of academic staff in the School of Education when reviewing a research ethics application.

Note to reviewers and applicants:

The ethical review process in the School of Education is designed to provide critical response on ethical issues identified in research proposals. For this reason, reviewers' comments are not anonymous*. The comments given here are intended to help applicants (and where appropriate their academic supervisors) to revise their research plans where necessary to ensure that their research is conducted to high ethical standards.

The contents of this form remain internal to the University, and should not be used for wider dissemination without written permission from the Ethics Reviewer named here and the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel.

1. Name of Ethics Reviewer*: <small>Reviewers who wish to make anonymous responses should contact the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel before completing the review.</small>	Dr Rachael Levy
2. Research Project Title:	'An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education'
3. Principal Investigator (and name of Tutor/Supervisor in the case of student applications):	David King Dr Elizabeth Wood
4. Academic Department / School:	School of Education

<p>5. I confirm that I do not have a conflict of interest with the project application</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;">Or</p> <p>The following details may be considered as a conflict of interest. (If a possible conflict of interest is declared, the Chair of the Ethical Review Panel will take this into account)</p>

6. I confirm that, in my judgment, the application should:

Be approved:	Be approved with <i>suggested</i> amendments in '7' below:	and/ Be approved providing <i>requirements</i> specified in '8' below are met:	NOT be approved for the reason(s) given in '9' below:
	X		

7. Approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (i.e. it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

The only thing I would say is that the information sheet is quite long and almost has too much information for participants (which could be slightly overwhelming). Do you really need to include the flow chart – I would suggest that you consider removing as I'm not sure this is necessary for participants.

8. Approved providing the following, compulsory requirements are met (i.e. the ethics reviewers need to see the required changes):

9. Not approved for the following reason(s):

10. Date of Ethics Review: 18/11/13

Appendix D. Participant consent form

Title of Project: 'An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education'

Name of Researcher: David King, EdD candidate, University of Sheffield

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated November 2013 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. (Please contact David King on 0876140905 with any concerns you have).
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

(or legal representative)

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

(if different from lead researcher)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Appendix E. Letter of invite and participant information sheet

Letter of Invite to Research Project on Junior Cycle Reform

Dear colleague,

You are invited to take part in a research project in relation to curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education. 'A Framework for Junior Cycle', published by the DES in 2012, represents a significant change in the way Junior Cycle education in Ireland will be experienced in schools. Since the introduction of the Framework, a number of schools in the 'Junior Cycle Schools Network' have been working to explore the opportunities and implications for schools of this reform. They have been generating examples of the new Junior Cycle in action for schools in the network and also for other schools. These examples have included approaches to getting started with planning for the new Junior Cycle, integrating key skills into teaching and learning and other innovations that it is hoped will directly feed into the curriculum and assessment development in the new programme.

This research project, entitled '*An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education*' looks to generate theory on the perspectives of key stakeholders on the 2012 'Framework for Junior Cycle'. You have been identified as a key stakeholder in this research due to your role in enacting the Framework as a practitioner within the Junior Cycle Schools Network

I would be most grateful if you would consider being part of this research project. Should you agree, then I shall provide you with a participant information sheet detailing the particulars of your involvement and shall request your written informed consent.

I am the lead researcher for this project, which is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Elizabeth A. Wood from the School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK. If you have any queries, feel free to contact me at any time via phone or email as detailed below. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincere thanks,



David King

Personal contact details

Ballymakeagh Beg,

Killeagh,

Co. Cork

0876140905

daithiking@hotmail.com

Institutional contact details

Blackwater CS,

Ballyanchor Road,

Lismore,

Co. Waterford

05853620

Supervisor details

Professor Elizabeth A. Wood

School of Education

University of Sheffield

388 Glossop Road

Sheffield, S10 2JA

e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

'An interpretive study on curriculum policy enactment in Irish secondary education'

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project related to the new Junior Cycle in Irish secondary education. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

'A Framework for Junior Cycle', published by the DES in 2012, represents a significant change in the way Junior Cycle education in Ireland will be experienced in schools. Since the introduction of the Framework, a number of schools in the 'Junior Cycle Schools Network' have been working to explore the opportunities and implications for schools of this reform. They have been generating examples of the new Junior Cycle in action for schools in the network and also for other schools. These examples have included approaches to getting started with planning for the new Junior Cycle, integrating key skills into teaching and learning and other innovations that it is hoped will directly feed into the curriculum and assessment development in the new programme.

With English being introduced in 2014 as the first official subject of the new Junior Cycle, continuous professional development has begun for school management and English teachers. This has been facilitated by the development of a new support structure, 'Junior Cycle for Teachers' (JCT) which is responsible for supporting schools in introducing the new Framework.

The overall aim of this study is to generate theory on the perspectives of those involved in the development and enactment of the Junior Cycle Framework. The emphasis here is to gather perspectives from teachers and management within a sample of Junior Cycle Network Schools and from individuals involved in developing the Framework and facilitating its introduction. It is envisaged that the duration of this project will be from January 2014 to September 2015.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen due to your involvement as either

- A principal or deputy principal within a network school
- A teacher within a network school
- A policy actor involved with the enactment of the Framework at a national level

There will be up to 3 network schools involved in this study and a small number of policy actors.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in this study, you will be involved in the study for its expected duration from January 2014 to September 2015. Depending on the type of participant you are, you may be asked to partake in one of the following ways:

- **If you are a teacher in a Junior Cycle Network School** - you will be asked to partake in a *group interview* consisting of up to 4 people. This will take approximately one hour. I may contact you at a later date to do a *follow-on, one-to-one interview*.
- **If you are a principal or deputy principal in a Junior Cycle Network School** – You will be asked to take part in a *one-to-one interview*. This will last approximately one hour.
- I will also ask for the schools' consent to *access some school documents*, namely
 - o School policies
 - o A copy of the school's student journal and staff handbook
 - o If there are any other documents that you wish to provide me with that may be of relevance to this research, I would be most grateful to receive them.

You may also be contacted at a date after the interview, either by phone, email or in person, to verify some of the information we had discussed or information in documents.

Please be assured that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, nor do you have to provide any documents that you don't want you. Also, you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time.

- **If you are a policy actor involved with the enactment of the Framework at a national level:** You will be asked to partake in a one-to-one interview which will last approximately one hour. You may also be contacted at a date after the interview, either by phone, email or in person, to verify some of the information we had discussed.

Please be assured that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to and you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time.

7. What do I have to do?

There are no lifestyle restrictions or travel expenses incurred by you due to your involvement in this study. I shall travel to meet you each time for interview at a mutually agreeable location. The main thing being asked from you is to contribute your time and to be as honest as possible during the research.

8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

All interviews will be audio recorded on a Dictaphone. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. These audio recordings will be withheld by me for the lifetime of the project on a personal hard drive (non-network linked). Upon final publication of the doctoral thesis resulting from this research these audio recordings will be destroyed. All files containing personal data on participants and their institutions, as well as original interview transcripts, will be held in the same way and deleted at the end of the research. All printed interview transcripts will be shredded. This is in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Following the completion of your period of involvement in the research, you will have the right to withdraw your consent to participate and request that your own data be destroyed. This will be mutually agreed if practicable and following discussion with me, the primary researcher.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I don't foresee any reasonable discomforts, disadvantages or risks for you due to your participation in this research. However, should any arise, please bring them immediately to my attention.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help to provide insights on the promises and pitfalls for enactment of the Junior Cycle Framework. This will have benefits for schools in general and specific information from school sites and individuals will hopefully benefit those directly involved in the study.

11. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

It is not expected that this will happen, but if it does the reason(s) will be explained to participants.

12. What if something goes wrong?

Should something go wrong during or after the research and you wish to express a concern, you can contact me, the principal researcher, directly (see next page for details).

If your initial concern has not been handled to your satisfaction, or should you have any further concerns, you can contact the supervisor of this study, Prof. Elizabeth A. Wood at the University of Sheffield (see next page for details).

13. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you and your involvement in this study during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

14. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The research will be published as a doctoral thesis (predicted completion autumn 2015) and will be available as part of the University of Sheffield/White Rose theses collection. There may also be further publications in academic journals during or after the research, as well as possible presentations at conferences. Please let me remind and reassure you that you will not be able to be identified in any final reports or publications. I shall provide all participants with a summary of the findings of the research upon completion.

15. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is not being funded by any external body. It is research that will meet the partial requirements for the awarding of a doctoral degree in educational studies from the University of Sheffield.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The ethical review for this project has been managed and approved by the University Of Sheffield School Of Education's ethics review board in conjunction with the University's Ethics Review Procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

17. Contact for further information

Lead researcher:

David King,
Ballymakeagh Beg,
Killeagh,
Co. Cork
Tel – 0876140905
edp11dk@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor:

Professor Elizabeth A. Wood
School of Education
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388 Glossop Road
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e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix F. Coding map with summary of collated codes round 1 open coding

Features of enactment	Organising Concept	Categories and sub-categories		
Interpreting	Struggle	Let go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessing our own students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o For o Against o Working conditions - Junior Cert Exam - Subject Ownership 	Embrace the new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity for change - Frustration - Positive - Questioning the JCPA - Looking for support 	Know <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we doing it right - Information from top down - Making sense - Progress of JC reform nationally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Union disputes with DES
Translating	Depth of translation	Doing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availing of opportunities - Borrowing and sharing ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Working together - Bringing people along - Finding meaning - Inventing - Ready fire aim - Taking small steps 	Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying a need - Iterative planning - Meetings - Official planning - Prospective planning 	Saying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing practice - Reassuring - Epistemologies challenged

Appendix G. Example of coding from phase 1 open coding

Struggle to know

Participants referenced (DK: Interviewer):

Woodville College	Kenwood Community School	St. Carthage's Secondary School
J: Jacinta F: Fiona L: Liz P: Patricia PWC: Principal Sh: Sharon	Jn: Joan E: Elaine PKCS: Principal	Jo: John S: Stephen SJ: Sarah Jane Fk: Frank

Extracts from data	Coded for categories:
J: Yeah, ehm, what we know is very little, it [JC] looks like it is being modelled on the UK system, y'know, but in the long term...	Information from top down
Jn: They [parents] are confused, you know? They're just kind of confused and anxious, they just ask you what does it mean, what does it mean for my child to come here in September?. What does it mean for my child to come in two years? What's going to happen? What'll be different? Will standards drops? You know, some of our SNA's would be parents and they are asking a lot, they weren't happy some of them that we were a network school because they felt, oh my gosh, what's the impact going to be on my child,	Aspects identified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental confusion - Media distortion

oh, phew, actually we'll have missed that, you know, thank God we have missed that, so I think, but I think it's again a lack of information, a lack of reassurance, not even, you know ...

E: Yeah, because there's only the kind of negative is coming out in the press, rather than the positive.

Jn: The press haven't really been, you know, if, the media coverage of this has been really kind of quite destructive at times.

PKCS: Then the next thing...10 subjects...then they are going to be introducing English and then there's going to be 3 subjects the following year...then that changes from English to...it's just sothey keep changing the goal posts...things ...new announcements ...change...I just feel em...I don't know...I don't know why they keep...but it's like...it's like that the damn thing is so dragged out....that they nearly kill it before it gets started....because I think...there's an enthusiasm that comes with something that to me would be different and is...is...is what people want ...so just sort the problems and go with it...you know...if there are assessment issues...sort them and go with it...but that was....that was an elephant in the room that they left in the room...and I don't think they should have left it in the room...they should have had that in their minds...understand...em....and have a clear vision of where they want to go with this and articulate that from the start....and then just go...

Jo: Because I can't see any, I can see very little support from the DES about this. I can see it's still a little bit, very vague

P: I think there's a lot of confusion in the media as well about it like, it's interpreted like next years first years are not going to sit a Junior Cert. But it's only one subject that's changing each year y'know? [int me: hmm, hmm]. And then it's four more the following year, y'know, so like everyone seems to think the Junior Cert is being scrapped next September [int me: yes, yes], but like, y'know it's the way its been portrayed in the media as well

- Fragmented introduction
- Lack of clarity

<p>C: I think I, well, em, I'm, I'm luckier than Elaine because, eh, I still just it's a bit, it's all, I think it's great and I think it's needed, ok, and it's like anything, a change is always nerve-wracking and I, I find things like the standardisation, you know, who's to say like, we're giving out an A, B, C, here in this school, is it going to be the equivalent, the exact same in the next school if you know what I mean. Like, who's to say my A is the same as the school down the road, their A, and also that kind of, well I suppose, where to start with your particular subjects, like, with languages, you know, it's, you've got your four skills</p> <p>DK: Are you a language teacher?</p> <p>C: Yeah, sorry, I teach languages. It's reading, writing, listening and speaking, so where do you start? Do you focus on one of the skills more, how do you assess them, you know.</p> <p>C: I, I don't worry so much. I know some people do worry about what the parents are going to say, etc., but for some reason it's not, the only thing that worries me is just that I'm doing it right, and assessing in the right way. Em, ...</p> <p>Jo: I want to see where I'm going, em, I'm, I'm pretty sure what I'm doing but you know, sometimes you actually stop and say, hmm, ok, let me see if other people actually doing is anything that I'm doing or let me see if I'm going in the right direction or the wrong direction .</p>	<p>Are we doing it right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standards in assessing own students - Our own practice - Uncertain but supported

Jo: I know it's going to happen, but I'm not concerned, to be honest, I'm not concerned at all the way I'm doing, the way, I'm doing it, we are doing the new Junior Cycle here, to be honest. I, in a way I have 100% support from the school, from the management, and do you know, so there's, I'm not worrying about that, but I can understand some kind of like concerns that other colleagues may have, em...

S: It's hard....well ...I might look at a thing and I've looked at my template here on how to teach this and I'd say....oh Jesus is it right? Remember....and I think you referred to it earlier this morning....we're in this bubble...and we're...I suppose what you'd call...I think you refer to as the front runners...but when you're out in the front...

DK: Yeah...

S: It's all behind you....

DK: Yeah...yeah...

S: And you're...

DK: It's hard to find a reference point...

S: Should I slow down for the crowd like...like that was a great expression [I used it earlier]...

DK: Yeah...yeah...thanks...(laughs)

<p>S: And it's so comfortable you know? Em....because I mean when you do go out in your front....what if it goes wrong?</p> <p>L: I would say if you asked any five students, picked them out of the corridor at random, they would think that we aren't a JC network school. I, ehm, I don't know, yeah, I don't think it's having any impact on them. The, we've chosen 'staying well' as a key skill to focus on. And, ehm, while we're doing that as a school in different small ways, I don't know if we're selling it or marketing it to the students as 'this is the JC key skill that we're focusing on now'. I don't know if we're referring back to it</p>	
<p>Jn: Where the Teaching Council come into this, you know. Like they're our, our professional kind of body. Maybe they should be stepping up to the plate and, and responding to this in a more measured way, I just find there's a lot of scare-mongering, there's a lot of kind of bash the teachers in the media, and it's just, it's quite disheartening ..</p> <p>E: ...they really aren't speaking directly to teachers, or to network schools, who've had the opportunity, who probably know maybe a little bit more about that than others. Like, there's no, we don't seem to have, I don't know... who our voice would be.</p>	<p>Progress of JC reform nationally</p> <p>Aspects identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of advocacy - Fragmented introduction - Lack of support nationally

Jn: I have this real concern that people are going to see Junior cert reform next year as being, only the English teachers have to worry about it, and then, only the Irish teachers, and only the Science teachers. It'll move away from being a change of kind of, in methodology and the way we teach, to just something that individual departments need to worry about. I've always worried, I've, I've always had a concern about this. I just, I, it's so fragmented that I wonder will we be able to keep everybody on board ...

SJ: I think the Department of Education have done very, very poorly....

DK: In what way?

SJ: Just in...I don't think they've made enough of an effort...I don't think they haveI don't even think they have the correct people working on this...because...you know....all the time....like I mean Stephen goes to meetings and he comes back and he's like...sure they have no idea about this...

I just...I just don't think it has worked out and I certainly don't think that English should come in in September...

DK: Don't you?

SJ: No...not a hope...

DK: And why...why would you think that?

- Teacher union influence
- Acceptance this is happening

SJ: Because they....they haven't enough...I don't think that people have...know enough about it and I do think the unions will ban it and there will be non-cooperation

PWC: In some ways they're going too slowly and I think they're going too slowly mostly because of that one [holds up card - teacher unions]. They're slowing it down, they're scaling it back to try and keep the teacher unions on board

P: And I know he's [Ruairi Quinn] blaming all that on the unions, but like the JC reform is coming one way or the other [int me: yeah]

Appendix H. Collection of memos

Code note on open coding struggle to know

Code note

Code name:	Struggle to know
Related codes:	Progress of JC reform nationally
	Are we doing it right
	Information from top down

Code note: Actors are demonstrating both a positive and negative struggle in relation to 'knowing' about JC reform. This 'knowing' stems from their own practice (are we doing it right) to the system in terms of the progression of JC reform as a process. There is also a struggle with the system regarding dissemination of information – not just in relation to the roll out of the new curriculum, but also the factual information regarding what JC reform is about. Surprisingly, some teachers (e.g. Elaine) who are very positive about JC reform in their schools (see 'embrace the new' coding) are still struggling to know if there as a system voice that advocates for their beliefs. This seems to be part of a complex national picture, shaped by teacher unions and negatively portrayed by the media. As actors are navigating this struggle to know about JC reform, different dimensions become evident. Actors are neither fully in one camp nor the other. This is an avenue worth pursuing, to try and understand which factors are bringing about a positive and negative response, and why. It may be also interesting to see if the positive and negative aspects of struggle are polarised or part of a continuum.

Dimensions of struggle: It seems that teachers look outward and inward when mediating their interpretive struggle:

Positive – looking inward – the uncertainty of information, new practices and roll out of the curriculum are stymied by the support that teachers are receiving from their JC coordinator

Negative – looking outward – the tumultuous nature of the reform process, the blame for which is being laid at the feet of teacher, unions and media polarisation

Negative – looking inward – there is a concern over whether the practices they are adopting are having any real positive impact. This impact is measured in terms of student progress and teacher standards in their innovative approaches and future assessment practices

Neither – some actors (such as Patricia) accept that 'it's coming in one way or the other' and are happy to get on with things

Questions

How can the same practitioners be both positive and negative about JC reform?

Some actors demonstrate a compliance with change – neither positive nor negative. Why?

What are the aspects of JC reform that are causing positive and negative responses? Is there a common thread?

What are the internal and external factors that are causing people to be both positive and negative?

Teachers struggle to know if their own practice is good enough – what unifies this struggle? Are there commonalities across these groups?

What areas of study are these data relevant to?

Contexts of influence

Discourse as an outcome of policy processes

Political strategies and effects

Resistance to/acceptance of change

Practitioner values

Policy actor types

[Axial coding theoretical memo on policy positions](#)

Actors' interpretive struggle – an irreconcilable concept?

Ball, Braun and Maguire (2012, p.49) talk of the eight types of 'policy positions' which are involved in making meaning of and constructing responses to policy through the process of interpretation and translation. Is there possibly a link between the type of policy actor that somebody demonstrates themselves to be and the nature of their enactment of JC reform?

For example, if somebody values being observed/inspected, demonstrates compliance, how does this effect the way they interpret JC reform? Likewise, if somebody resists union and media influence, does this influence their overall enactment and if so in what way(s)?

Some interesting cases:

Katie, Woodville – demonstrates compliance, reverting back to usual, tried and tested, admits to trying to do 'little things'...huge justification from her in terms of the pressures her school is feeling as a new school, she passively voices some concerns about reform but, most interestingly, she speaks in the language of compliance. *Neither positive or negative.*

Fiona and Jacinta, Woodville - both English teachers, subject being rolled out next year, seem to come across more so as critics (ibid, p.62). They have an affinity for the de facto situation and are more so expressing concerns rather than hope for the future. Major concerns are linked to sustainability of reforms, resourcing, teachers assessing their own students and increased workload. Most pointedly, they are concerned about the impact of letting go of the JC exam on students when they sit the LC exam. They serve as maintainers of 'counter discourses; some of these are drawn from the historic archive of teaching discourse - 'the field of history' (ibid, p.63). However, they also show signs of being advocates of policy, through evidence of their efforts to translate JC reform into practice

and their reports on positive outcomes for students. They seem to, like Jacinta, show a tweaking of their practice. *Inward positive, outward negative.*

Sharon, Woodville - definitely enthusiastic about what the new JC will offer students but she is critical, for the most part, about school based assessment and its potential to be polluted by poor standards from teachers who will bump grades up either to look favourable to other schools or else avoid the pressures of management. *Inward positive to students, negative to fellow professionals. Outwards negative*

Frank, St. Carthage's - he makes multiple references to student and teacher enjoyment, he refers to the openness, flexibility and freedom he is afforded by negotiating his own curricular content...he has some points that he is critical about but, again, these are issues that are external to the school for the most part....Even in the case of concerns over resources in the school, he is positive in his spin on this, that he has become a sort of 'MacGyver' of teaching, that he gets on and makes do within the constraints of time and resources. Even in the face of contextual limitations brought about by material circumstances, he is still enthusiastic in his thinking about practice and doing of JC reform. *Inwards positive, outwards positive (In a minority)*

Joan, Kenwood – Excited about change, loves the transformation she has seen in school amongst staff and students, on the side of the system and the meaning of change but critical of the influences of the media, teacher unions and fragmented introductions. *Inward positive, outward positive and negative*

Bringing it together

The above cases are indicative of other participants, all of which cannot be allocated an individual policy actor 'type'. It seems, then, that most actors demonstrate both positive and negative interpretations of JC reform depending on whether they are looking inward at their school experiences or outwards at the system. Looking inwards, actors are enthusiastic. Looking outwards, they are critical in their struggle to interpret JC reform. This change of perspective is common across schools and across a number of core categories. Some actors fall in the middle, wherein they are neither excited enough to be enthusiastic or care enough to be critical. Looking at the perspectives of participants through the lenses of

- external criticism,
- pragmatism, and
- internal enthusiasm,

allows for a reading of the data which justifies why the same actors can have polarised views on the same issue, depending on whether they are looking inwards at the school or outwards at the system

	Policy positions	Criticism (External)	Pragmatism	Enthusiasm (Internal)
Struggle to	Let go	Assessment: vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposing the teacher - Unfair on the student, leaving them overwhelmed Subject ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compartmentalising teachers - Subject knowledge over skills 	Assessment: get over it, sense of accession/compliance	Assessment: autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freeing the teacher - Fairer on the student Subject ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total growth of the child is what matters
	Embrace the new	Capacity in the system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear of change - Not enough autonomy for teachers from top-down Lack of support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaningful training - Clarity Advocacy for champions at a national level	Get on with it but exam speaks all	Student benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills development - Creativity - Love of learning Teacher benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration - Positive classroom dynamic
	'Know'	National policy management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DES: fragmented introduction, lack of clarity and consultation Teacher unions: slowing momentum	External monitoring valued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DES interventions - Moderation 	In-school management - feel supported by JC Coordinator

Questions

What common factors are causing participants' to be internally enthusiastic and externally critical?

What factors polarise participants' internal enthusiasm and external criticism?

A minority of actors (Stephen and Frank from St. Carthage's, Liz and the Principal from Woodville, and Joan and the Principal from Kenwood) are externally enthusiastic – what does this mean?

What areas of study are these data relevant to?

Contexts of influence

Curriculum policy

Practitioner values

[Theoretical memo on contexts](#)

There are differences in the ways that participants:

Interpret JC reform

Reconciled as a positive and negative struggle, depending (mostly) on whether participants are critically looking outwards to the system or enthusiastically looking inwards to the school

Contexts influencing the interpretive struggle

Depending on the influence of the context (positive or negative), participants were either externally critical or internally enthusiastic

National policy management

Externally critical of

- System capacity
- Support and advocacy
- Media and union interference
- Fragmentation of introduction

Curriculum policy (past and present)

Externally critical of

- Assessment/vulnerability and distrust
- Subject ownership/compartmentalisation/lack of knowledge

Internally enthusiastic regarding

- Benefits of JC reform for teachers and students (linked to practitioner values)
- Subject renewal/cross curricular links – total growth of the child (linked to practitioner values)
- Assessment/autonomy

Externally enthusiastic regarding

- Pioneering change and the underlying principles of JC reform (linked to practitioner values)

There are differences in the ways that participants:

Translate JC reform into practice

Reconciled as depth of translation, ranging from shallow to deep

Contexts influencing depth of translation

Depending on the degree of influence of the context, participants experienced different depths of translation. This was unique to each school, but common factors were evident

School	In-school policy management	Values
Woodville - Shallow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of JC Coordinator <p>Common across schools, mediated different at each school site</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The purpose of the curriculum - Service to students <p>Common across schools, mediated differently at each school site</p>
Kenwood – Deep, transformative change	<p>Influences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritizing other policy initiatives (due to unique material contexts) 	<p>Reinforcing policy intentions of previous curriculum (exams serving students)</p>
St. Carthage’s – Deep, personal change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ready-fire-aim approach - Bringing the whole staff on a journey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o External opportunities o Accessing student voice o Promoting professional conversations o Focusing on the classroom 	<p>Service-driven meaning of the purpose of curriculum shared between leaders, teachers and coordinators (supported by in-school policy management)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting professional conversations - Availing of opportunities - Selective innovation 	<p>Similar to Kenwood, but limited to pilot group (due to policy management of selective innovation)</p>

Arising from this, there are 4 contrasting possibilities, based on the degree of interpretation and translation of JC reform:

Shallow translation and criticism – in-school policy management does not prioritise JC reform, actors critical of national policy management of JC reform process. In some cases, their values serve to reinforce the policy intentions of the Junior Cert curriculum. Curricular concerns over new approaches to assessment engender distrust for other teachers and vulnerability. *Capacity lacking, critical of the system:*

Nature of contextual influences:

School: Lack of positive in-school policy management

System: Negative perspective on national policy management. Not positively aligned with JC curriculum policy

Shallow translation and enthusiasm – as above for in-school policy management, but these actors interpret the Junior Cycle curriculum differently. Again, linked to their values, they are the most closely aligned with the underlying principles of JC reform. They believe in the change, but it is not happening for them in their schools due to the in-school policy management. *Capacity lacking, belief in the system*

Nature of contextual influences:

School: Lack of positive in-school policy management

System: Negative perspective on national policy management. Positively aligned with JC curriculum policy

Deep translation and criticism – As above for criticism, but these actors are also critical of the lack of advocacy for JC reform nationally. They have experienced deep changes in practice (some more than others, i.e. Kenwood more staff than St. Carthage's) and are enthused about the changes they see in their schools. However, they are critical that the system doesn't defend them, and that the good work they are doing is shrouded by a nationally negative reform discourse. *Capacity realised, critical of the system*

Nature of contextual influences:

School: Positive experiences of in-school policy management. In some cases, values alignment between school leaders, JC Coordinator and teachers regarding the purpose of JC curriculum in their school is evident

System: Negative perspective on national policy management. Not positively aligned with JC curriculum policy

Deep translation and enthusiasm – these are individual teachers who are engaging with JC reform in a rich way through their practice but also in their alignment with the purpose of the curriculum. They are enthusiastic about the proposed changes, and are seeing them played out in practice. These teachers believe in change, in their interpretation of the curriculum and its translation into the classroom. *Capacity realised, belief in the system*

Nature of contextual influences:

School: Positive experiences of in-school policy management. Values alignment evident in some cases

System: Still slightly negative perspective on national policy management, but in some cases arising from a need to force the positive rather than a focus on the negative. Positively aligned with JC curriculum policy

Looking at the influence of the different contexts on participants' interpretations and translation of JC reform, a picture begins to emerge. This is based on the (lack of) positive influence of each context. All of this is inextricably linked to the values of the teachers, which can serve to either reinforce or reject the previous curriculum against JC reform. The data does suggest, however, that values are 'tapped into' more so at the level of the school through the ways that policy is managed.

In-school policy management	National policy management	Curriculum policy	Interpretation	Translation	Descriptor
Negative	Negative	Negative	Critical	Shallow	Stagnation
Negative	Positive	Positive	Enthusiastic	Shallow	Fertile Ground
Positive	Negative	Negative	Critical	Deep	Affirmation
Positive	Positive	Positive	Enthusiastic	Deep	Transformation

Taking the premise of Ball, Braun & Maguire (2012) that context is an *active force* – what do forces do? They serve to move things. In this case, they are 'moving' people or schools. Leverage is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as 'the power to move people or situations'. In mechanical terms, it refers to the ability to exert large forces with small efforts; to move heavy loads using an appropriate instrument. This metaphor is apt for what is happening with contexts in this study. Within and across schools, the identified contexts are a mechanism by which to move people into different *enactment spaces*. This movement at the school level is linked to policy management and values. A shared meaning of what the school is about in terms of JC reform is a positive outcome of this policy management in the school. At the system level, it is linked to curriculum policy and national policy management. Participant perspectives on these two contexts serves to move them to different enactment spaces. A shared meaning between individual participants' views on JC reform and the underlying principles of the JC curriculum is tentatively evident in some participants as a positive outcome of management of the JC reform process (e.g. choice and flexibility, wellbeing, inclusive education, engagement and participation, creativity and innovation). Whilst still critical of aspects of the introduction of JC reform, they do believe in the curriculum that has been framed by the state. *At the school level: Positive policy management, realised shared values, leads to a shared meaning of the purposes of JC curriculum. This is leverage of school contexts*

*At the system level: Positive perspectives on policy management (i.e. the JC curriculum framework as an outcome of policy management) leads to a shared meaning between teachers and the purposes of the curriculum. **This is leverage of system contexts***

Commonality between school and system: Policy management + influencing shared meaning = contextual leverage.

Appendix I. Example of coding from phases 1 through 3 for interpreting

Participants key (DK: Interviewer):

Woodville College	Kenwood Community School	St. Carthage's Secondary School
PWC: Principal L: Liz K: Katie F: Fiona J: Jacinta Sh: Sharon P: Patricia	PKCS: Principal Jn: Joan JE: Jackie E: Elaine C: Christine	S: Stephen Fk: Frank SJ: Sarah Jane Jo: John

Coded extracts are underlined. Categories and concepts coded for across phases are summarised below extracts.

External Criticism → Curriculum policy	
Extracts from data	<p>E: I do feel nervous about eh, with the assessment, there's a couple of things that I feel nervous about, like what Christine's saying. I do feel nervous about the <u>standardisation</u>, but I feel <u>I'm very exposed personally</u>, em, like for example, you know, we're a very small community here and I feel if I was down at the local supermarket or whatever, picking my lunch, that I could be approached and say, <u>why was my son a B and not an A, you know, and I feel very personally exposed, it's not like the Department this kind of anonymous person who has graded your son or daughter</u>, and I think you know, we're very professional in this school and I think, you know we would look, whatever the Department decides, I think we would look at moderating amongst ourselves, em, that we would try and avoid that maybe as much as possible, but em, <u>I think that's the bit that makes me the most nervous, that I think I, em, as I said, I'm just very exposed, I think, to parents.</u></p> <p>Sh: <u>It's really easy for a teacher to go, just to add, just fifteen percent on and make them all in the forties and fifties instead of the twenties and pop them into a new band, and I won't like,</u> I've had kids sitting on eighty four and thirty nine percent before and I will not give somebody a pass, if they are not deserving it [...] <u>Will we end up like going, your vice principal is coming in and he's</u></p>

saying, eh, 'Sharon, the Science [grades] down the road and the Science overall are really high and yours are really low and', sure here, I'll bump them up by ten percent?

DK: I mean, when we go to the doctor we have professional confidence in the doctor to diagnose us, when we go to the dentist and the nurse, we have professional confidence in them, so why wouldn't we have confidence in us [as teachers] to diagnose, to use the medical speak, our own students?

Sh: But have you, like, we've all taught in schools and we've all seen different doctors and different nurses, and there are good doctors, there's bad doctors [..] I can tell you there's about ninety five percent of the teachers here that I would definitely give my trust to correct these [exams] and they would do an absolutely fantastic job, there's a couple where I think that they wouldn't do it . And not just this school [..] like I've worked in schools where I'd say fifty percent of the teachers wouldn't do it, I've worked in schools where I'd say ten percent of them wouldn't correct them properly. And I, y'know and, because, sometimes [...] June, July and August [summer holidays], y'know? That's why people are here. [..] I feel people aren't always committed to the job, as like, all doctors aren't as good as each other, all nurses aren't as good as each other...

DK: Is there anything that isn't there [*points to flash cards*] that concerns you about the new JC coming in?

F: I think my main concern is the impact it will have when we move up to Leaving Cert

DK: OK...

F: That would be the big concern for me, in terms of like, exam preparedness and the kind of expectations that are there. Because, the Junior Cert [exam] is great practice for the Leaving Cert, the actual, the whole process of the thing, y'know it is good practice and I would worry that might get lost and then students coming to Leaving Cert might be overwhelmed by the fact that it all comes down to the final exam and they're not going to get by on work done throughout the year as well. That really concerns me

J: Yes....that is a big concern and it's great for the kids who are struggling to have that 40% in the new JC reform, y'know, continuous assessment, 40% in the bag and then do the rest as an exam. But when it comes to the LC, they are going to be absolutely thrown by all these exams, state exams, y'know, and all that pressure and at LC level, they never will have had a practice before and they will find that difficult to not have that continuous assessment as a safety net

F: I think, like, what the Junior Cert, personally I think prepares them well for is sitting in an exam situation and having to write for, y'know quite a long period of time [..] I understand like there will be assessments in that, fit into the new JC, but I would be

	<p>worried about the, maybe forming a habit of writing for, I suppose for long periods of time. Like I know it's something we've talked about ourselves [looks to Jacinta]</p> <p>J: Yeah, yeah...</p> <p>F: That you know then when it comes down the LC exam that you have to sit and write for three hours that getting out of that habit might, <u>it might just overwhelm them again</u></p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Interpreting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to let go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment: accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pressure from parents ▪ School management pressure ▪ Overwhelming students 	<p>Phase 2: External criticism</p>	<p>Phase 3: System contexts Curriculum policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability/Vulnerability - Accountability/professional distrust - Reinforcing of current policy intentions
<p>External Criticism → National policy management</p>			
Extracts from data	<p>S: <u>Democratic professionalism has to come into play</u> ...where they're the people in charge [teachers]...if we're that great and if this ...if this....if this eh Junior Cycle is going from the ground up ...okay fair enough but <u>leave us to it as professionals.</u></p> <p>E: I think it's a really needed change and I think it's a really positive change, but em, you know, I feel <i>that voice isn't heard</i> and you know, <u>there's nobody saying that out there,</u> and I think that would be a concern [..] the unions are probably being spoken to and the NCCA but <i>they're not talking to teachers,</i> they really aren't speaking directly to teachers, or to network schools, who've had the opportunity, who probably know maybe a little bit more about that than others. Like, there's no, we don't seem to have, <u>I don't know who our voice would be.</u></p> <p>Jn: The media wants ...</p> <p>C: <u>The media ...[*rolls her eyes*]</u></p> <p>E: Yeah, the negative.</p> <p>Jn: The negative voice. <u>I think that's powered by unions</u> [..]They do tend to hype things.</p> <p>Jn: ...do you know, David, I think, like, I'm really, really positive about this and have been from the very outset, but as the journey has progressed, <u>I've become more and more frustrated with how it's being rolled out, and the lack of information and the</u></p>		

	<p><u>conflicting information</u>, and we're hearing things from the media, and you know, we're, eh, and it's just... <u>the lack of information and the whole area of assessment has really caused difficulties for those of us who are really trying to push this in the staff room.</u></p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Interpreting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to embrace the new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Capacity in the system o Lack of teacher autonomy o Lack of advocacy for champions - Struggle to know <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Progress of JC reform nationally o Misinformation o Media distortion o Teacher union influences 	<p>Phase 2: External criticism</p>	<p>Phase 3: System contexts National policy management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National advocacy - Fragmented introduction - Teacher support
<p>Pragmatism → Curriculum policy</p>			
Extracts from data	<p>F: Well I think I'll probably approach it differently in that I won't have the junior cert [exam] pressure hanging over, y'know and I feel like now so much of what I teach I almost have to justify whether it's relevant to the junior cert [syllabus/exam]</p> <p>J: Yeah</p> <p>F: So <u>I suppose it'll probably give us a bit more freedom to an extent</u> [J agrees] in terms of what we can actually teach to an extent but <u>the problem lies with the teachers trying to shift from all the terminal exams at the end of the year</u>, the exams being corrected by a state body to actually correcting it themselves. Y'know, that's gonna be a big change and that's gonna be, <u>it's gonna be hard to kind of loosen that tie either..</u></p> <p>E: Students want to know where they are [in their learning] and I know you've other forms of assessment and not a final grade like, you've got assessment for learning and things like that but I think really, students need to be kind of screened, [<u>.. I think in our culture, it's embedded in us, like, from an early age, that A, B, C, [..] it's always been that way</u>]</p> <p>Sh: I assume everybody is going to go there, <u>eventually it will be just the way it's done and that's it, y'know?</u></p>		

	<p>L: I don't think the capacity is there, which is unfortunate but <u>it'll have to be there</u> because..</p> <p>K: It's very hard. But, y'know, <u>it's here, and we have to deal with it, get on with it</u></p> <p>K: Ehm, I suppose the assessing your own students, personally I would think would be a bit of an issue</p> <p>DK: And why would you say that Katie?</p> <p>K: I suppose just the basic things like if you were in like, a rural enough, small enough town, you're going to bump into parents, the usual story, they're knowing you're assessing their students or you could be living on the road near some of the students and I know that's something you have to get over... <u>it would be something that would be in the back of my mind now, [...] and it mightn't be an issue, but it's just something that I would be thinking of.</u></p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Interpreting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to embrace the new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get on with, but exam matters ▪ Acceptance - Struggle to let go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accession to change 	<p>Phase 2: Pragmatism</p>	<p>Phase 3: System context Curriculum policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subversive towards Junior Cert policy intentions - Accession/compliance towards change despite rooted concerns of previous curriculum
Internal Enthusiasm → Curriculum policy (and values)			
Extracts from data	<p>Jo: I'm seeing it especially in second year, em, <u>they're developing, they're really developing, like, a huge critical thinking, and that's crucial.</u> I had projects with my students actually last week, some of them were just fantastic. I've, I actually wouldn't be scared to say <u>they were probably at college level, to be honest.</u></p> <p>SJ: <u>I think they have more freedom to be creative and to voice opinions</u> and just for not to be...you know very regimental.....em and I do think it's good....I think kids develop greatly with it</p>		

- Fk: Yeah, they loved it. They became more confident, because this was reported afterwards that they felt more confidence, eh, they made new friends, em, they just enjoyed, they loved coming in, they were coming up to you during the yard, maybe during the week when class isn't even on, you know, eh, coming up to you about, look what I done [...] they were very enthused by it
- Fk: Em, it's definitely seeing, trying to, it's getting the excitement into students, engaging with them. Em, teaching them new words, new concepts that they haven't seen. Em, not going, eh, for example it's, it's maybe tying in many different things that they've done in normal science, em, oh, it's, it's that flexibility that you can do anything you want to do next week. You're not bound by the, you're not bound by the set curriculum, and it's having that flexibility is, is nice.
- Sh: We've been saying for years and years and everybody since I was doing my Junior Cert which is a long time ago that, people were saying 'God if you had one bad day' [...]. So like, you've to look at the positive here [...] will we get a better reflection of what our kids are capable of and, like, we see children here who work really really hard for three years and deserve so much and go into a [Junior Cert] exam and don't do well? And that's very disappointing. But it's less likely to happen with the new JC I think
- Jo: The idea behind it [the new JC] is excellent, it's great, it's fantastic, em, I don't really believe in exams, I don't really believe in em, big days where you go there and you have to speak at an oral exam and if you fail it, you fail it, you know, I don't believe in that. I believe in, do you know, continuous assessment and I believe that, I don't know, like, I suppose probably myself, I was bad in school, I didn't really like exams and so I think that a student can produce better, em, in a relaxed environment.
- L: I think getting rid of assessment is the best thing, and that's what people are most fearful of. Because getting rid of assessment you have the freedom now to actually think about what you're going to teach.
- PKCS: Well I think it's a good thing because first of all...boxing ...em ...off subjects in their individual box [...] life isn't all boxed off in home economics today and something else [...] You see it with the kids growing up ...from when they come in as different first years....and you see them growing...now...so for me it's not about home economics or maths orthese are side-line issues...you know...eh...now I don't mean to be dismissive because all the subject areas are in their own part of the jigsaw essential elements of ...of the development and growth...we wouldn't have them in the curriculum if they weren't [...] But it's...it's about the total growth of the child

	<p>E: What I really like, the idea of the cross-curricular [...] <u>I love the idea of coming together with another department</u> and kind of, either reinforcing something or working together to get a topic across. I love that idea, I just think it's going to be so interesting, and it will make, you know, <i>not</i> <u>that it's all about me, it will make my job a lot, you know, more fulfilling I think than the current curriculum</u></p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Interpreting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to embrace the new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills development ▪ Creativity ▪ Love of learning ▪ Teacher benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration - Struggle to let go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment: autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fairer on the student ▪ Freeing the teacher o Subject ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Total growth of child 	<p>Phase 2: Internal Enthusiasm</p>	<p>Phase 3: School contexts Curriculum policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curricular freedom in JC reform - Accountability/autonomy <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose of curriculum - Service to students
<p>External Enthusiasm → Curriculum policy (and values)</p>			
Extracts from data	<p>J: <u>It has been the most fascinating journey. It has been unbelievable with the students.</u></p> <p>J: And I think there's much more in understanding of <u>collective responsibility</u>, so if you're working as part of a group, you can't sit on the sidelines, you are part of the team and you have a responsibility to support the rest of the students you're working with, em, and we have, you know, <u>we've lovely things that happened a lot because as we were trying to bring more and more staff with us, we were feeding back all the time.</u> We were getting the students to journal their experiences as well as us, em, and we had one instant where they were working in groups and somebody was the timekeeper, and somebody was the chair, and somebody was the note taker, and they all had knew what their responsibility was, and at the end, they had to say, in the lesson today I learned about the flowering plant, but I also learned how to be a competent note taker, and some group who had not finished in</p>		

the time, the person who was the time keeper wrote down, I learned how to be a time keeper today, and I said to her, well do you know what, I'm not really sure you did, did you, because your group didn't get finished, and she said, yes, Miss, it'll never happen again. And gems like that. You just think, wow, you know...

DK: Yeah...yeah....if you could offer advice to my school now...who are...where the word Junior Cycle co-ordinator is ...

S: Wouldn't be great?

DK: Is a very ugly phrase right....what would you...what advice would you give us to get started with this thing?

S: Start with the staff....remember I'm the junior cycle co-ordinator right and people don't believe this...I've no post right...I'm doing this for free...there is nothing at all....and I was asked why....and the reason is because I want to....do you understand what I'm saying to you? It's not...

DK: And why do you want to?

S: Because the buzz...because this is something new....this is pioneering ...this is going somewhere do you know what I mean? And I want to be part of that...

DK: Yeah...

S: Like I can go into my class...close the door and teach for the rest of my life...I've no problem with thatbut I don't want to do that....that's my problem....this type of stuff...I'm really excited about ...new type of stuff and any one of those 27 people inside in that front roomso my advice to a principal or anyone...get the staff around...find out what their talents are...

J: Yeah, it doesn't, I wouldn't because I come from the English system, it doesn't bother me [assessing own students] in the slightest, because I'm very confident that we will come up with some kind of quality control moderation system that will ...

DK: Good, good stuff. And what about you, Joan, have you enjoyed JC reform so far?

J: Oh, loved it, loved it, yeah.

DK: And why so?

J: Just because I'm a bit like you, I love change. I love the, just the buzz of the whole kind of, you know, there are things that are really important to me. I come from, I came from a senior management post in England, and I suppose the things that are really

important to me are making a difference for the students and making a difference for your colleagues, and when I see the, the capacity that we've built up in the staff through our involvement with this, through kind of really trying to push this, you know, kind of when I stood up and said this to the staff, I said, I promise you there will be professional development and we'll all grow as practitioners if we engage in this, and I really think we've delivered, we have.

DK: **I'm really interested in the work you are doing here. I suppose my first big question is, why did you feel this [creative curricular approaches] was the way for your school to go?**

Fk: With the new Junior Cert. cycle, curriculum? Em, definitely it was to get students engaged more, and em, be more in control of creating content, what we can do that's not going to be the same as the normal Junior Cert programme, basically, so when we were asked initially to go with this, Stephen explained this quite clearly, would be that you would try to pick areas that you would have liked to have done when you were a student

Fk: I'll be honest personally [...] I find that when you're with the normal curriculum, you're boxed in. Whereas this gives us the freedom, to think a little bit more. It allows us to think, em, also that learning isn't just, em, the traditional normal way of learning that we would normally, that we were brought up with. And it was good, I'm not knocking it, the chalk and talk method, but it's getting students now to be more aware that students learn in different ways.

DK: **Yes.**

Fk: We never had the opportunity to do that, to get up in class and talk, em, be aware more of how to develop the student, are you with me? Academically, obviously but also socially and to work more in groups, are you with me?

Fk: I do believe that eh, change is needed. You, we have to get away from students learning off and memorising. They need to be able to apply it, and that's really a key area for us as teachers, is, is, even they've said that in third level, that the students coming in can't really think. Em, they can learn stuff off and, and memorise it, and then it comes down to who has the best memory on the day, kind of thing.

Fk: Em, it's definitely seeing, trying to, it's getting the excitement into students, engaging with them. Em, teaching them new words, new concepts that they haven't seen. Em, not going, eh, for example it's, it's maybe tying in many different things that they've

	done normally, em, oh, it's, <u>it's that flexibility that you can do anything you want to do next week. You're not bound by the, you're not bound by the set curriculum, and it's having that flexibility is, is nice.</u>		
Coded for	Phase 1: Interpreting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to embrace the new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills development ▪ Not being bound ▪ Teacher enjoyment ▪ Student enjoyment ▪ Capacity building amongst teachers ▪ Valuing change - Struggle to let go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confidence to assess o Subject ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creative approaches 	Phase 2: External Enthusiasm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positives for teachers - Positives for students 	Phase 3: Curriculum policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curricular freedom Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose of curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Aligned with principles of JC reform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choice and flexibility, learning to learn, inclusive education, engagement and participation, creativity and innovation

Appendix J. Example of coding from phase 1 translating to phase 3 contexts

Participants key (DK: Interviewer):

Woodville College	Kenwood Community School	St. Carthage's Secondary School
PWC: Principal L: Liz K: Katie F: Fiona J: Jacinta Sh: Sharon P: Patricia	PKCS: Principal Jn: Joan JE: Jackie E: Elaine C: Christine	S: Stephen Fk: Frank SJ: Sarah Jane Jo: John

Coded extracts are underlined. Categories and concepts coded for across phases are summarised below extracts.

Deep translation → In-school policy management (and values)	
Extracts from data	<p>DK: Ok, it sounds like you've been on an epic journey with this thing. Have you had any resistance along the way, or any struggles with it?</p> <p>J: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You're speaking to the converted here [laughs]. Do you know, we, <u>I think the way we came to it, aligned with school self-evaluation, meant that everybody had to be on board, because this was our school focus</u>, so at some level, everybody had to, you know, we have been for years analysing our exam results, and then action planning, em, in the context of those exam results and looking at the strengths of our results, looking at the areas for development in those results, and then action planning. <u>So you know every department was having to put together an action plan that focussed on developing teaching approaches and assessment methodologies because that's where we were focussing as a school</u>, so everybody engaged at some level, but obviously some people engaged more than others, and continue to. You know, em, we started off with a core group. The science department were fantastic, because I was a science teacher. They were kind of my guinea pigs. So I said, look...</p> <p>DK: We always are [laughing]</p>

	<p>J: <u>I can't go to the staff and say, I put in a little tool kit for the staff at the first staff development day on this, and I said <u>I can't go to the staff and say, try out these things unless we've done them, I, I've done them myself, and I can't do them all on my own, will you come on this journey with me?</u> And they said, yeah ok, and they were fantastic, so that we went with a credible tool kit and said, this works and we took some things out and we added new things in, and <u>we were able to say what the students had said.</u> So, there were some very early adopters who very, very quickly came on board and then we fed back a lot to staff, we did a lot of you know, this is what we've done, this is what we've tried. This is what's worked, this is what the students are saying. This is what is exciting about it. Yes, we recognised there are challenges, but, and we brought more people on board.</u></p> <p>J: <u>I think teachers hearing from their own colleagues about their own students is much better than, em, somebody from the outside coming in and telling us,</u> if we could do just as good a job, and when you're hearing what your own students are saying, or what works in the context of the cohort of students that you're going to see every day, then you know, it's much more real.</p> <p>JE: I've been kind of conscious of, but then you tend to go back to your own, your old ways and you know, it depends as well on the dynamics of the class, etc. Em, but it, it's like anything. <u>Once you kind of try it, and you give it a go and you see that it's working, you'll go on, that right, I feel more confident in letting them go off and do, figure things out themselves.</u></p> <p>J: I think that will be, that's why <u>we kind of try to keep away from assessments because we didn't want it to compromise our progress in the other areas.</u> We felt if we got bogged down with the whole assessment thing, that's what would happen, so ...</p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Translating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Bringing people along o Reporting student experience o Reporting teacher experience o Ready fire aim approach o Focus on the classroom o Complementing other initiatives - Saying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Epistemologies challenged 	<p>Level of translation Deep transformation</p>	<p>Phase 3: In-school policy management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whole staff on a journey - Accessing student voice

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changing practice 		
Personal deep change → In-school policy management (and values)			
Extracts from data	<p>S: You know...but I mean...now I have to go into the class and instead of saying...eh...you know...inflicting death by PowerPoint for example...which I was tending to do you know? Here are the notes....and you go....oh God here we go and it was only when someone said to me....how many classes a day do ye have in St. Carthage's Secondary School and I said 10....think of this now...imagine you were sitting in the desk...the front desk and 10 teachers came in and did 10 PowerPoint presentations...Valium is the answer to that...you know what I mean? So I said God yeah....<u>so now I have to go in and I have to challenge them...the other thing I have to do is...I have to reflect on my own teaching...now I haven't been asked to do that in a long, long time...</u></p> <p>S: <u>I had teachers come up to me and say...only for collaboration...I think it's the key....the kids are buzzedthe teachers are buzzed....if you ever hit a wall...you know in teaching you hit a wall? And you say oh where am I going man....what's this going...where am I going to go with this...I can't teach this anymore....then you talk to another teacher who said...well actually I was there last week and ...you know...I did this....oh Jesus I never thought of that...</u></p> <p>DK: Yeah...yeah...yeah...</p> <p>S: <u>Suddenly you're rejuvenated and suddenly things start happening for you....so I would say ...to summarise there that I'm reflecting now...I'm really challenged in my pedagogy and the way I teach and how I deliver and I'm flipping my teaching and I'm collaborating a lot more...</u></p> <p>S: The other thing I would say to you is...<u>this has to be a whole staff thing....even though I got 12, it was a dangerous thing...</u></p> <p>DK: Yeah...yeah...yeah...</p> <p>S: <u>At one stage we were nicknamed the 12 apostles...</u></p> <p>DK: (Laughs)</p>		

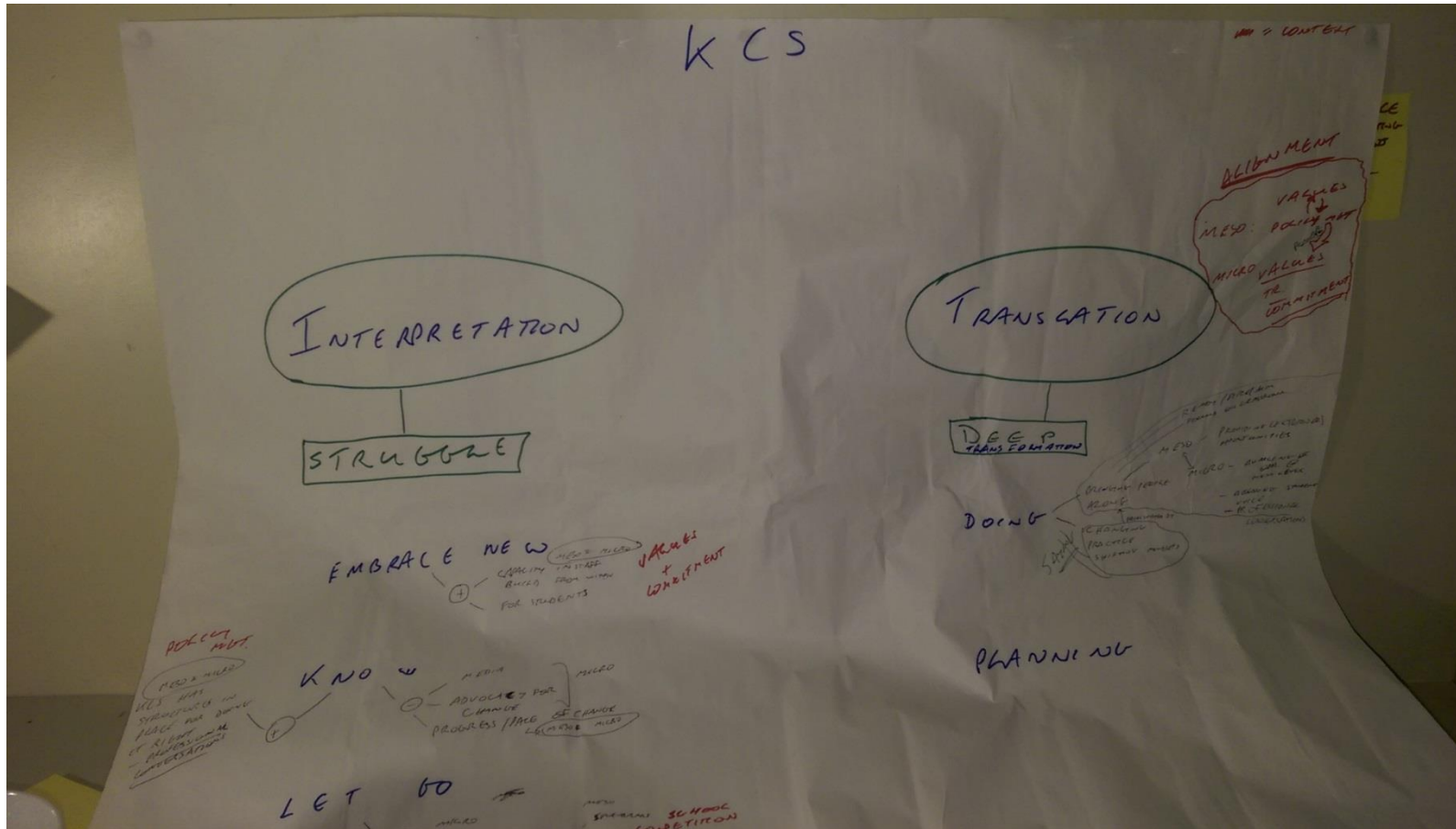
	<p>S: Do you know what I'm saying... <u>now we're called the special...the special kids...</u></p> <p>DK: The special kids? (laughs)</p> <p>S: But you can't...you have to</p> <p>S: If you're going to introduce this thing...<u>now we did introduce it to the whole staff...we didn't introduce it to 12...I stood...God bless me...in front of 67 people sitting the junior cycle and they looked at me like....what is that?</u> And I put it out and they were...and then I said look...offers <u>and then the 12 came forward....and the 12 became 24....28 and we go back to the rest of the staff again and say you're very welcome to run a course....you come up with the idea....we'll give you the resources...</u></p> <p>Fk: They [students] had to work with each other, whether they were students they never worked with before, they were actually made work with each other. Now initially they were a bit daunted by it but by the end of it [...] they found it very difficult [...] to go back and work individually. They found it very strange. That made it a lot much easier for me personally because <u>I knew then we weren't on our own, that other teachers were feeling the same way. We'd the same concerns and with, with, it, there was good communication between us.</u></p> <p>SJ: <u>I think it could have been done better [...] just brought in more teachers and said lookyou're working with Sarah Janeand they had said it at the start of the year [...] but then that was kind of thrown to the side [...] it's just...I think there's a divide</u></p> <p>S: We're in this bubble...and we're...I suppose what you'd call [...] the front runners...<u>but when you're out in the front [...] It's all behind you [...] We're the only people in the kitchen here...</u></p> <p>Jo: I think it would be <u>nice to actually have the, do you know, criticism of the people,</u> and say, look I think that maybe you're doing this right or you're doing this wrong</p>		
Coded for	Phase 1: Translating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Changing practice 	Level of translation Personal deep change	Phase 3: Values In-school policy management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Epistemologies challenged - Doing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Borrowing and sharing ideas ○ Running with the runners ○ Working together 		- Selective innovation
Shallow change → In-school policy management (and unique material context)			
Extracts from data	<p>J: Yeah, we have, <u>we're at an advantage myself and Fiona because we did, Fiona did 5 years teaching in England, I did one year teaching in England that we were doing a lot of that kind of, NCCA kind of methodologies as such, y'know?</u></p> <p>F: Well I think like, with regards to the key skills themselves...like <u>I dunno if this is coming from the UK and having worked there but...like when I looked at the key skills and I kind of looked like, broke them down, the vast majority of them are being met anyway, y'know? In your teaching...</u>kind of certain things that you're doing so..and then I think the actual skills themselves are not intimidating, it's not a case of you have to change absolutely everything, what you're teaching, but I suppose it's probably about looking for ways to make them kind of more obvious to the students as to what you're doing. <u>But I mean like with regards to the skills, y'know I wouldn't be intimidated by them.</u></p> <p>K: But I suppose <u>I'm a creature of habit and I'm kind of sticking with the things I've always done</u> which really isn't what you're supposed to do,</p> <p>K: It's just that <u>there's so much else, the situation we're in,</u> and I know you can make excuses forever, but there's just so much going on here, like, we're in a new school, we're moving buildings, <u>there's just a lot of other stuff, we're all trying to establish departments. There's just so much else to do</u></p> <p>K: I suppose a way I'd think about winning them over is to show them, <u>look it, you're doing so much of this already.</u> Like, it just hasn't been printed in a nice glossy booklet with JC reform or anything on it but like <u>you do loads of it already.</u> So it's just about maybe letting the students know this is what we're doing...I dunno if I'm making sense there..</p>		

	<p>L: I feel that <u>everybody is just so busy that they, it's like that they're full to capacity and they can't take in anything else. And it's no reflection on them, ehm, and I sort of feel the same myself. We are doing so much of everything. How do we try and go about doing something else?</u></p> <p>L: I don't know, I think right now, <u>you have to consider the culture of the school and the capacity of the school, and right now, I don't think we're ready for change, y'know? We've had too much change.</u></p> <p>PWC: In our context, where we're a new school...now, <u>a lot of this we're doing by 'feel', it's anecdotal, it's very difficult to get scientific data as to why this might be the case but it's very much associated with the context of the school.</u></p> <p>PWC: But my experience here, and I think it'd be the experience of a lot of post-primary school principals is that <u>what we're going to do in JC reform is very much under development...it's not really finalised yet.</u> And in my case our particular context is that it can't be finalised yet because of staffing and...</p> <p>S: But it was, <u>we all came in here with a heart of hearts</u> [int Patricia: at the start of the second day here we were picking up rubbish outside] yeah, [int Patricia: unpacking chairs], but like we [in Patricia: building everything up from scratch], but like, I was contracted for seven hours, and <u>we worked, we worked on policies, we worked on getting departments started up, so we were working very long hours, and when that came in....</u></p> <p>P: But the fact for us is that <u>it isn't that big a change cos we're not too settled into our ways</u></p>		
Coded for	<p>Phase 1: Translating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Sticking with practice o Taking small steps - Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Capacity for change - Saying 	<p>Level of translation Shallow change</p>	<p>Phase 3: In-school policy management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritising other areas <p>Unique material context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritising establishment in new building

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reassuring<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rationalising practice<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drawing on past experience• New school building▪ Already doing it		
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Appendix K. Collection of mind maps and draft theoretical models
 Mapping of coding from phase 1 to phase 2 policy positions January 2015
 Kenwood



SC

INTERPRETATION

STRUGGLE

TRANSLATION

DEEP INDIVIDUAL
CHANGE

EMBRACE NEW

LET GO

KNOW

OTHER CONFOUNDING
FACTORS FOR SC =
POLICY MGT. IN SCHOOL
HOW CAN THE MGT
SERVE TO EXPLAIN HOW TO
ACTION THIS CONTEXT??

ALIGNED THE MGT. OF
POLICY w/ THE
VALUES OF THE TBS
& TEACHER STAFF??
OR CHANGING POLICY NOT TO
OR CHANGING VALUES BETWEEN
MGT LEVELS.....

DOING

→ BORROWING / STAFFING TO DO
- COLLECTIVE WORKING w/ COLLEAGUES
- EXTENDING RESOURCES - COLLABORATION

→ BRINGING PEOPLE AROUND
- SELECT FEW
- INVITE
- RUN w/ THE RUNNERS.
↳ INVOLVING - PARTICIPANTS

POLICY
MGT.
IN SCHOOL

SAYING

- CHANGING PRACTICE
- MORE REFLECTION

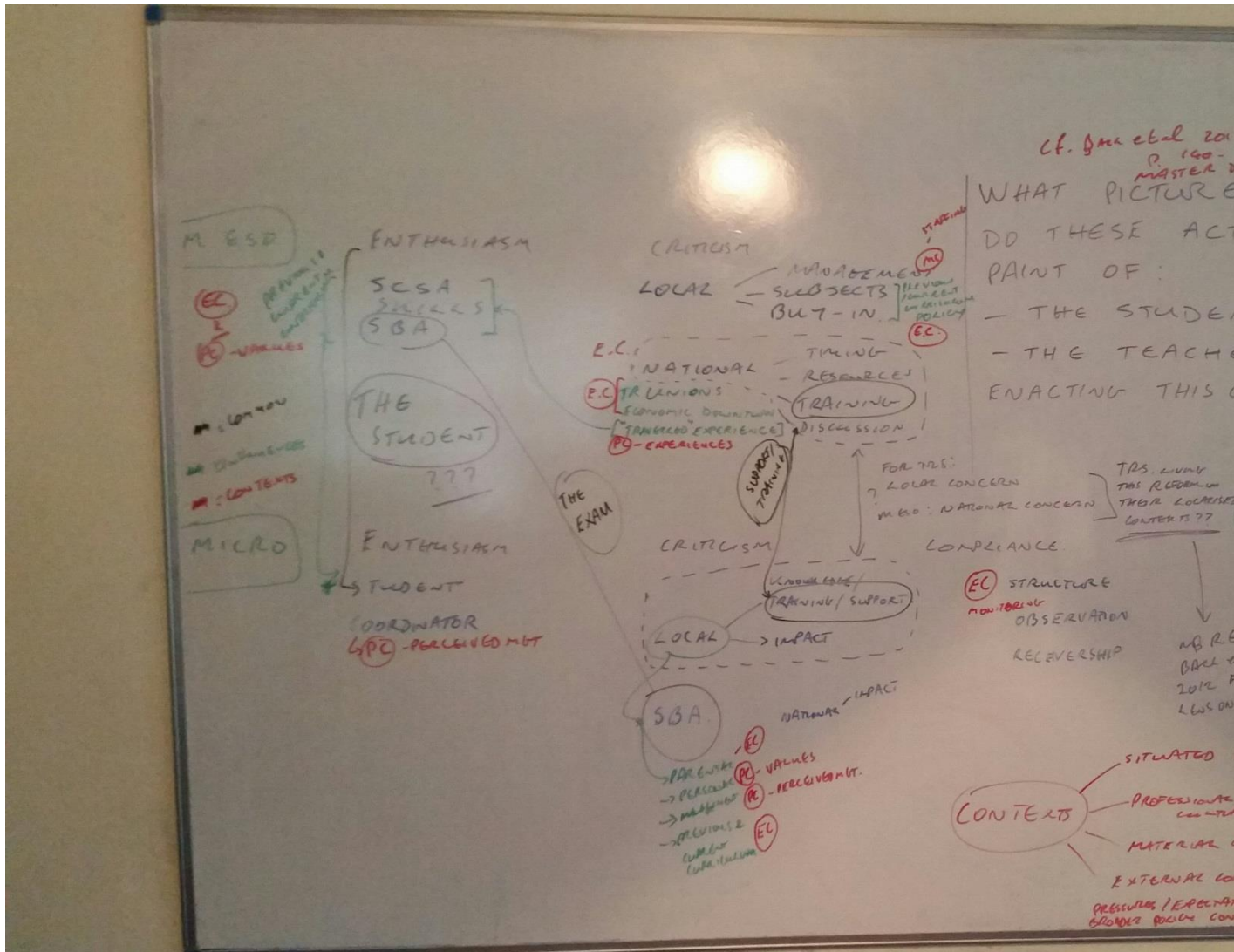
CHANGING
CLASSROOM
PRACTICES

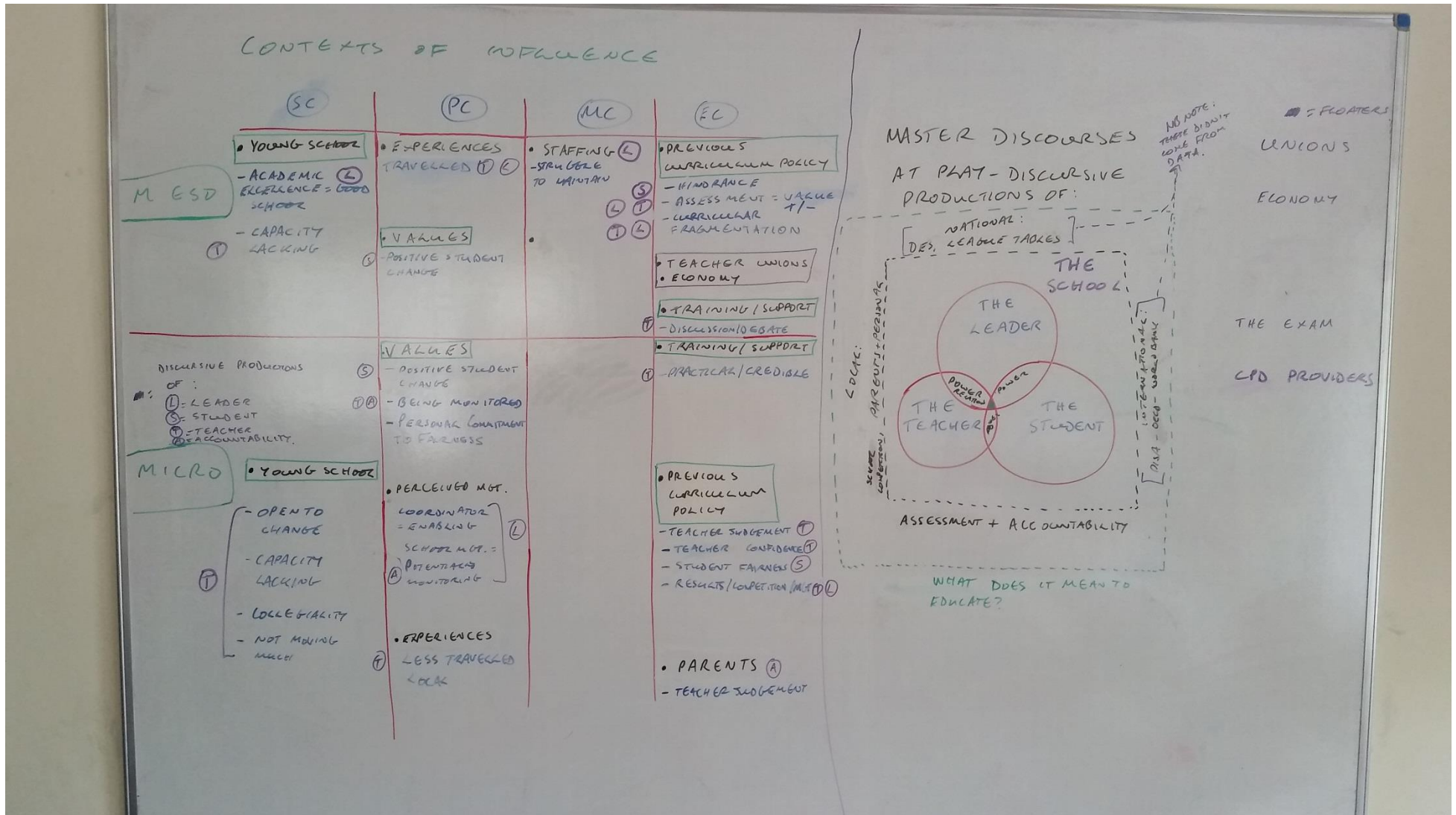
SO WHO SELECT IDEAS, THERE IS
AN ACCOUNTABILITY OF CONTEXT
FROM ABOVE TO INTERMEDIATE...
TO BRING THIS TO A DEEP
TRANSFORM THE CHANGE =>
SOME MORE SENSE AND THE
SOUNDNESS - FOCUS ON THE MGT,
W/ THE ONLY TO THE MGT
STAFF, AGREE TO A MGT VOICE

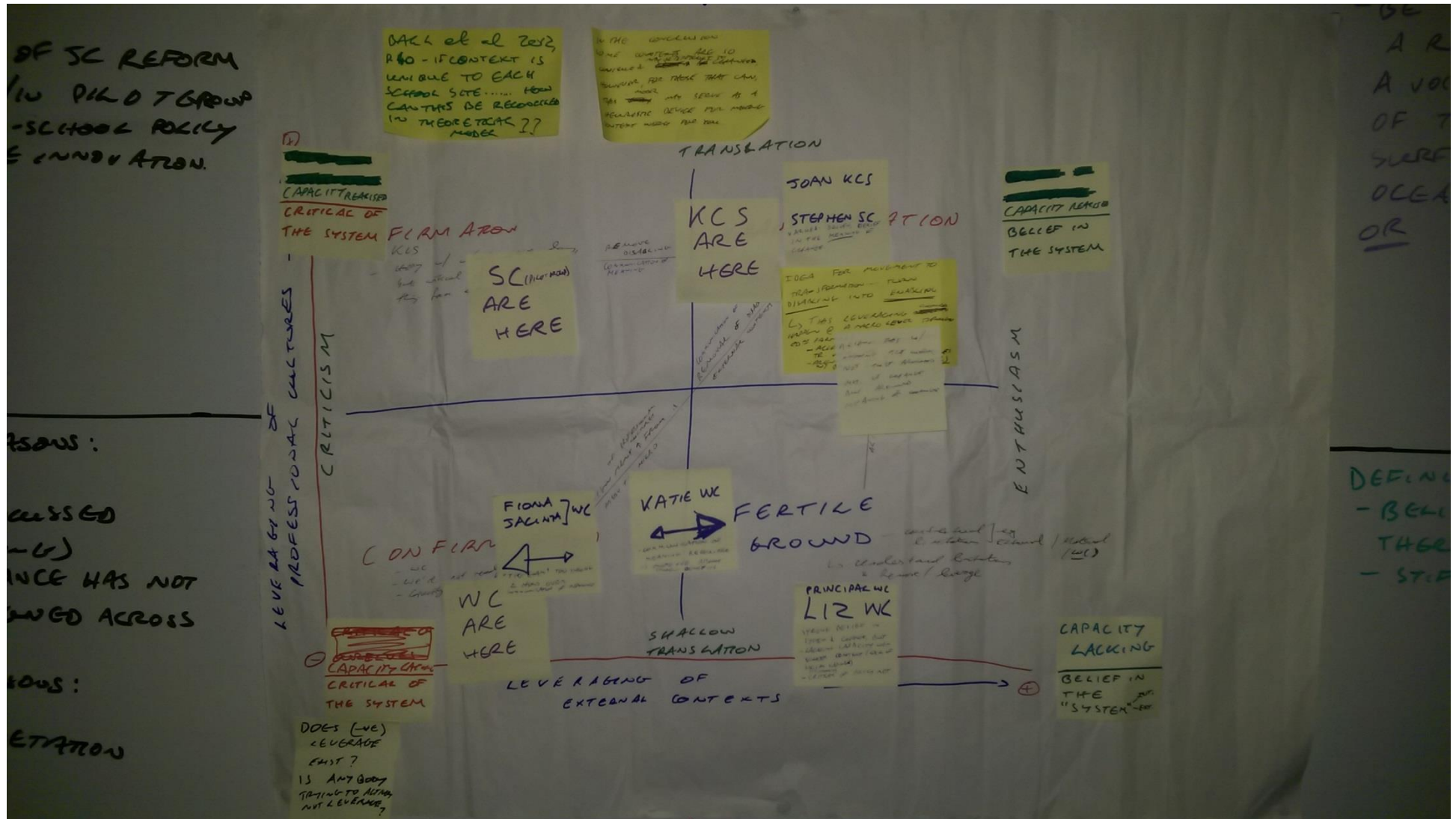
- SHARED - VALUE
- NEGOTIATION
- FREEDOM FOR TBS

VALUES
IN SCHOOLS

Mind map of categories and concepts showing progressive construction of policy positions and contexts March 2015







AFFIRMATION | CAPACITY REAISED, BUT

DEFINING FEATURE:
 - SEE MEANING IN HERE,
 UNSURE OF MEANING OUT THERE,
 CRITICAL OF NOT DECLARATIVE

CAPACITY BELIEF
 - NO SC REASON

- STILL CRITICAL OF HOW THINGS MAY WORK IN AROUND

SC HERE:

- (+) - ALIGNMENT W/ BENEFIT OF REFORM BASED ON EXPERIENCES W/IN THE GROUP
- (-) - LACK OF ALIGNMENT W/ IN-SCHOOL POLICY MGT. APPROACH OF SELECTIVE INNOVATION.

- CAPACITY LACKING. REASONS:
 -> DISABLING CONTEXTS.....
 IN-SCHOOL POLICY MGT. FOCUSED

FROM JACQUES

WATH WE FERTILE

CRITICISM

NO OF CULTURES

CRITICAL OF THE SYSTEM

FROM AROUND

SC (MAY) ARE HERE

KCS ARE HERE

TRANSLATION

JOAN KCS

STEPHEN SC

BACK of 2012 P40 - IF CONTEXT IS LINKED TO EACH SCHOOL SITE..... HOW CAN THIS BE RECONCILED IN THEORETICAL MODEL??

- CAPACITY LACKING. REASONS:

- > DISABLING CONTENTS.....
- IN-SCHOOL POLICY NOT FOCUSED ON LEVERAGING (FIREPOWER-L)
- > VALUE OF CHANGE IMPORTANCE HAS NOT BEEN PRIORITISED & ALLOWED ACROSS LEVELS

- CRITICAL OF SYSTEM. REASONS

- > POOR POLICY MGT.
- > VALUES-DRIVEN INTERPRETATIONS OF CCP

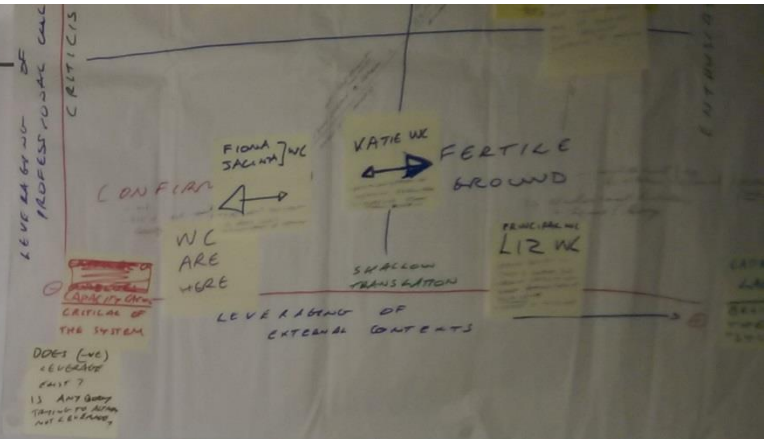
PRINCIPAL
 NUANCES - LIZ w/in THE FERTILE GROUND, BUT STILL ADMITS HERSELF CAPACITY LACKING.
 (SOCIAL CAPITAL?)

- KATIE, F + J, DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRAGMATISM

CONFIRMATION

DEFINING FEATURES

- LACK OF EMBRACING THE MEANING OF CHANGE. OVERLY CONCERNED w/ THE MGT. OF CHANGE



FEATURE:
 MEANING IN HERE,
 MEANING OUT
 THERE,
 CONWAY
 CRITICAL
 BE MET.
 OF CHANGE

CAPACITY REALISED
 BELIEF IN SYSTEM.

DEFINING FEATURE: SURGICAL
 MEANING OUT THERE &
 MEANING IN HERE

TRANSFORMATION

- NO SCHOOL CAN ENTIRELY CLAIM TO BE IN THIS SPACE
 REASON: CCP - "THE EXAM" - TOO DISABLING
 SOLUTION? 1) COMMUNICATE MEANING @ A SYSTEM LEVEL

- BE A VOICE FOR THE CHAMPIONS
 A RESOUNDING VOICE, A LOUD VOICE.
 A VOICE THAT SHAKES THE FABRIC
 OF THE INSTITUTION, FROM THE
 SURFACE WAVES TO THE DEEPEST
 OCEAN FLOOR.
 OR 2) REMOVE THE DISABLING CONTEXT

2012
 EACH
 27

TRANSLATION

TRANSLATION

JOAN KCS

STEPHEN SCOTTON

CAPACITY REALISED
 BELIEF IN
 THE SYSTEM

FOCUS FOR MOVEMENT TO
 TRANSFORMATION - PLANNING
 DISCUSSION INTO PRACTICE
 CS FOR COOPERATION & COLLABORATION
 - ALL
 - ALL
 - ALL

ENTREPRENEURISM

SC (the school)
 ARE
 HERE

KCS
 ARE
 HERE

FIONA SAGAN WC

KATIE WC

FERTILE
 GROUND

PRINCIPAL WC
 ID WC

DEFINING FEATURE: OF CHANGE
 - BELIEF IN THE MEANING OUT
 THERE
 - STIFLED BY MET. OF CHANGE IN HERE

Endnotes

- ⁱ Following tentative negotiations with education partners in January 2014, the Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn decided to slow down the introduction of the *Framework* to allow more time for teacher CPD and whole-school planning. A new projected date of 2022 was given for final phasing of the *Framework*.
- ⁱⁱ 'Social' settings, in this regard, pertains to the social structures developed amongst policy actors in school through strategies devised and actions taken when enacting JC reform.
- ⁱⁱⁱ During a keynote lecture at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Dublin, 2016.
- ^{iv} 'Teachmeets' are regional and national gatherings of teachers from all sectors for the purpose of sharing innovative practices. Typically, a Teachmeet lasts for an hour, with each teacher giving a 3 to 10 minute presentation on a topic of their choice. This is a growing community of collaborative practitioners across Ireland.
- ^v Children are expected to develop the capacities to be 1) successful learners, 2) confident individuals, 3) responsible citizens, 4) effective contributors (Scottish Executive, 2004, in Priestley and Minty, 2004, p.40).
- ^{vi} At the time of submission of this thesis, the ASTI directive was still in place.
- ^{vii} I had initially envisaged to use document analysis as a research instrument in this study. However, following the initial scoping exercise, it became clear that there was insufficient depth of information to analyse in any documents or artefacts that were provided by the schools. This was due to their pilot stage of development in JC reform. As such, any documents and artefacts served to provide a sense of the work the schools were doing.
- ^{viii} These items had been highlighted in the Irish media and in literature produced by teacher unions at this time as issues of most concern in relation to JC reform.
- ^{ix} I felt it was ethically acceptable to identify the teachers who served as JC Coordinators, as there was one in each school (much in the same way as each school had a Principal and Deputy Principal). It was important to declare the teachers charged with this role for they had a rich experience beyond other participants and needed to be seen in the light of this extra responsibility.
- ^x In this regard, one participant withdrew at data verification stage.
- ^{xi} Given the grounded theory method employed in this study, the analysis of the data was, by nature, iterative and at many times non-linear as categories and concepts were constantly being compared, tested and

refined. However, for the purposes of identifying the major milestones in moving from raw data to theory generation, the phases of analysis are described here in a linear fashion.

^{xii} My shifted positionality, thanks to my work with teachers in JCT, has influenced this interpretation of change in practice. I have seen the gravity of potentially small changes in thinking and approaches to the classroom on the beliefs and practice of teachers.

^{xiii} I had initially tried to reconcile participant responses under a specific typology of actors. However, during an initial attempt to draw meaning from the data through the lens of individual actor positions, I quickly realised participant responses were falling into categories that were too broad to pin individual participants to a single type of actor. As such, it was deemed more suitable to consider a typology of positions, within which different participants could fall at a given time.

^{xiv} If anything, participants in the research were exceptionally enthusiastic. This is something that shall be addressed as a limitation of the study in the conclusion chapter.

^{xv} Joan, the JC Coordinator, sat in both teacher interviews. As such, the intermediary and classroom levels are represented together for Kenwood.

^{xvi} For example – a project on local environmental studies that drew on knowledge from the traditional subject areas of Science, Business Studies and Geography.

^{xvii} The Oxford English Dictionary (2016) defines stagnation as ‘the state of not flowing or moving’ and ‘lack of activity, growth or development’.

^{xviii} Further, this research contends, as do others (Full & Hargreaves, 2012, for example), that there is no such thing and, if it is conceived there is, they tend to not work.

^{xix} A 2016 Millward Brown survey conducted on behalf of the ASTI revealed a 20% decrease in teacher job satisfaction since 2009, with administrative duties identified as the greatest source of job dissatisfaction. In the case of Principals, their greatest cause of job dissatisfaction is the moratorium on posts of responsibility.

^{xx} In Greek Mythology Sisyphus was a legendary king of Cornith. As punishment for his self-aggrandising craftiness, in the Underworld he was forced for eternity to roll an immense boulder to the top of a mountain, only to watch it roll back down again.

^{xxi} A SLAR meeting takes approximately 2 hours. The professional time allocated to teachers per week can be ‘bundled’ to amount to time required to engage in the meeting.

^{xxii} These are all issues that are being addressed during CPD support for SLAR meeting facilitators, as well online and in-school supports from JCT.

^{xxiii} At the time of submission of this thesis, ASTI schools were disengaging with assessment practices and CPD for JC reform, according to union directive.

^{xxiv} The standard practice, heretofore, was for subject teachers to convene at local education centres. Due to the demands of school supervision and class contact time, this meant that teachers from the same subject department would normally attend different CPD days.