

PROVIDING 'OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL' THROUGH HIGHER STILL: A CONTINUING CHALLENGE FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND.

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ABSTRACT

This paper comments on the development of Higher Still policy in general and the practice of Higher Still Physical Education (HSPE) in particular. The analysis of Higher Still policy provided by Raffe, *et al.* (2002) is critiqued alongside consideration of how conflicts were defined and resolved, and the extent to which weak leadership and specific implementation decisions affected HSPE progress. In reporting on HSPE practice, the author's professional involvement in policy formation and field research from 30 semi-structured interviews with physical education teachers is considered. Findings indicate that many teachers found it difficult to follow the pedagogy and assessment practices associated with the rationale. Furthermore, 'short termism' through curriculum reductionism and rote preparation for assessment occurred. Accordingly, this paper provides discussion points for further policy review in an attempt to promote improved quality of learning and assessment experiences for students and feelings of self-efficacy for teachers.

INTRODUCTION

By the early 1990's, there was increasing concern about the effectiveness of Scottish Highers as a benchmark for measuring student attainment in the upper secondary school years (Pickard, 2003). The analysis provided by the Howie Report (Upper Secondary Education in Scotland, Scottish Office Education Department, 1992 Edinburgh: HMSO) highlighted the problems but did not provide the remedy. Rather, the Government's response 'Opportunity for All', (Scottish Office, 1994) set out the planned changes for achieving higher standards of attainment and an even gradient of progression. The proposals enjoyed the broad support of the education community (Tinklin, *et al.*, 2001); (ADES/ASC/HMI, 2001) based as Higher Still was on retaining the breadth and opportunities typically embedded in the Scottish upper secondary school curriculum, as well as offering clearer progression through a broader framework of awards.

Briefly, Higher Still was introduced in 1999 and aims to offer a unified and flexible curriculum framework, which provides all students with a series of awards at five different levels (Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher). The different award levels comprise 40 hours units, which link to 160 hours course awards.

An analysis of the examination crisis of 2000 has been widely commented upon (Raffe, *et al.*, 2002). Hence, why (when there was agreement about the values of Higher Still and delays to the introduction of the programme to accommodate teacher — and student — workload concerns) the first operational year of Higher Still ended with such calamitous results, has benefited from critical enquiry.

Despite the merits of this general analysis, there has been relatively little attention paid to subject-by-subject analysis of the effects of Higher Still on teachers' pedagogy and assessment practices, and on the quality of student's learning experiences. There was some commentary in Paterson (2000) on the development of problematic content knowledge and its interpretation in English and Computing. There has been less specific research on curriculum subjects (like Physical Education), which have attempted to translate centrally dictated curriculum policy, into effective teaching, learning and assessment practice.

Canning (2003) has reminded us with regard to Higher Still, that too often curriculum discourses present an overtly simplistic view of the education change process. Canning (2003) argues that greater reference to what actually occurs within different learning institutions requires consideration. Accordingly, this paper argues that if we wish to learn about the implementation effects of Higher Still, it is necessary to comment upon each step in the decision making chain from the development of policy through to the practices of teachers at the point of delivery in schools. This involves consideration of overarching and subject specific policy issues, scrutiny of teacher's curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation decision-making and measurement of student's learning experiences and attainment outcomes. Does the emerging pattern of teaching, learning and assessment provide 'Opportunity for All' through increased choices and clearer progression? Such findings can contribute to further policy and practice discussions about the efficacy and sustainability of different courses at Higher level in general and HSPE in particular.

In addition, Humes (2003, p.1052) notes the significance of completing research, which examines whether knowledge transmission is 'any less inert' than was the case with the original Highers. In this respect, an examination of HSPE is offered as a valid exemplar for research; a new Higher level award which attempts to present knowledge through 'critical and imaginative practice' (SQA, 1999) in practical workshops with a problem solving orientation.

A CASE STUDY: HIGHER STILL PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

Background

The design of curriculum courses at Standard Grade, Higher Grade and Higher Still has placed Physical Education (PE) in something of a dilemma, from which there appear to be three viable options. Firstly, that PE's enduring claims for enjoyment, health and other personal and social benefits merit its inclusion in the non-certificate curriculum, albeit with marginal status relative to other academic certificate subjects. The later work of Carr (1997) argues for this position. A second alternate view, advocated by Reid (1996a; 1996b), argues that the boundary between academic and practical knowledge has been drawn in the wrong place, and that much greater recognition of the variety of ways in which students can display understanding is required. Reid (1996a; 1996b) was concerned about the assimilation strategies of arguing that physical activities when pursued for their own sake lacked educational validity. Such activities, however, could acquire educational significance when pursued for academic goals. Reid (1996a; 1996b) was critical of this position arguing that there was no requirement for PE policy makers and teachers to reconsider their priorities to accommodate the confused academic bias within school curriculum. Thirdly, PE policy makers could argue that the dominant mind/body dualism framework of human understanding should remain intact and that PE could adapt itself with some careful definition to this new set of operational opportunities. In essence, if PE wished to be included in a curriculum which values mental activity, then PE must move beyond its intrinsic claims for curriculum inclusion (enjoyment, health) and develop an instrumental justification (powers of thought, reasoning, understanding) that highlights that in effect, PE can be 'mental' too. This was the path followed.

In doing so, policy makers in PE required to link the government's concerns for increasing attainment and accountability with teachers' intrinsic beliefs about the practical nature of the subject. Consequently, HSPE courses planned to integrate improving practical ability with the process of analysing performance. This curriculum approach is described through the rationale, teaching methodologies, different units and in the course assessment weightings within HSPE. The need for certificate PE courses to emphasise performance led practical learning (rather

than anything more recognisable as practice and theory), was an important factor in involving teachers in introducing new certificate courses (Bilsborough and MacLeod, 1998). The challenge has therefore been for teachers to balance the requirements for improving standards of performance alongside developing underpinning knowledge about performance, which is assessed through written examinations.

These types of debates have presented themselves to other subjects within Higher Still. Bryce (2003) highlights how Home Economics faced similar anxieties over status and position within a predominantly academic curriculum. Their response to this situation was characterised by decreasing written assessment tasks and increasing the significance of practical tasks, updating the content of courses in favour of vocational rather than academic content and introducing new types of awards in areas such as fashion and hospitality.

Other curriculum subjects reacted in similar ways. Conlon (1999 pp.485) urges that unless Computing teachers 'summon the energy, expertise and professional freedom to reconstruct their subject then the decline in Computing Studies in the coming decade could be as rapid as was its growth in the last.' Subsequent developments have been characterised by diversification into separate 'Computing and 'Information Systems' awards as well as considering more enduring concerns over the rationale of awards and type and volume of assessment (Conlon, 2003).

By contrast, PE has remained rather one dimensional. Only one 'type' of academically inclined PE award, with a personal performance and analysis of performance focus has been pursued. Other 'types' of PE awards emphasising vocationally inclined sports organisation and coaching competences or more participation based health and fitness benefits do not, as yet, exist.

To assist in making connections between general policy and leadership aspects of Higher Still and subject specific commentary, four of the propositions developed by Raffe, *et al.*, (2002) are utilised for the construction of related arguments. These are that:

- Introducing a unified, flexible system involves more conflict than other types of reform
- The scale of the Higher Still reform was under-sold reflecting weak leadership
- Unified flexible systems tend to be linear, centralised, top down and disenfranchising for teachers
- Specific implementation decisions exacerbated problems.

The intention is to report on findings which link the general construction of policy with the teaching and assessment practices of PE teachers and the learning and assessment experiences of students. This paper, aims therefore, to consider whether firstly, the character of practical and academic assessment did produce conflicts between the rationale of the HSPE course at Higher level and the ability profile of many students. Secondly, whether the 'business as usual' approaches advocated within Higher Still, benefited or restricted teaching and learning practices within HSPE. Thirdly, whether the top down model of Higher Still policy was useful in highlighting the merits of the full award framework within HSPE and lastly, whether the integrated curriculum model intended (between performance and analysis of performance) was positively or negatively influenced through implementation decisions taken.

Methodology

This paper collected data, firstly, on the development of HSPE policy and, secondly on the development of HSPE practice in schools.

A feature of education policy formation in Scotland has been the use of staff in 'intermediate' positions (Humes, 2003 p.84) where staff are expected to link their work for two different audiences, policy makers at a national level and class teachers at a local level. The author has occupied a number of such 'intermediate' positions as: a participating member of the Reference Group for HSPE between 1995 and 2001; Principal Examiner for Higher Grade Physical Education (HGPE) from 1995 to 1999 (the examination precursor of HSPE); a National Trainer for HSPE in 1999-2000 and as National Development Officer for HSPE between 1998 and 1999. At relevant points in the presentation of findings and discussion selective reference is made to policy issues and national training debates in order to clarify and elaborate on research findings.

To collect information on the development of HSPE practice in schools a representative sample of ten Scottish Secondary Schools was selected in terms of socio-economic and geographical circumstance. In addition, the national examination results for session 1999-2000 were obtained on a confidential basis from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The results were used to ensure that the sample of schools was reflective of the overall national assessment figures. Only schools with more than 10 students completing HSPE were included to reduce any small sample size bias. Table 1 highlights the socio-economic and geographical profile of each school, numbers participating in HSPE courses and the levels of attainment achieved by each school's student's relative to the national mean in all three areas of the HSPE course. The overall examination performance of each school is also compared with the national attainment figures for students who achieve three Highers at A-C pass standard. Confidentiality was assured so that no centre, teacher or student would ever be named in any report findings. All schools were mixed ability, non-selective, co-educational and non-denominational.

All schools were visited on three occasions during session 2000-2001 for a series of interviews with the lead teacher for HSPE. The first interview examined the teacher's beliefs, values and expertise and how this subsequently affected course planning decisions. The second interview focussed on the processes of teaching and learning. This included consideration of the balance of teaching time, use of different teaching strategies and support materials and any problematic content knowledge or course adaptations that occurred, during the session. The third interview addressed how the process of assessing students affected ongoing course revisions. All interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were based around a framework of 10 questions. The interviews were taped and transcribed in full. The lead teacher in each school was, typically, a male teacher with 20 plus years teaching experience, although one school had an experienced female teacher in charge of course planning. All lead teachers interviewed had been teaching before the introduction of certificate PE in Scotland in 1988 and were the Heads of Department (Principal Teacher). In considering the gender balance within the sample it is worth emphasising that the purposeful sampling approach employed was based on school socio-economic, geographical and examination performance. In Scotland 'there remains a preponderance of male Principal Teachers' (SOED/HMI, 1995; Section 4.4). As such, the sample selected, is in part, reflective of the national picture.

Table 1: The levels of attainment for each school in each unit of Higher Level Physical Education in session 1999–2000 and the contrast with National mean figures (in percentage terms). A record of each schools overall pass rate at Higher level relative to the national average (1999–2001) for all subjects is provided

		No of pupils	Performance	Analysis of Performance	Investigation of Performance	National % Pass rate for students achieving 3 Higher Awards at A–C level	
No	Area	3287	Mean - 83%	Mean - 40%	Mean - 41%	1999 Mean 21%	2001 Mean 22%
1	Middle Class: Class Town	17	89% (6%)	30% (-10%)	25% (-16%)	47%	38%
2	Lower Class: Urban	10	85% (2%)	39% (-1%)	38% (-3%)	28%	18%
3	Semi-deprived: Urban	10	76% (-7%)	24% (-16%)	27% (-14%)	11%	14%
4	Middle Class: Town	19	81% (-2%)	30% (-10%)	42% (1%)	41%	46%
5	Middle Class: City	15	85% (2%)	28% (-12%)	42% (2%)	31%	35%
6	Rural: mixed	12	71% (-12%)	49% (9%)	56% (15%)	19%	20%
7	Lower-middle Class: City	11	86% (3%)	51% (11%)	66% (24%)	17%	12%
8	Middle Class: Large Town	16	94% (11%)	54% (14%)	48% (7%)	33%	41%
9	Semi-deprived: Town	11	76% (-7%)	60% (20%)	50% (9%)	13%	9%
10	Semi-deprived: Town	17	89% (6%)	53% (13%)	38% (-3%)	13%	12%

Findings

The findings section considers the four general propositions developed by Raffé, *et al.*, (2002) outlined earlier and links these with teaching, learning and assessments evidence from HSPE at Higher level.

- Introducing a unified, flexible system involves more conflict than other types of reform.

Raffé, *et al.*, (2002 pp.179) indicates that the ‘biggest problems faced by flexible educational structures tend to be associated with the increased demands and changed character of assessment.’ The ‘increased demands’ of HSPE arose through the need for students to achieve ongoing units as well as final course award assessment.

The increased demands on teacher and student time for unit assessment has been adversely commented upon (Bryce, 2003; De Luca, 2003) and will be considered later in this paper with regard to specific HSPE implementation decisions. Of concern at this stage is to note that the difficulty of the assessment in HSPE has decreased. This is because those competences at which students already, typically, excel are now more highly rewarded.

This has occurred through the ‘changed character of assessment’ increasing the weighting for Performance, which moved to 50% in HSPE from 40% in HGPE. This had a profound effect on the pass marks achieved by students, even though there has been only relatively modest improvement in the student’s analytical and investigative abilities over the years (ref Table 2).

Table 2: The national mean figures for each area of HGPE from 1996 through to 1999 and in each unit in HSPE from 2000 through to 2003

Year	Performance Course weighting 40%	Analysis of Performance (AP) Course weighting 40%	Investigation of Performance (IP) Course weighting 20%	Pass marks % A B C (Pass)
1996	48.4 (60)	16.4 (60)	13.6 (30)	6.1 16.3 29.4 (51.8)
1997	49.7 (60)	19.3 (60)	11.6 (30)	5.5 17.0 31.4 (53.9)
1998	50.4 (60)	20.1 (60)	11.9 (30)	6.1 16.7 33.1 (55.9)
1999	51.6 (60)	21.4 (60)	13.1 (30)	7.2 18.7 30.3 (56.2)

Year	Performance Course weighting 50%	Analysis of Performance (AP) Course weighting 33.3%	Investigation of Performance (IP) Course weighting 16.6%	Pass marks % A B C (Pass)
2000	74.5 (90)	24.0 (60)	12.7 (30)	17.5 26.1 30.2 (73.8)
2001	76.0 (90)	24.7 (60)	15.1 (30)	28.6 31.2 23.6 (83.4)
2002	75.8 (90)	23.3 (60)	14.5 (30)	25.8 30.6 24.6 (81.0)
2003	75.6 (90)	24.5 (60)	13.8 (30)	26.2 29.8 24.5 (80.5)

Table 2 highlights that the pattern of assessment results has remained different year on year between relatively high levels of Performance and relatively low levels of Analysis of Performance (AP) and Investigation of Performance (IP) attainment. However, the number of ‘A’ pass students has quadrupled from 6.1% in 1996 to 26.2% in 2003. At the inception of HGPE, the policy making members of the Joint Working Party were particularly keen to ensure that the Scottish Universities Council on Entrance (SUCE) credited HGPE as being an acceptable Higher for undergraduate degree programmes. The reason for the acceptance by SUCE of HGPE was the extent to which it had a commitment towards using language verification through written assessments as evidence of students underpinning knowledge.

Within HGPE, there was the possibility to rectify the skewed profile of attainment through setting the annual cut off scores. This was difficult to put into practice, but was a solution of sorts. A fundamental design rule within HSPE, however, is that

there should be coherence between the criteria used for defining unit and course standards. Students who achieve all the units in a course should then pass the overall final course assessment, as the unit pass standard should be based on the equivalence of working at a 'C' pass course standard. If there is conflict between the unit and the course standards, then the greater the difficulty there is for teachers' to develop the required concordance skills necessary for accurately estimating the eventual awards students will obtain.

Until the interpretation of standards at unit and course level is clearly understood then the potential for confusion is evident. After all, a high performing student who has gained very few additional marks in either AP or IP should not be completing the final HSPE course assessment, as there is no evidence of such a student working at unit standard elsewhere in their course. Only rigorous unit moderation and staff development can ensure that undue claims about the extent to which an HSPE award at Higher level can purposefully be used as part of student's entrance qualifications for Higher Education are not advanced.

These problems were to different degrees acknowledged by the different lead teachers. Most recognised that the revised course weightings had significantly increased the pass marks. Some teachers commented that such moves would not reduce their own anxieties over curriculum standards in HSPE. One teacher also noted that it would 'not come anywhere near solving the status problems we have.'

- The scale of the Higher Still reform was under-sold reflecting weak leadership

Raffe, *et al.*, (2002, p.179) refers to the pragmatic reasons why Higher Still was presented as a 'business as usual' curriculum initiative, which consolidated earlier reforms. The HMI, as the architects of policy formation as well as the examiners of it, were keen to work with a tired and innovatively fatigued teaching force. Consequently, the full implementation significance of Higher Still tended to be underplayed.

Certificate PE awards, however, had begun to draw adverse comment (and hence potential conflict) from both outside and inside the 'traditional policy community' Humes (2003, p.84). Within academia, Brewer and Sharp (1999, pp.543) noted that 'the extent to which these references (teaching) have been informed by research into successful teaching is not so evident'. There was criticism from HM Inspectors of Schools (SOED/HMI, 1995; Section 5.29) that 'too many teachers resort to the classroom, a 'talk and chalk' approach and the use of simple worksheets'. This divide between practical and theory was against the spirit of the rationale and hinted at inert knowledge-led methodologies overtaking those advocated within a performance-led rationale. Hence, whilst teachers' professional beliefs were well disposed towards the rationale, translating them into pedagogy practices which engaged students and which led to high levels attainment was producing considerable difficulties for all teachers in the field research.

Thorburn and Collins (2003) have reported that teachers find making integrated curriculum connections between Performance and AP difficult due to the unpredictability involved in working in performance-led environments, which inevitably entail adapting to what is actually happening during the lesson at any one time. By comparison, establishing connections within a knowledge led teaching environment was perceived as relatively certain and predictable. Consequently, many teachers alternated between different teaching approaches; working for a time as a 'facilitator' through practical experiential learning and then, as they became increasingly concerned by the lack of development, students' written AP answers assumed greater control over the teaching environment.

Despite the scale of the HSPE reforms and the associated assessment requirements, a few teachers expressed positive views about change that had taken place in their

pedagogy practices as they exercised 'flexible control' (Griffey and Housener, 1991) as a way of developing their own sense of self-efficacy in their new teaching role. One teacher noted that:

It made me look at my own teaching methodologies very closely and I actually managed to tap into a couple of students who found this idea (constructivism) okay. I'm now getting that self-confidence to allow students to go away and try this and it's amazing in actual fact the results you can get if you trust the students and if you have high standards and if they understand exactly what's being asked of them.

Overall, however, a review of the field research highlights the difficulties of preparing teachers in post for performance-led teaching and learning with an emphasis on performance-led workshops. This is especially the case when the programme leadership might for a wide range of reasons underplay some of the complex issues surrounding curriculum decision making in practical learning environments (Rink, 2001).

- Unified flexible systems tend to be linear, centralised, top down and disenfranchising for teachers

One further consequence of the concern shown by HSPE policy makers for introducing further 'minimum change' curriculum reform was that it could limit the development of teacher's pedagogy practices and consideration of the other levels in the Higher Still framework. Raffe, *et al.*, (2002, pp.181) indicates that the development of policy tended to be disenfranchising for teachers, as policy leaders in Higher Still were keen to avoid the delays which characterised the development of Standard Grade. Hence, teachers tended to be kept at arms' length from the policy making process.

Evidence from HSPE would not support this assertion. Brewer (2003 pp.589) notes that teachers 'knew what they wanted and were not slow to inform the reference group for HSPE' about the type and amount of support materials they wished. One consequence of this was that a proliferation of support materials (unmatched at HGPE level), were developed to help teachers. This tended to have a threefold effect on teachers practice. Firstly, the materials assisted teachers in developing practices for teaching the process knowledge skills required at this level. Secondly, the materials indicated the depth of content knowledge understanding required. This was more problematic for teachers as it began to 'threaten teacher confidence' (Brewer, 2003 pp.589). Thirdly, curriculum reductionism became a concern as teachers could decide to use the support materials in an uncritical rather than 'critical and imaginative' way, as per the HSPE rationale.

In addition, the concentration on time and resources at Intermediate 2 and Higher level affected uptake levels at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher level (Table 3). Stronger leadership and an ability to move beyond explanations of 'minimum change' to explanations of how 'Opportunity for All' could be delivered across the entirety of the Higher Still framework might have been advised. As it was, the work of the Higher Still Development Unit had ceased long before many aspects of staff development were complete at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher level. This situation is likely to lead to a sense of continuing disenchantment for many PE teachers.

Table 3: The participation figures for Higher Still Physical Education at Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher level from 2000–2001 to 2002–2003

Year	Intermediate 1	Intermediate 2	Higher	Advanced Higher
2000–2001	337	1782	3699	36
2001–2002	400	1711	3696	60
2002–2003	369	1690	3970	75

HSPE appears to have been disenfranchising for Further Education (FE) lecturers as well. At various levels of consultation and national training in-service days their concerns over the narrowness of the definition accorded to HSPE, as it attempted to meet the timescales required for the 'systems wide' introduction of Higher Still, were evident. In attempting to satisfy the 'minimum change' school audience at Higher level, a broader conception of the multiple types of awards possible under the umbrella term of PE was missed. This concerned FE lecturers as they tried to reconcile an academic conception of PE with their own more vocationally inclined requirements.

- Specific implementation decisions exacerbated problems

Raffe, *et al.*, (2002, pp.182) indicates that 'consultation had insufficient input from those at the chalkface responsible for implementing the proposals.' This position is not reflected in HSPE, where two critical decisions made during implementation were a clear response to requests by 'chalkface' PE teachers.

The first decision occurred during the first HSPE consultation stage in 1996. The HSPE Reference Group suggested that the outcomes in Performance should be integrated together with those in AP, hence HSPE would be taught together and assessed together (unlike HGPE where Performance and AP were taught together but assessed separately). This would offer a more complete form of internal integration as per the rationale. It would also help avoid the difficulties evident when setting pass marks within HGPE, where reconciling the variable assessment profile typical of students (high Performance, low AP) was an annual headache.

The PE profession, however, rejected this and in true pluralist fashion the HSPE Reference Group changed the unit and course design accordingly. The main reason many PE teachers requested separate Performance and AP outcomes arose from a sense of protecting equity and fairness for those students whose strength was in Performance. If Performance and AP units were separate, then at least high performing students would gain some unit credit.

This decision however did have pronounced curriculum, pedagogy and assessment ramifications. In curriculum terms, the integrated rationale no longer dovetailed with integrated assessment arrangements. In pedagogy terms, there was evidence of an increasingly dichotomous theory/practical split rather than the advocated integrated approach (Brewer, 2003). In assessment terms, the difficulty of setting pass marks remains. In fact, as indicated earlier the situation worsened.

The second problematic short-term implementation decision occurred during the first session of HSPE in 1999-2000. The HSPE Reference Group came under repeated calls to reduce the range of the unit assessment in AP. In the course examination students are required to write about three areas of AP. Consequently, the drafting of the unit specification for AP at Higher level required that students complete answers in three areas of AP. This was interpreted by many PE teachers as excessive for unit assessment.

The HSPE Reference Group relented on this matter to allay PE teachers' concerns and the unit standard was reduced to writing about one AP only as the minimum required. However, reference to the year-on-year results profile (Table 2) indicates that many students at Higher level lack the required competence across all three units and are still unadvisedly presented for the course award. In the longer term, it might have been better if more rigorous unit demands were part of HSPE. Whilst these two decisions may have made short term implementation easier and less contested, they have resulted in HSPE struggling to make substantive claims for its place within an academically orientated curriculum.

DISCUSSION

With regard to the four areas of the Higher Still policy process reviewed, it appears, firstly, that the unified flexible framework did create conflict in HSPE. This arose through the changed weighting of assessment rather than through any additional assessment demands. Indeed, in HSPE the award at Higher level shows every sign of being significantly easier to achieve than its HGPE predecessor.

Secondly, there is considerable evidence to support the claim that the scale of the Higher Still reform was underestimated. The particular HSPE concern was the optimistic rather than proven pedagogy approaches, which teachers were expected to put into practice whilst still achieving high levels of authentic attainment.

The field research indicates that two schools (number 1 and 2 in Table 1) had extreme variables in practice, which made reliable findings difficult to determine. There were four schools, (number 3 to 6 in Table 1), who followed the policy rationale but with modest assessment success. In these schools, teachers were trying to rectify many of the pedagogical and workload concerns, which had come to dominate their professional lives. Hence, whilst their values were favourably disposed towards HSPE, the teachers could not link the spirit of the rationale to high levels of student attainment.

There were two high achieving schools (number 7 & 8 in Table 1) where the extent of their assessment concerns led to the development of prescriptive answers, which could be rote learned by their students. This is despite having strategies in place for efficient course management (timetable, homework, student codes of conduct). This approach extended to producing prepared answers in advance of the AP written assessment and rehearsing these with students in rote fashion. The Principal Assessor for HSPE (SQA, 2000) observed that it was far from certain whether this complicated (essentially knowledge-led) approach actually helped, as less able students tended to lose their way as the answer developed and more able students underachieved through being unnecessarily constrained (SQA, 2000). Such comments echo those made by the author when Principal Assessor for HGPE, where it was noted that (SQA, 1998):

The examining team found the incidence of this (rote assessment) to be increasing significantly. It is debatable whether this benefits candidates, but this is certainly what is intended. Some packs of ten answers contained answers to the same three questions using identical contexts... It is certainly moving things away from a practical experiential rationale.

A cursory glance at other formal reporting by the SQA highlights the extent to which providing genuine 'Opportunity for All' appears to be a significant challenge for other Higher Still subjects, as they make the transfer from Higher Grade. Comments from two subjects are offered, Drama, a relatively new Higher subject with an applied element similar to HSPE and a more traditional Higher subject, History.

In the Annual Statistical Report for 1998 (SQA, 1998) it was noted by the Principal Assessor for Higher Grade Drama that: 'In general, candidates found the

written examination taxing and many appeared to rely on prepared answers rather than concentrating on the questions actually asked.'

The Principal Assessor for Higher Grade History (SQA, 1998) noted that: '[candidates] often let themselves down by addressing a rehearsed question rather than the one actually set.'

Scrutiny of later Principal Assessor's reports indicates that some of the teaching, learning and assessment concerns at Higher Grade are still evident in Higher Still (SQA, 2002). The Principal Assessor for Higher level Drama noted in Paper 2 on Contemporary Scottish Theatre that:

Despite a paper which was clear and understandable regarding the questions asked candidates still fell into the trap of not addressing the question. Unfortunately, many are still relying on a prepared answer and trotting it out regardless of what it asked.

The Principal Assessor for Higher Grade History noted that:

...several markers again expressed concern over what they saw as an increasing practice of class preparation of a single essay title and over the level of teacher input, which was felt in some cases to be excessive... such practices are against the spirit of the Extended Essay...

This short review highlights that there are similar curriculum reductionism and rote assessment difficulties in other subjects. Furthermore, the types of difficulties indicated are evident across different 'types' of subjects. The introduction of the Higher Still reforms does not appear to have tackled these significant issues. This might be partly attributed to the general underestimation of the scale of the reforms and their implications for pedagogical practices.

Lastly, there were two high achieving schools (number 9 & 10 in Table 1) where teaching was characterised by a high level of expertise for performance-led teaching environments and highly motivated students who engaged with learning tasks. Crucially, students in these two schools completed the assessment answers, (three written answers in a two and a half hour examination), in the divergent open manner expected.

Furthermore, both teachers were teaching in semi-deprived socio-economic areas. Comparison with the national average percentage figure for students achieving three higher level awards (Table 1) indicates that students in these schools were out performing other higher level PE students in schools in much more favourable socio-economic areas and students completing other higher level awards in their own school.

To date, PE research into the antecedents of expertise has often focussed on Initial Teacher Education programmes (Rovegno, 1994) but little research has taken place on the changing levels of expertise of teachers in post. Bearing in mind the increasing age profile of teachers (SOED/HMI, 1995) this appears a curious omission. At present, policy appears to be capable of far more rapid change than practice, except in a minority of cases.

Thirdly, whether the Higher Still model was centralised, top down and disenfranchising for teachers is a moot point within HSPE. At one level teachers were not disenfranchised, in fact their forthrightness about the support they required was a key influence on the development of policy at Intermediate 2 and Higher level. This effort has subsequently resulted in HSPE policy makers overlooking the breadth of the Higher Still framework, as evidence by the skewed presentation figures at the different HSPE levels and the disenfranchising of FE lecturers who were attempting to advocate other types of courses.

Fourthly, specific implementation decisions, most notably with regard to the demands of unit and course assessment, did significantly affect the development

of HSPE. Subsequently, the NQ review initiated by the SQA will have an interest in simplifying and clarifying assessment arrangements, even though there is wider evidence that a critique of rationale and practice is necessary as well. It is doubtful whether an SQA led review will consider whether the rationale should require integration of both teaching and assessment, as was originally suggested by the HSPE Reference Group.

CONCLUSION

The crisis of confidence created by the Scottish examination problems of 2000, has dissipated in subsequent years as the processing of awards has become more reliable. However, whether the aims of 'Opportunity for All' (Scottish Office, 1994) with its intentions towards inspirational teaching and authentic assessment is being realised is an altogether different matter.

The field research highlights the range of factors, which influence curriculum, pedagogical and assessment practice. It appears that pragmatic pressures may dominate to such an extent that the achievement of higher order educational objectives may be marginalised. Higher Still policy requires direct consideration of these genuine pressures in an overt fashion, rather than underplaying the professional significance of the challenges involved in attempting to develop effective and sustainable courses.

Despite the commentary provided by teachers in HSPE, there were limitations with this paper. Only national attainment figures were used for analysis about the relative strengths and weaknesses of student's answers. A closer longitudinal examination of how student's answers developed alongside the specific teaching and assessment intentions adopted by teachers' during HSPE courses in schools is merited. This could provide detail about how student's abilities developed relative to the teaching and assessment approaches adopted by HSPE teachers, and of how beneficial or otherwise such approaches might be for students as the progress towards and into Higher Education.

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