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The rationale for subsidiarity as a principle applied within curriculum reform and its unintended consequences

Following trends across the developed world to devolve power and responsibility for public services to more local agencies, curriculum reforms in several countries have been characterised by policies designed to increase teacher agency and professionalism as a means of achieving successful change (Priestley et al., 2014; Ryder, 2015). In Wales this approach has been promoted through adoption of a principle of subsidiarity. Four interconnected reasons are presented for its use within the development of a new curriculum. These can be summarised as follow: that it will encourage teacher professionalism; stimulate improvements in teaching; enhance the responsiveness of schools to local and national needs; lead to increased confidence in the reforms. This paper explores the extent to which these four justifications are reflected in teachers' experiences of curriculum development in schools involved in leading the reform process. Drawing on data from 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and a survey of over 600 teachers, data reveals that although the principle of subsidiarity is broadly welcomed, whether or not its application fulfils the justification criteria presented is far from clear. Questions about the application of a subsidiarity principle in relation to curriculum reform are discussed.

Keywords: curriculum; curriculum reform; subsidiarity; Welsh education; teacher development

Introduction: the principle of subsidiarity and curriculum reforms in Wales

One of the central components of the curriculum reform process that began in Wales in 2015 is the application of the principle of subsidiarity. This term has a long history, including in the last century within Roman Catholic teaching relating to the church's efforts to differentiate between what actions the individual must make moral decisions concerning and which should be succeeded to the community's authority (Chaplin, 1993). More recently, the Maastricht Treaty (1992) adopted the principle,

enshrining it in European law as a means to distinguish which laws a nation state could continue to make and which would need to be established from within the European Union (E.U.). In both instances the object was to respect and foster responsibility, at the level of the person or state, while recognising there were areas of practice and law where the intervention of a superior social body was expedient to prevent tensions and fragmentation at a communal level. The principle has gained further traction through the processes of devolution within the United Kingdom. However, it is often poorly defined and can have adverse effects, for example, Gray, Scott and Mehisto (2018) describe the way European ambitions to create common standards of education across Europe have been frustrated by subsidiarity. Constantin (2008) and Öberg (2017) describe that even within E.U. law the concept is problematic because of the vague way it is defined. Despite these issues, it has become a central principle in policy designed to bring about curriculum reform in Wales.

Reform of the Welsh education system was prompted over concerns about the quality of education raised by the country's performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2011. This evaluation led to policy changes to the school system and the commissioning of the OECD to review the country's provision of education. Their subsequent report (OECD, 2014) identified four areas for improvement: differentiated teaching needed improvement; teachers and school leaders required greater professional development; greater coherence between assessment and evaluation was needed; and, a more sustainable process of reform was required to ensure engagement of all stakeholders.

In March 2014, the Welsh government commissioned Graham Donaldson to conduct a review of the Welsh education system from Foundation Phase (age 3) through to the end of secondary schooling (age 16). This was to focus on both the curriculum and assessment processes operating within Wales. The report was published in February 2015 (Donaldson, 2015), stating in its introduction that it is both a response to the OECD findings and to broader concerns about curriculum overcrowding and the perceived lack of responsiveness of school education to changes in wider society and employment demands (here citing the Confederation of British Industry). The then Minister for Education and Skills within the Welsh Assembly, Huw Lewis, fully accepted Donaldson's recommendations and in October 2015 they were incorporated within a new curriculum policy framework. This sat alongside a commitment to develop teacher professionalism (the New Deal), review how school performance is evaluated (including the role of school inspection service, Estyn) and develop appropriate qualifications.

Donaldson described his proposals as “radical and wide-ranging”. The recommendations begin by setting out four core purposes and six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs), complemented by three cross-curricula responsibilities relating to literacy, numeracy and digital competence (see Table 1). Subsequent work on the development of the curriculum has included incorporation of ‘What matters’ statements that are used as content descriptors in relation to the AoLEs. These express concepts related to the AoLEs and have been developed by subject specialist teachers in a way designed to be coherent with the four purposes. They are described as reflecting the experiences, knowledge and skills children should encounter throughout their schooling. The four purposes are meant to be practised by pupils while at school, rather than be

seen as outcomes only realised at the end of schooling (Welsh Government, 2015).

‘Progression Steps’ have also been written that indicate levels of engagement and comprehension for each of the ‘What matters’ statements. These are designed to be seen as markers on students’ educational journey and reflect an approach that recognises each students’ progress and pace may be different.

Table 1: Purposes and Areas of Learning & Experience of Curriculum for Wales

The four purposes of Curriculum for Wales are that children and young people develop as:

- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The six Areas of Learning & Experience of Curriculum for Wales are:

- Expressive arts
- Health and well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, literacy and communication
- Mathematics and numeracy
- Science and technology.

Central to the vision for implementing these reforms is the principle of subsidiarity. Donaldson writes that the reform process should be:

‘Based on subsidiarity: commanding the confidence of all, while encouraging appropriate ownership and decision making by those closest to the teaching and learning process.’

In a number of documents and presentations a rationale for this model of curriculum reform is discernible (Donaldson, 2016a, 2016b). It appears to include the idea of increasing ‘stakeholder involvement’ and is linked to the concept of ‘distributive leadership’. Four interconnected benefits to the reforms can be summarised as constituting a rationale for the use of a subsidiarity model:

- (1) Encouraging ownership and renewed professionalism of teachers: increasing teacher responsibility, seen as a means to overcome potential resistance to reform;
- (2) Reinvigorate teaching: stimulate teachers’ reflexivity, seen as means to improve quality of teaching and learning in schools;
- (3) Improved responsiveness of schools to local and national needs: this is seen both in terms of raising pupil aspirations (particularly of pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds) and pupil employability in general;
- (4) Fostering teachers’ confidence in the reforms which will ensure engagement in the reform process is sustained over the long-term.

Subsidiarity appears to be used as a management tool, it is seen as a model for achieving specific goals in a desirable manner with as few unintended consequences as possible. Viewing it in this way is convenient but ignores the presuppositions about identity, autonomy and relationships of power implicit in the concept. Even within the context of European law the neglect of these philosophical components has been shown to be problematic, for example, Chaplin (2014) argues that viewing it as merely a principle of decentralized governance ignores its ontological dimension that recognises the importance of pluralism for human flourishing. Carozza (2003) believes we should understand subsidiarity as a principle underpinning human rights, where local contexts

and change are recognised as affecting individuals and communities in ways that require dynamic, fluid decision-making. However, he also makes clear that because human rights are central to its use there are times when intervention from a higher authority is required:

‘Subsidiarity cannot be reduced to a simple devolution of authority to more local levels. While it clearly expresses a presumption in favor of the freedom of smaller and more local forms of human association, it does seek to balance both the idea of noninterference and that of intervention or assistance. It therefore requires serious consideration of the ways that more local authorities may sometimes be less capable of ensuring the protection of human rights without external intervention or assistance.’

Establishing the criteria for this kind of federal intervention in member state law has been something European courts have wrestled with over many years (Horsley, 2012).

Clarity will be needed concerning levels of direction, decision-making and intervention between teachers and schools, middle-tier agencies (Estyn, Regional Authorities and Consortia), and the Welsh Government. This paper aims to contribute to debate around these issues through analysis of teachers’ engagement with the activity of curriculum development within the current model of subsidiarity in Welsh education. The findings section of the paper presents data exploring whether the justifications for subsidiarity are being experienced positively by teachers involved in the reforms. Is subsidiarity leading to the benefits it was meant to bring? Having explored the evidence structured around the four justifications, the discussion section returns to these to consider what can be learnt about the application of subsidiarity to the task of

curriculum reform. The paper will reveal tensions between what appears to be the managerial aims of the reform model and the way teachers appear motivated in their curriculum development work by the latent powers of subsidiarity as a principle linked to individual rights.

Methods

The findings draw from data collected from teachers working in schools developing the new curriculum in Wales. These 'Pioneer' schools have received additional funding and at least one member of staff has been appointed a 'Pioneer Lead', receiving considerable training and support as well as contributing to policy development. An exploratory, sequential, mixed methods design was used to explore teachers' perspectives on various aspects of the new curriculum. There were two stages of data collection and data used in this paper makes use of both.

Stage 1

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with over 30 teachers involved in curriculum development, including Pioneer Leads. These were individual or small group interviews structured around a common interview scheme. Thematic content analysis of the interviews through NVivo was conducted resulting in a map of significant perceptions and information on the reform process. Statements within the interviews were attributed a conceptual label, forming a code (or node), and any repetition of content sharing the same or similar semantic value occurring later within interviews was placed within this code. These codes were then examined in more detail and checks made in relation to the accuracy of the code title in reflecting the ideas expressed under each label. Major topics could be identified, reflecting the prevalence

of shared perspectives or concerns of teachers interviewed. Coding also made easier the interrogation and extraction of representative quotations.

Stage 2

A survey was administered to teachers across all Pioneer schools in Wales resulting in responses from 634 teachers working in 81 different schools. A range of questions were presented, including both closed and open-ended items. The survey also collected demographic data. Thematic content analysis, along with statistical analysis and discourse analysis, were applied. The aim was to allow significant themes emerging from initial analysis of qualitative data derived from interviews with teachers to be examined alongside data on a broad set of questions, with a larger sample of teachers across all Pioneer schools. Alongside information which could be obtained about teachers' schools, including percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, the survey data allowed us to explore the potential influence of context and teachers' background on attitudes to the new curriculum. However, for the purposes of this paper it is teachers' responses to open-ended questions about their hopes and fears about the reforms that is primarily used.

Findings

Professionalism and ownership

The first component of the rationale for the application of subsidiarity within the curriculum reform process in Wales is that teachers' professionalism will be strengthened, leading to an increased sense of responsibility and ownership of the reform process. Listening to teachers and incorporating their ideas into the way the curriculum takes shape and is interpreted is seen as a means to increase teachers'

willingness to engage with the reforms. However, increased recognition of teachers' professionalism is associated with a greater scope for teacher autonomy and flexibility, something which raises questions about accountability systems.

Feeling listened to

An important part of a renewed sense of professionalism is feeling listened to in relation to decision making that will affect working conditions. Several 'Pioneer Leads' (PL), those most directly involved in the development process, did report feeling that their opinions were being taken seriously and that they were able to make more decisions about how to teach:

"I think it's put a lot of trust in the professionalism of teachers to know that actually the curriculum that they build that's right and proper for their school is now high on the agenda... The freedom we spoke about earlier though for teachers to design the 'what', in order to get the right 'how' means that you can do things in partnership and dialogue with students." Morien School¹, secondary PL

Level of involvement in development process matters

However, teachers not directly involved in the process, but within Pioneer schools, have not viewed keeping up to date with the developments as top of their priorities, as one PL summarised their attitudes:

"We haven't got time to deal with all of this now, that's your job."

Enfys School, secondary PL

¹ Pseudonyms for the schools involved in the research are used throughout.

The survey data revealed significant differences in perspective between teachers about the new curriculum depending on their level of involvement. Those teachers not directly involved in teaching the new curriculum reported being considerably less informed and enthusiastic about it. There was also evidence that many partner schools, those not in receipt of additional funding for curriculum development, are not yet preparing for the new curriculum. Teachers interviewed felt that these schools were waiting to see what happens:

“It's, I think they sit quite kind of, let's have a look and let's see. Because I think some people still think... they don't think it's [the reform] going to happen.”

Banwen School, secondary PL

Flexibility and accountability

As mentioned above, many teachers see the new curriculum as offering greater flexibility. This was one of the most widely cited hopes teachers expressed concerning the new curriculum. There is a complex relationship between the concepts of freedom, autonomy and flexibility that are difficult to unravel. Flexibility was often referred to interchangeably with the concept of autonomy and this in turn was viewed as implying less control or monitoring of teachers. Teachers felt that currently data was used to evaluate their performance that failed to take into account their professional judgement. Teachers described these things in the survey in response to a question about their hopes:

“More autonomy for teachers. Less data driven education system.”

“Staff given greater autonomy in their profession and not bogged down with data.”

What the findings revealed was that teachers' sense of professional ownership for the new curriculum might be encouraged through the adoption of the subsidiarity model but only if they feel involved in the process, can make decisions about content choices and believe their judgement will be given greater weight when evaluating educational performance in a context where examination results are not necessarily the main measure used.

Reinvigorating teaching and improving quality

The second aspect of the rationale for subsidiarity is that with an increased sense of their professional ownership of the reforms, teachers will make greater efforts to improve the quality of their teaching. This, along with changes to professional learning, will lead to a more reflexive teaching body capable of innovative implementation of the changes.

Teaching more engaging lessons

The most commonly expressed hope by teachers responding to the survey was that the reforms would lead to more exciting and engaging teaching. It appears that many teachers believe that giving them flexibility would result in improved experiences for pupils. This reflects the way the new curriculum is seen as liberation from the current curriculum which is seen as overloaded and prescriptive. Teachers' comments also evidence a confidence in their knowledge of what pupils will find engaging, with many teachers surveyed reflecting these thoughts in their hopes for the changes:

“To create learning environments that provide pupils with a love of learning and a desire to learn and improve.”

“To make learning fun and get more out of children.”

“I hope that it will reinvigorate education and allow for more creativity in the classroom.”

Pre-packaged innovations in innovative schools

The spirit of adventure and innovation expressed in these statements may not fully reflect the constraints on teachers' abilities to innovate within the pressures of daily school life. Teachers questioned in interview about what they were doing within the classroom to reflect development of the new curriculum almost universally began by describing a pre-packaged technique or method that they were using. These were seen as being consistent with or specifically reflecting the direction of the new curriculum. They ranged from pedagogical methods (inquiry learning), to approaches to content management (Mastery approach), to efforts to change learning cultures across the school (growth mindset). Survey data revealed that the majority of teachers in Pioneer Schools had received training within the last 12 months on a pedagogical method or technique, over 40 different approaches were cited. However, there appears little awareness that each of these draws from its own theoretical background and when asked in the survey to explain how the method relates to the new curriculum no teacher offered a response.

Where teachers interviewed did mention doing new things with pupils, they tended to talk about whole school learning days and provision of experiential learning opportunities.

“The children wanted to learn about the fairground, but we knew that many of our children have never been to a fairground so we brought a fairground to our school. So then we knew that all our children had had that experience.”

Tanwen School, primary PL

While these things were referred to as providing the kinds of stimulating and interdisciplinary learning opportunities consistent with the new curriculum, several teachers worried about whether schools would be able to continue funding these if additional resources were not provided to schools.

“To run a Donaldson curriculum well you need more planning and preparation time... if you’ve got back to back five lessons in a row on a day you can’t do all singing, all dancing, hearts out on the table, pastels here, this there, that... it’s unrealistic to expect that off anybody. How’s that going to work longer-term.”

Enfys School, Secondary, teacher

In summary, there was little evidence to suggest that teachers felt anything more than excitement about the possibility of greater freedom under the new curriculum to experiment with new teaching approaches. Pressures on teachers are such that rather than engaging in reflexive pedagogical planning many look to ready-made models and methods to apply within the classroom or costly whole school initiatives. How consistent these are with the new curriculum is hard to evaluate, as is whether some of these approaches are sustainable over the long-term.

Responsiveness to local and national needs

One of the arguments for the subsidiarity model of curriculum reform is that it will encourage teachers to be more responsive to local and national needs in their teaching. There is an assumption that what counts as good preparation of young people for employment is something best defined at a local level. The four purposes of the new

curriculum include terms that reflect commonly accepted employability skills ('confidence', 'creativity'), along with terms that are considered positive for civil society more generally ('ambition', 'healthy'). Teachers reflected this aspiration:

“You have to look out the local community and wider community in order to fully realise those Four Purposes, don't you? So, you know, that certainly almost forces you to do it.”

Deri School, teachers

Teachers also appeared to view their role in the shaping of the new curriculum in relation to broad themes of relevance and better preparing young people for lifelong learning in work. They appeared to believe that schools would have more freedom to offer vocational pathways to some of their learners. This perspective emerged frequently in responses by teachers to the survey question about their hopes:

“That it will become more 'real world' so that pupils have a much better chance of accessing employment or further training.”

“It will prepare them to participate in society and become employable.”

However, many teachers also worried that because of this perceived shift of focus, along with greater school autonomy, some learners may miss out on acquiring valuable subject related knowledge.

“Knowledge will take a back seat and experiences and 'transferable skill' will be at the forefront. I fear that gaps between advantaged children and less advantaged children will then grow.”

“That it will not link in to GCSE, A Level and Degree study & that pupils will have less knowledge.”

Furthermore, evidence suggests that even schools keen to provide a more 'relevant' focus, engage with their pupils' parents and with local businesses have found fulfilling this challenging. Without these strong relationships it is hard to envision how teachers' understanding of local and national issues will be well informed. Furthermore, questions need to be raised about teachers' expertise to identify and develop employability skills, with many not seeing this as their primary role.

Variability increases with focus on relevance

One of the issues suggested by data above is that any focus on relevance shaped at the local level will increase variability between schools. Many teachers understood that with any curriculum there are gains and losses. Although recognising this, there was more hesitancy in their contemplation of being in a position to evaluate these trade-offs themselves. This can be observed in relation to discussion about how different groups of learners might be affected by the changes. Primary teachers tended to see the new curriculum as particularly benefitting lower ability pupils because of its more experiential and practical focus. Here, high ability pupils were frustrated by what they felt was a lack of challenge. However, although some secondary teachers talked about the new curriculum benefitting lower ability pupils, primarily because it was felt content could be more relevant and engaging, others spoke about higher ability pupils flourishing in the freedom they experienced to choose how they approached tasks. Lower ability pupils, in contrast, were felt to need more support and struggled with this choice:

"I've found that I really have to scaffold things for the weaker pupil, and direct them a lot more. So it's a lot more one to one. But MAT pupils obviously fly

because they feel like they can really go for it and put their own style into things and twist on things.”

Banwen School, secondary teacher

“My lower ability children found it hugely beneficial, they really, really loved it. My higher ability children hated it!”

Seren School, primary teacher

What can be seen here is that flexibility to be responsiveness to local needs is hard to manage. Whether teachers have the discernment or objectivity to ensure responsiveness to local and national demands does not result in varied provision that adversely affects some groups of learners or limits the access to some kinds of knowledge to some groups is hard to tell.

Confidence for sustaining reform process over time

The final benefit of a subsidiarity model implied in presentations and documents relating to curriculum reform is that it will successfully foster teachers’ confidence in ways that will help sustain curriculum development efforts over time. One of the challenges of curriculum reform is that initial enthusiasm and activity wanes before significant changes in practice have had time to become integrated within school cultures (Sinnema, 2011). The research data suggests that while many teachers are excited about the reforms and optimistic about their potential, as mentioned above, confidence in the way the changes will be implemented is less certain and this raises questions about the model of subsidiarity being adopted.

United in reject of the current curriculum

What the majority of teachers participating in the research had in common was a shared narrative about what is wrong with the current curriculum and why the new curriculum is needed. Teachers appeared to see the bottom-up model of reform as creating a blank sheet upon which their rejection of aspects of the current curriculum should be written down first. In almost all interviews, teachers' comments were framed in terms of how the reforms provided an opportunity to move away from the current curriculum. Within the survey data, many teachers expressed their hope and fears about the new curriculum in relation to moving away from the current model and avoiding a return to it. In particular teachers' felt that school education was adversely affected by the influence of accountability systems, the assessment pressures on pupils and a high degree of prescription in overcrowded syllabi that often lack relevance to young people:

“For so long, schools have become exam factories and we're constantly preparing them for an exam. And the pupils tend to be used to sort of, being on a spoon-fed.”

Bedwyn School, secondary teacher

“There are children who have been adversely affected by the current curriculum, you have children who don't conform to the normal learning styles or learning strategies and you just have to adapt and you just have to change it to make it work for that child.”

Tanwen School, primary teacher

Too good to be true

Hopes that the reforms would deliver schools from these flaws within the current system were strongly counter balanced by fears that the reform process was simply too good to be true:

“It is so broad and ambitious that it becomes a compromise, lacking focus and leadership.”

“My fears are that we are unable to bridge the gap between the vision and reality in the classroom. I can see this may be an issue if we do not provide teachers currently in the profession with time, opportunities for research and professional learning and clear messages/guidance to enable the vision. I fear if we don't ensure access to the above that teachers will revert to a 'tick box' and coverage culture, as it is what they know and are comfortable with.”

Survey responses

Tensions between hope and fear were prompted by a sense that the current teaching body will struggle to adapt to the proposed changes. Many PLs described overcoming a gap in their own knowledge and professional capacity in order to feel confident to engage in the task of curriculum making central to the reforms. This they referred to as a ‘mindset change’ they had to go through, expressing worry about how their colleagues will experience this:

“It’s a difficult one because it’s change your mindset more than resources.”

“Have they got the skills to do those things because we’ve never taught in that particular way and you can’t just suddenly change the mindset of a profession that’s almost going to take a generation to re-educate that profession to do things differently.”

Deri School, Pioneer Lead

In the absence of sufficient training and support to foster this change in perspective, many teachers feared colleagues would simply continue teaching as they had always done:

“That traditional teaching will prevail and change will become ever more difficult.”

“Teachers try and deliver it the old way. Teachers need a different way of looking at teaching and learning.”

Survey responses

Training and support

As mentioned above, teachers often expressed the view that key to the success of the new curriculum is investment in professional training and resources:

“Workload will become unmanageable for conscientious teachers and they will not be given adequate planning and preparation time to deliver the curriculum in the way it is meant to be taught.”

“That there won't be enough funding for training and resources.”

Survey responses

Confidence is highly dependent on teachers' beliefs about whether the profession will be adequately supported in terms of time to prepare new ways of teaching; training to help them become competent curriculum 'makers' able to respond appropriately to pupils' needs; and, sufficient funding to allow schools to offer pupils the more experiential learning many seem central to the changes. Rather than the

subsidiarity approach leading to increased confidence, we see throughout the data that the more consideration teachers gave to the specific changes that would be needed and the resources it would require, the more uncertainty they felt about the reforms.

Discussion

The finding outlined above show that many teachers believe the new curriculum will give them greater freedom in their choice of subject content and the learning experiences they can provide pupils. They see an aim of the reforms as making the curriculum less prescriptive and giving them more scope to make lessons relevant to pupils' interests. The importance of the core purposes also appears to be placing a responsibility on schools to provide opportunities for learners to develop dispositions and personal characteristics. There is no way of knowing what the impact of this will be until a cohort of students have gone completely through the system. What the findings have sought to explore is whether teachers are responding to the challenges of the reform process in ways consistent with the rationale for adoption of a model of subsidiarity. A number of questions emerge that will be discussed here that highlight potentially serious problems with the reform process. Has the process thus far led to an increased sense of teachers' professionalism, contributing to reduced levels of resistance to the changes? Do teachers report being reinvigorated in their teaching practice? Do teachers appear willing and able to respond to local and national needs in a way likely to raise pupils' aspirations? And, is there any indication that the process is leading to teachers' increased confidence in the new curriculum?

Professionalism and ownership

Professionalism is conceived as teachers taking greater responsibility for the development of the curriculum (Welsh Government, 2019, page 19, 3.20). Recognition of the importance of teachers' decision-making is implied but what the boundaries and constraints to this will be is not clearly set out in any curriculum reform documents. Expressed positively, professionalism can be seen as encouraging 'ownership'. The more teachers feel trusted to make decisions, the more they will feel the new curriculum belongs to them leading to increased commitment. The importance of creating a sense of ownership for successful management of change can be found in business literature (James & Connolly, 2000; Collins, 2001; Everard et al., 2004). The theory asserts that ownership and participation in decision-making increases responsible action, whereas lack of participation can lead to cynicism (Wanous, Richers and Austin, 2000).

Improvements to teaching are more likely if teachers feel they are having to change their practices for reforms they have been instrumental in developing and which they feel an ownership of. The logic of this is convincing but it implies that all teachers will have this sense of ownership and that exercising it would result in changes all would think of as improvements. There are two issues that are unclear. First, in the absence of more detailed description of how students' success at school will be measured, 'meeting the needs of all learners' remains a vague and problematic phrase. What if some teachers believed that this objective could be achieved through no direct instruction and with no formal evaluation of a pupil's acquisition of knowledge or skills? Many teachers believe that there will be national standards and learners will need to work towards some form of standardised assessment. It is these that will set the parameters for teachers' exercise of their professional judgement. Second, there is no clarity concerning the degrees of responsibility that will be granted to the individual

teacher and those granted to the school. Some teachers work in schools that have strong internal hierarchies of authority over teaching content and practices. What is the value of being told you will be trusted to make decisions concerning how to meet your learners' needs, if a more senior member of staff within your school will actually make the decisions and expect you to follow them?

If teachers believe their input will shape the new curriculum, then it is possible there will be increases in their sense of professionalism. The extent to which this occurs and leads to feelings of ownership appears dependent on the levels of freedom teachers have and the level of engagement with curriculum making within their school context. However, it is also clear that ownership is dependent on teachers seeing radical change to how their pupils and their own performance is evaluated. The potential problems in reconciling teachers' flexibility and national standards of accountability may prove difficult to manage.

Reinvigorated teaching and changing the role of the teacher

The idea that subsidiarity stimulates innovation is not new but freedom to innovate is highly dependent on the qualities within the environment within which a person or state has scope to work. Teachers are required to function in highly pressurised contexts where demands on their time are considerable. What scope there is to develop new approaches to teaching is limited by these contexts (Priestley et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that many teachers may end up using pre-packaged methods and pedagogical innovations re-branded as reflecting the new curriculum. However, the data also reveals a lack of debate about the place of knowledge within the curriculum or about learning theories. This creates a situation within which the pressures on teachers

may surmount their aspirations to ensure teaching practices really improve for all learners based on a coherent enacting of the new curriculum.

Furthermore, although many teachers appear to welcome greater flexibility and freedom in relation to their choice of topics and how they engage students with subject knowledge, recent research on history teachers in England, who were given considerable choice of topics to study with students, revealed that few considered the relevance, or ‘usability’, of their decisions for young people (Harris & Reynolds, 2018). Teachers well trained and inducted into modes of thought related to their respective specialised disciplines may struggle to put themselves in the place of young people whose daily experiences are influenced by diverse and complex sociological factors. In a sense, teachers’ implicit assumptions about curriculum relevance is likely to reflect their own understandings influenced by their professional backgrounds (Bernstein, 2000; Rata, 2016).

Responding to local and national needs

The rationale that subsidiarity should lead to increased responsiveness within the education system to local and national needs depends in many ways on the strength of relationships between schools and their local communities, including with parents. Although many schools know that parental involvement is valuable to support pupil learning (Castro et al., 2015) and that theoretically the new curriculum should allow them to utilise and engage parents better, evidence suggests that even teachers leading curriculum reform at school level have not yet found the means to achieve this.

There is an assumption in this rationale that increasing the employability agenda within schools is a good thing that will be welcomed by all teachers. Ainley (2016) has argued that focus on employability skills in this way is based on false assumptions about the labour market. In fact, there are very few jobs available for young people because employers do not want them. Even high numbers of graduates are now facing difficulties finding any kind of job let alone ones commensurate with their qualifications. Although on the whole the idea of making school education more 'relevant' is widely accepted as a good thing, a significant number of teachers worry that there will be a diminution in focus on knowledge which could have detrimental effects on pupils' ability to progress into post-16 study. Furthermore, with no clear guidance as to what counts as legitimate local and national needs and how these are to be determined by teachers, it is likely that this aspect of the reforms will lead to considerable variability across schools. This is another thing that concerns teachers and appears to contribute to many of them who are working in Pioneer School still feeling unsure and uncertain about the potential benefits of the changes.

Subsidiarity

It is worth considering the problems that can arise when the principle of subsidiarity, once accepted as important, is diluted or ignored. In 2015, the then UK Prime Minister David Cameron embarked on a diplomatic mission to win concessions from the European Union (EU) which he hoped would appease the discontent of many European sceptics in his party. These efforts ended with a letter to the EU President Donald Tusk within which Cameron argued that the EU enact its own principle of subsidiarity more fully. He made reference to a Dutch proposal for more policy areas being left to sovereign nations to decide, for reinterpretation of the doctrine of 'ever

closer union' and for 'flexibility', particularly relating to how EU law is created. The EU failed to offer a satisfactory response to Cameron's appeal and it became a Conservative manifesto promise to hold an 'In-Out' referendum, resulting in the nation voting by a small majority to leave the EU.

Jean-Pierre Danthine (2017) suggests that disenchantment with the EU across many EU countries can be traced back to the Union's failure to apply, 'the subsidiarity principle that was enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty'. He describes how centralisation has driven many aspects of European policy but with desires for national sovereignty reasserting itself in many countries, it is no wonder why many questions are being asked about why the principle of subsidiarity has not acted as an adequate counterbalance. He writes, "But in many other areas it (centralisation) cannot be justified and in those cases the failure to take literally the principle of subsidiarity appears to have had very negative consequences." This failure occurred because there was no clarity about the way the principle should work and without this centralisation dominated decision-making. Danthine argues that subsidiarity places the burden of proof on those advocating centralisation:

"Specifically, subsidiarity means that proponents of centralisation are the ones who have to prove that further integration is justified. If they fail to make the case, subsidiarity means that the powers should remain de-centralised."

In the context of curriculum reform, the principle of subsidiarity has exercised a powerful influence on teachers' imagination. It has fostered optimism in the reform process and the hope that the educational landscape in Wales will change radically, teachers will be listened to and granted the freedom they covert to provide more

engaging and exciting learning opportunities for their learners. But throughout the data, we have seen doubts and tensions emerging which no level of subsidiarity is likely to be able to adequately reconcile. There has been no clear policy about what degrees of flexibility or freedom schools will have and what decision-making autonomy classroom teachers may be granted, nor indeed about what accountability systems will be put in place. Subsidiarity has clearly exerted a powerful influence on teachers engaged in the curriculum reform process. But rather than acting as an effective tool to facilitate smooth change, it appears to run the risk of generating tensions that may prove difficulty to resolve.

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