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# "Are we making a quilt, with lots of ill-fitting cloths in here?": Teachers' internal conversations on curriculum making

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**Abstract**
Teachers exercising reflexivity through their internal conversations is one of the most important factors in the process of curriculum change. Drawing from Margaret Archer's theory, this research explores teachers' internal conversations in their own descriptions about a range of matters related to curriculum making. Eight secondary school teachers from different subject backgrounds (6 from Scotland and 2 from Wales) participated in the research. Findings suggest that although teachers may have similar concerns to produce internal conversations, the texture of the conversations, their standpoints, and how they project future actions differed. This variation can be partially explained by teachers exercising different modes of reflexivity in their unique circumstances. Findings suggest that a complex, nuanced and dynamic understanding of reflexivity is a salient feature to explain teachers' stances towards curriculum, reasoning, decision-making and actions, which may help to understand curriculum change processes better.

**Keywords** Internal conversation · Reflexivity · Curriculum making · Scotland · Wales

## Introduction

The ways in which teachers navigate their way through curriculum change have been one of the foci of curriculum research. This is particularly evident with the rise of international trends, which offer more flexibility to teachers than previously (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013). Consequently, the depiction of teachers as curriculum makers has

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received much attention. Historical and contemporary curriculum literature has illuminated different areas of this commonly articulated but rarely realised phenomenon (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008; Craig, 2020; Doyle, 1992; Osborn, 1997; Schwab, 1983). For example, much research has offered insights regarding the concept of teacher as curriculum maker from West (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008; Craig, 2010) and East (Craig, 2020), what factors influence this process (Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen, & Voogt, 2015; Osborn et al., 1997; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015) and how teachers make curricula (Ben-Peretz, 1975; Mitchell, 2017; Shawer, 2010). Moreover, teachers expressed their own accounts of the act of curriculum making by using metaphors, such as 'walking a tight rope' (Wee Teo, 2013), 'going through a maze', 'cooking' and 'painting' (Fisher-Ari & Lynch, 2015). As the title suggests, this research offers another one, 'quilt-making' to underline the complex and relational nature of curriculum making. These metaphors shed light on different aspects of the nature of curriculum and how teachers perceive their relationship with the practices of curriculum making. Further, there have been some changes and developments in our understanding of curriculum which have subsequently influenced how teachers' curriculum making is depicted. There is a long journey from Bobbitt's (1918) technocratic view of curriculum as specified content to be delivered and measured, to, for example, Pinar's (2004) *Currere*, which is about perceiving curriculum as complicated conversation, or Priestley, Alvunger, Philippou, and Soini's (2021) understanding of curriculum as social practice. Building upon some valuable curriculum scholars (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Pinar, 2004; Priestley et al., 2021; Stenhouse, 1975), this research understands curriculum as social and relational process in which teachers construct meaning, for example, about the purposes of curriculum, make decisions on several aspects (e.g. content) and enact policy in different sites, including schools. Hence, curriculum making by teachers refers to relational, complex, multidirectional practice, in which teachers reflect, make decisions and take actions to translate policy, using a variety of resources based on their concerns, priorities, and future projects in relation to their unique contexts.

The journey has witnessed several theoretical and practical crises (e.g., Schwab's (1969) call for the moribund nature of curriculum studies, which was partly about the disconnection between academic and practical sides of curriculum). To address such crises, there have also been various attempts to employ different theoretical lenses to make sense of teachers' curriculum making, such as social realism (Mitchell, 2017) and socio-material theories (Tronsmo, 2019). These have enhanced our understanding of different aspects of teachers' 'act of educational imagination' (Eisner, 1979, p. 47). We now hold a more sophisticated understanding and research evidence of the fact that teachers mediate their practices, even in the most prescriptive curricula, in different ways (Sivesind, Bachmann, & Afsar, 2013). However, we still have limited knowledge of how and why this mediation occurs in different and often unexpected ways. This research offers a window to understanding the role of teachers' internal conversations on curriculum making, including how teachers address their concerns and mediate various curriculum making affordances and constraints. The contexts of this research, Scotland and Wales, are particularly important where a major curriculum change has been witnessed.

## Internal conversations and reflexivity

Internal conversations are the internal dialogues considering ourselves in relation to our concerns, and priorities to act upon; and through these conversations we exercise reflexivity (Archer, 2007). Archer defines reflexivity as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa' (2007, p. 4). Internal conversations can serve various cognitive functions, such as planning, self-regulation, sense making, and self-control (Chalari, 2017), which are all important components of teachers' curriculum making practices. By utilizing the notion of reflexivity, research studies have illuminated different areas or factors, such as teachers' identity and agency (Lord, 2016; Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Ryan & Barton, 2020; Westaway, 2019) and policy implementation (Brew, Boud, Lucas, & Crawford, 2017), having an ultimate aim of explaining people's complex actions. For example, it has been argued that reflexivity conditions how teachers mediate different affordances and constraints and may shape the emergence of teacher identity and agency in particular ways (Lord, 2016; McCaw, 2021; Westaway, 2019), which are important factors in education change (Lee & Yin, 2011; Pantić et al., 2021) Moreover, some researchers argue that people can draw on a range of modes of reflexivity to varying degrees in different situations (Cavener & Vincent, 2020; Kahn, 2013; Kahn et al., 2017; Ogilvie, 2017), through their internal conversations. The overarching aim of these internal conversations is to establish a *modus vivendi*, which is sustainable and satisfying for that particular individual. Of course, the individuals are located within social contexts. This indicates the importance of understanding individuals within their contextual characteristics, which may help or hinder change.

Another important contribution of Archer's (2012) theory is on the heterogeneous nature of reflexivity, meaning that, even though we all engage in reflexivity, the way in which we project actions, including envisaging opportunities and deciding on course of actions, based on our concerns may vary in different contexts and times. She also argues that the texture of our internal conversations, qualitative differences in the content of our conversations (e.g. referring to a value or task orientation) is different. It is, therefore, a helpful concept to explore why teachers take certain standpoints, holding a certain position or possessing a certain attitude to particular issues, and act in different ways to understand their role in curriculum change. This view resonates with Zeichner's (1994) call, made more than two decades ago. Zeichner suggested that instead of merely focusing on teachers' individual reflection, we should be researching for different kinds of reflexivity and for structural and cultural factors that inhibit or nurture reflexivity. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1988, as cited in Craig & Ross, 2008) stated that 'the more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be' (pp. 290–291). Archer's (2007) theory offers a nuanced approach, which is helpful to investigate teachers' reflexivity through internal conversations, to delve into the complexities of teachers' practices.

The imperative of reflexivity to understand people's reasoning, decision-making and actions has been examined in the literature. For example, this includes how reflexivity plays a role in mediating accountability mechanisms and pressures and generat-

ing teacher agency (Ryan & Barton, 2020); in teaching practices such as teaching to and about diversity (Ryan et al., 2019); and in building and shaping professional identity (Lord, 2016; McCaw, 2021; Westaway, 2019) and professional growth (Ryan & Webster, 2019), to name a few. Second, there is a recurrent argument for the need for a more sophisticated approach to Archer's (2007) modes of reflexivity. Although this paper concerns teachers' internal conversations, rather than a detailed analysis of their modes of reflexivity, it is still important to explain Archer's different modes of reflexivity even briefly to understand the implications of this research better.

Archer (2007) proposes four dominant modes of reflexivity which can explain why people reason and act differently at a certain time. These are communicative reflexivity, autonomous reflexivity, meta-reflexivity and fractured reflexivity. In summary (see Archer (2007, 2012) for theoretical explanations and Hizli Alkan & Priestley (2019) for an example of empirical application in education), communicative reflexivity brings about inconclusive internal conversations, unless they are shared with one's partners for confirmation and/or affirmation. Autonomous reflexivity manifests in the lonely exercise of self-sufficient and self-contained internal dialogues, which are not required to be supplemented by external conversations to lead actions. Practising meta-reflexivity constitutes a continuous analysis, reflection, monitoring and self-interrogating one's circumstances and reflections. Finally, fractured reflexivity manifests in inner dialogues, which often do not lead to purposeful actions as the matters are usually beyond one's control. These modes of reflexivity are not static and should not be seen as personality traits, but more like a repertoire of reflexive approaches (Dyke, Johnson, & Fuller, 2012) or sub-ecologies of educational reflexivity (Raffo, Forbes, & Thomson, 2015).

Archer's modes of reflexivity have been challenged by some because of their nature or how they are investigated. For example, there is a discussion suggesting that four modes of reflexivity oversimplify social actions and therefore underemphasize intersubjectivity and social circumstances (Lord, 2016; Matthews, 2017). Dyke, Johnston, and Fuller (2012), while valuing the contribution of reflexivity, suggest that there is a need for a different discourse, such as using practising/demonstrating/exhibiting reflexivity instead of using 'reflexives' as a fixed label or a personality type. This research has followed the same path. Another question related to the modes of reflexivity concerns how people may come to exhibit one certain mode of reflexivity. Cavener and Vincent (2020) argue that educational interventions and employing critical reflective pedagogical strategies may lead to the development of a certain mode of reflexivity. Moreover, Ryan (2014) argued that, if people are aware of their reflexivity, they may be able to learn how to effectively navigate their way. These are important findings to highlight that the way teachers mediate curriculum making can be understood and shaped by interrogating the modes of reflexivity. Further, because these modes are not fixed, there is scope for developing more complex and elaborate modes of reflexivity when required, especially during a curriculum change. This research will shed light on teachers' internal conversations, in which different modes of reflexivity are exercised to examine their role in how teachers mediate curriculum making practices.

## This study

### Context

The research was carried out in Scotland and Wales, both of which have underlined the important role of teachers in curriculum making (Scottish Government, 2008; Welsh Government, 2020). The notion of teachers as agents of change is also accompanied with teachers developing as reflective practitioners in both countries (Education Scotland, 2014; Lee & Richings, 2018). Moreover, recent developments of revising the professional standards include several references to the importance of professional reflection (General Teaching Council of Scotland, 2021: Welsh Government, 2019). Hence, it is imperative to investigate how teachers utilize their internal conversations to exercise reflection as part of their ongoing personal and professional reflexivity, which is one of the key mediators of curriculum making (Hizli Alkan & Priestley, 2019).

## Participants

Eight secondary school teachers participated in this research during 2018–2019: six from Scotland and two from Wales. Participants were sought following opportunistic sampling strategy (Creswell & Clark, 2017) by utilising the networks of local authorities and advertising the research on social media (Twitter). The teachers have different subject backgrounds: two Chemistry, two History, one English, one Biology, one Design and Technology, and one Arts. Teachers' years of experience ranged from six years up to 30 years. Participants are assigned pseudonyms that do not reflect any of the teacher or school characteristics (Table 1).

**Table 1** Demographics of the participants

| Participants | Country | Gender | Years of experience | Subject specialism | Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bethan** | Wales | F | 19 years | Biology | Teacher and Senior Leadership member |
| **Sara** | Wales | F | 7 years | Arts | Teacher |
| **Skye** | Scotland | F | 7 years | Chemistry | Teacher |
| **Alister** | Scotland | M | 30 years | Chemistry | Teacher |
| **Kirsty** | Scotland | F | 11 years | History | Teacher |
| **Fiona** | Scotland | F | 9 years | History | Teacher |
| **Aileen** | Scotland | F | 11 years | English | Teacher |
| **Elsbeth** | Scotland | F | 6 years | Design and Technology | Teacher |

## Data generation and analysis

Data generation activities fell into three phases. In phase 1, I carried out eight individual semi-structured interviews to portray teachers' professional profiles and access the contextual conditions within which the teachers acted in terms of affordances, constraints, opportunities, resources, tensions, etc., whilst accepting the subjectivity of participants; in other words, their interpretations of their world (Smith & Elger, 2014). The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 to 88 min. Teachers produced reflective diaries over 10 weeks during Phase 2 until my final visit to their school. Details about the structure and frequency of the diary entries, and the digital application (Whatsapp, e-mail) within which teachers generated their diaries, were negotiated at the first meeting. The word count for the diaries varied from 364 words to 2868 words. Finally, I held individual internal conversation interviews in the final phase of this research project. Each interview took approximately 50 min. Sample items from the three data generation instruments can be found in Table 2.

Archer (2003) proposes that the point of an internal conversation interview is 'to identify inner mechanisms of thought on what is of most concern to subjects, according to their own definitions' (Archer, 2012, p. 159). Internal conversation analysis was informed by posing several questions derived from related literature (Archer, 2003; Chalari, 2017). These questions included:

- What is the struggle/conflict/challenge for teachers in curriculum making that teachers are concerned about?
- What are the mental activities related to curriculum making? Do all teachers engage in the ten mental activities? Are they any other activities that internal conversations are devoted?
- Do different teachers devote their inner talk to different matters? Do different modes of reflexivity help to explain different curriculum making practices? If so, how?
- What may foster and obstruct internal conversations related to curriculum making?
- In what ways are the internal conversations related to external conversations?

**Table 2** Sample items from data generation instruments

| First semi-structured interview | Reflective diary suggested structure | Internal conversation interview |
|---|---|---|
| How would you describe what curriculum means to you? What are your general feelings towards the curriculum? | What is the most important concern for me now? How do I experience this as a teacher? What are my priorities? How do I decide what to do? | Please have a look at these ten mental activities and comment on the ones you think you experience at any stage of curriculum making.<br>1. Planning (the day, the week, or much longer ahead)<br>2. Rehearsing (practising what you will say or do) |

Overall, there were three main areas that the data exposed. First was the range of deliberative activities that the teachers engaged in related to curriculum making. This aspect was addressed using the ten mental activities Archer (2003) proposed in investigating internal conversations. The ten mental activities are planning, rehearsing, mulling over, deciding, re-living, prioritising, imagining, clarifying, imaginary conversations, and budgeting. Archer (2007) argues that how we engage with these activities, how much time we spend, how important each is, and how we consider ourselves in relation to our circumstances offer rich insights about how and why people act in certain ways. I have utilised Archer's definition of the ten mental activities and her guiding questions from her validated empirical research to apply to the data (see Appendix 1 for an extract from data analysis). The ten mental activities will structure the findings sub-sections to illustrate the texture and content of teachers' internal conversations on curriculum making. Second, data analysis aimed to illustrate a variety of internal conversations in teachers' own descriptions about a range of matters related to curriculum making. I had started to note similarities and differences between cases. First interviews and reflective diaries acted as complementary data sources in this respect. For example, some teachers dwelled upon and strategically sought assessment-related advice, while some others did not. I then began to question what conditions might create the practices that I observed. More specifically, I explored what made the teachers act in different ways under similar conditions (e.g., the same curriculum, the same hierarchical secondary school structures, the same examination system, etc.). Third, I drew upon Archer's (2007) theoretical concepts such as personal, cultural and structural factors and modes of reflexivity, to explore how these factors interacted for each person in their specific circumstances. This analytical separation of different factors is helpful to offer more nuanced and particular characteristics of certain ways of curriculum mediation that may lead to different forms of change. Additionally, this helps to reveal why there might be non-change in that particular context.

## Findings

Teachers' quotations have been selected as themes to organise the findings section, considering how representative and helpful they are to convey the messages of teachers' internal conversations on curriculum making. The following five themes represent the ways in which teachers speculate about themselves and the interplay between different factors, which is helpful for (re)contextualising internal conversations in curriculum making:

1. I organise chaos.
2. Are we all reinventing the wheel again?
3. Are we making a quilt, with lots of ill-fitting cloths in here?
4. What would happen if we pull the curriculum apart?
5. How would I know if I am a good enough teacher?

These themes portray various curriculum making affordances and constraints, including personal, structural and cultural factors, different tensions that emerged during curriculum making and the importance of teachers' metaphors to express their account of the act of curriculum making. The sub-headings will include a range of mental activities to indicate the focus of each theme. This is also because 'the key feature of reflexive internal talk is silently to pose questions to ourselves, and to answer them, to speculate about ourselves, any aspect of our environment and, above all, about the relationship between them' (Archer, 2007, p. 63).

### "I organise chaos"

Kirsty's quotation above underlined the complex process of curriculum making by teachers through engaging in different mental activities. These included, but were not limited to, content selection, arranging whole-school activities, timetabling, multi-level teaching, and assessment. From this perspective, curriculum making proved to be particularly challenging in the context of Wales, as it felt as though *"Every day, there is something new"* (Bethan). In the following sub-section, I shall present examples of some of the ten mental activities, such as planning, deciding, budgeting, prioritising and clarifying, which formed the teachers' internal conversations.

### Planning

All of the teachers indicated that they engaged in this activity, for example, when organising learning activities, and thinking about curriculum provision, departmental practices, and time allocations. The type of questions ranged from meeting the Benchmarks (Scotland)[1] to thinking with big ideas about curriculum. An example for the latter was that Skye was planning to make the content relevant and challenging for students, to address some prominent global issues, such as the climate crisis.

Apart from day-to-day lesson planning and organising their annual timetable, what made the teachers perceive some of the planning as 'chaos' lay in the influence of other factors, which affected their planning and therefore their internal dialogues. One of the most recurrent curriculum making constraints was the number of part-time teachers, which made time allocation difficult, for example. This was particularly evident in the context of Wales because, at that time, Bethan and Sara were working on curriculum provision. Bethan had a curriculum lead role and felt supported by the senior leadership team for her decisions. Nevertheless, balancing different components in curriculum making was proved to be challenging, which required constant communication with different people. Hence, Bethan's internal conversation revealed some traces of communicative reflexivity.

"It is very challenging as you are trying to meet the requests of staff in teaching their first subjects, coverage of the curriculum, getting the right staff in the right

[1] Benchmarks provide expected national standards and illustrate progression in all curriculum areas. Please see for more information: https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/curriculum-for-excellence-benchmarks/.

place, working in the sixth form of consortium and timetable part-time staff (1/3 of staff are part-time)." (Bethan– reflective diary).

Additionally, staff turnover meant that teachers had to plan for unexpected circumstances such as teaching in a different subject or at different levels.

### Budgeting

One of the recurrent questions appeared in the internal conversations was; "*Do I have time and money for this and/or is it worth my time and money?*" (Skye). This was evident in, for example, deciding on the detail of feedback to be given students, which depended on the time of year (Skye), or decisions about weighing up the pros and cons of actions related to students' learning while promoting equity (Aileen).

"I mean definitely, I do have internal conversations about whether I can afford the time or whether it is worth the effort. For example, how much feedback I write in a piece of homework, is it worth the time to give that individual feedback or would I be better to have one of a whole class conversation and pick up on the key points so I think I do certainly a balance of these things? If it is a time of the year where we don't have so many things going on, maybe I would write individual feedback." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

Some teachers commented on the monetary aspects of budgeting in organising learning activities. For example, Kirsty and Fiona both commented on the lack of budget available in the school. Kirsty considered this as an obstacle for active learning, which was her fundamental pedagogical ideal, especially in relation to Broad General Education (BGE)[2]. While Fiona felt a lack of motivation to overcome this budgetary problem, Kirsty sought instrumental support through some enterprising activities, such as selling Scottish tablet (sweet baking products) to organise an extracurricular activity. Similarly, Sara felt confident about accessing the budget through her network. It is important to note here that Sara's school was located in a rural area where the school historically had close connections to the local communities nearby.

"I am very good at budget. If I need to find money, I will. If the school does not have the money, I will find a grant out there. […] It is about being resourceful as well. […] I would go to the potters and I would say, 'Look have you got any that you are not using, can we have it?' […] I think it is because of the nature of my subject [Art], 450 odd kids in this school, can you imagine the connections? So it is all about building relationships." (Sara – internal conversation interview).

This illustrates how different teachers took different standpoints towards a similar constraint and projected their actions. What makes this difference is partially due to their modes of reflexivity; relational goods (Donati & Archer, 2015) emerge from their external conversations (Hizli Alkan, 2021) and the social context in which they work. For example, Kirsty and Sara were exercising autonomous mode of reflexivity, which was evident through their self-initiated enterprising actions.

[2] Broad General Education is a phase starting from early learning to the end of the third year of secondary school in Scotland (3–13/14 years).

### Deciding

In organising such complexities, all teachers felt that internal conversations related to deciding focused on what is best for the students and their learnings. Some teachers (Kirsty and Fiona) found it easy to come to a decision, while others mentioned how much time it took to consider the pros and cons of a situation.

"I tend to be quite indecisive. Most recently, I just had it temporarily because of staff shortages. And we had real issues with behaviour management within that class so I was trying to create a curriculum that was going to be engaging and challenging and allowed if necessary for independent learning. That was a bit tricky." (Aileen – internal conversation interview).

Sometimes, this decision making activity was also related to managing requests from the senior leadership team.

"I: What about internal dialogues about deciding?

Elsbeth: I had one today. I needed to decide what is best. I had an appointment with B&Q [a retailing company] to get resources for the vocational training centre. Headteacher wants me to attend the year of the young people celebrations in the castle. What should I do moment. So If I go to the castle, I would not learn much and probably it would not benefit me. But Headteacher is asking so you are kind of … A bit torn. I thought about it overnight. I then decided that I can call B&Q to ask if they can rearrange. I ask 4D [a strong and trusted relationship] if he can go on behalf of me to B&Q so he will. I know that we need free stuff." (Elsbeth – internal conversation interview).

Hence, seeking help from the networks was one way of concluding internal conversations, signposting a potential for exercising communicative reflexivity. This was particularly evident when deciding on curriculum provision for Bethan as she was overseeing whole school curriculum making at the time.

Bethan and Sara, as mentioned before, had time and space devoted to curriculum making, which was not the case in Scotland. Thus, some teachers in Scotland argued that their internal conversations about curriculum making have become very frustrating. Hence, they had to make decisions based on cost-benefit analysis or starting to say no to things, which required to prioritise something over.

### Prioritising

Internal debates regarding prioritising had been influenced by some structural and personal factors. In Wales, Bethan and Sara had to prioritise the 6th form curriculum when making curricular decisions, for example, and therefore Bethan's internal talks included some references to that.

"When I have started timetabling, you get the 6th form first because we are tied." (Bethan – internal conversation interview).

Another example of a structural factor is the changes in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)[3] exams in Scotland, which triggered internal conversations on what

[3] SQA regulates and awards national qualifications. See for more information: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/70972.html.

to prioritise in curriculum making practices. Moreover, some traces of autonomous mode as an individual factor, such as prioritising instrumental and task-oriented actions also played a role in Fiona's case:

"We prioritise brand new Highers coming in. We still not perfected the new Highers this year. For BGE, we can't prioritise this at the moment. […] If we don't change BGE course now, no one is going to die, nobody falls an exam; but, if we don't change Advance Higher course, kids gonna fail." (Fiona – internal conversation interview).

Similar to many schools in Scotland, Fiona's school also held department meetings regarding students' attainment levels and there were certain pressures on senior-level classes. Exam classes have been also a priority for Elsbeth in terms of allocating her time because she felt accountable for that. Because the lack of time had been a concern for all teachers, Alister was particularly critical of spending extra hours for curriculum making, which was perceived not to be resourced properly at micro, meso and macro sites (Priestley et al., 2021). Amid all mixed messages in the system, as he saw it, he prioritised students' learning and said no to things that he disagreed with. His criticality was present when there was an inspection to his school and he commented on how 'boastful language' was used to hide actual practices, which was 'gaming' the inspectorate. Although he demonstrated some traces of meta-reflexivity, such dilemmas and unresolved issues in Alister's head led to practising a fractured mode of reflexivity, which disabled him to take continuous purposeful actions.

As for teaching in multilevel classrooms (e.g., teaching students who will sit National 4 and National 5[4] qualifications in the same classroom), it felt challenging to allocate sufficient teaching time for students from different levels. Thus, there was a variety of internal debates while teachers needed to prioritise. For example, Skye felt very unhappy spending half an hour for only one National 4 student in the class, while spending the other half with 19 students, mainly due to a lack of learning assistants. She then initiated a sixth-year peer-mentoring programme prioritising the equity for all students' learning. In contrast, Fiona assigned a task for National 5 students. while she was teaching to the others. This difference can be attributed to the mode of reflexivity, even partially, that they exercised at the time. More specifically, Fiona's autonomous mode might have brought about more instrumental actions, whereas Skye's meta-reflexivity led to taking more of an idealistic standpoint.

### Clarifying

Timetabling, Bethan's major concern, triggered some internal conversations when she was first trying to clarify things for herself and later to her colleagues about the potential changes.

"I do that [clarifying] all the time. Again, timetabling, you look at it, as there can be clashes between staff and certain pupils. You try to sort it what days they are off and they are working. Sometimes, they [teachers] have gotta teach slightly different subjects and you are trying to think what issues it may rise. For example, I have a list of people for tomorrow meetings, that I will have a chat as they will be affected by

[4] These are national examinations usually taken in the fourth and fifth year of secondary school respectively.

changes. So I clarify first why it is happening and if he has the skills and what I can do to support them." (Bethan – internal conversation interview).

The new reform-related changes prompted such internal debates for both Bethan and Sara, especially before meeting their colleagues, as they felt that they should get everybody on board to make the changes happen. Clarifying was therefore perceived as essential to organise such a complex array of changes.

### "Are we all reinventing the wheel again?"

There was a common concern in Scotland about a collective culture for curriculum making as Skye's quotation above illustrates. A lack of meso curriculum support was seen as a prominent reason, which in turn prompted some internal conversations amongst teachers. Here I shall present two examples from the ten mental activities in this section. These are mainly related to the collaborative aspect of curriculum making.

#### Mulling over

Skye was concerned about curriculum making being a duplication of work and she was mulling over this through her internal conversations.

"I do probably dwell upon problems. Actually, the conversation we had earlier about SQA meetings that I went to, so I ended up speaking some of the people there about curriculum. That was because I was dwelling upon an issue in my own school and I was thinking here is a chance to ask others. […] Because I was mulling over a long period of time. Hanging over me for a few months perhaps. There are still things which I am sort of mulling over and waiting for opportunities to explore them further." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

Skye's Faculty Head was from a different subject and although she felt trusted in Chemistry curriculum making, she was seeking some support within the department and wider. Skye was not the only one who conducted her internal conversations on this issue and needed external conversations to finalise her internal deliberations. This was similar to Bethan. Alister and Fiona also argued about the lack of collaboration, but in fact, had different opinions on the culture of sharing. Fiona shared her resources only if the relationship was reciprocal, whereas Alister shared his all resources, whoever requested, because of his core beliefs about education.

"Some teachers would not like to share their courses. It is part of the accountability agenda. If you are going to judge me every year on my exam results, why would I help someone else? But I have a wider view. All children deserve good teaching." (Alister – first interview).

Although both Alister and Fiona mulled over the same topic, the texture of their internal deliberations was not the same. Alister acknowledged the systemic pressures (e.g., accountability practices) on teachers and had been critical of not having time and space for curriculum making, yet he did not contemplate the instrumental benefits of selling the resources. In contrast, Fiona too argued on the same issue while indicating a propensity to selling her resources on a website. As such, practising dif-

ferent modalities is important to understand why we observe such differences. This argument is discussed elsewhere in more detail (Hizli Alkan & Priestley, 2019).

### Clarifying

This mental activity was mostly devoted to making sense of the change and potential issues related to disseminating information to colleagues. I shall particularly focus on sense-making, as it is related to the feeling of reinventing the wheel again, which was particularly evident amongst teachers in Scotland.

Teachers raised some questions while trying to clarify some issues in their heads, such as: "*What do the benchmarks mean?"; "What do I have to achieve?"; "Is there any checklist to decide at which level the student is?"; "Do I know what they talk about in this meeting?"; "Am I right in thinking?";* and *"Right, this is what I know and this is why I need to do so let's move on?"*

It was evident that internal debates related to sense-making were extended to external conversations sooner or later. This indicates, first, the importance of examining the interplay between internal and external conversations, and second, the significance of support mechanisms in change management, sense-making and making decisions. This aspect of change was what concerned teachers most, and also shaped internal and external conversations.

"I tend to mull things over and go out and talk to others to help me clarify." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

There was a perception of curriculum making being a 'duplicated work' as Skye wrote in her reflective diary. Fiona made a similar argument, which points to an area where schools and local authorities should support teachers' practices by creating opportunities for teachers to create sustainable and satisfactory curriculum making practices.

## "Are we making a quilt, with lots of ill-fitting cloths in here?"

Curriculum making is a complex web of enactment (Priestley & Philippou, 2018) and Alister's quotation above captures this complexity. Several domains need to be taken into account (e.g., pedagogy, assessment, curriculum purposes) and, as mentioned earlier, some teachers felt lonely and unsupported during that process at times. The ten mental activities were all mentioned under this theme, but four of them will be discussed here together to indicate the integration of these activities with each other.

### Clarifying, Deciding, Imagining, and Rehearsing

Alister retrospectively revealed his internal conversation about the time when CfE was first introduced and provided an example of a curriculum making exercise.

"In those days, my internal conversation was 'look, I need to do all these things?' I would look at principles, which I cannot recite now, and looked at the Science documents, and there were 7–8 principles like what should happen in Science, and they were like enquiry, investigation, activities, reports, etc. My initial thought was how do I do all these things now? All I knew then was, we would write a topic and then we

would try to put a bit of enquiry, debate, a bit of research. How do I populate it then? I would then take our current courses and pop all the stuff in and take all the stuff that seem to disappear. And pop more stuff in, and then 'oh we need some research, enquiry', and that was a bit of, making a quilt with lots of cloths, and I was not convinced that all fit in together." (Alister – internal conversation interview).

As shown above, Alister found it difficult to rationalise such complex integration, which was different compared to the previous habits of curriculum making. Because there was a perceived lack of support to clarify, which led him to exercise fractured mode, he decided to keep some of the old practices and utilize the new reform language in documentations. Such practice resonates in other internal conversations, except for Aileen. After the creative summer school, which felt like a milestone in her pedagogical approach, she focused on the big ideas. This also indicates the potential of networks to change the texture of internal conversations, and subsequently how a person imagines a different possibility of making a curriculum. Additionally, the mode of reflexivity that teachers practice may also explain these differences as well as how these former curriculum making practices may trigger a certain modality. For example, in Alister's case, I argue that these unsatisfactory experiences and a lack of support might play a role in forming a fractured mode of reflexivity (Hizli Alkan & Priestley, 2019).

### "What would happen if we pull the curriculum apart?"

The question in this sub-heading was drawn from Skye's interview and it was being actualised in the context of Wales in many ways, where teachers were required to consider different questions and possibilities of making a curriculum. In fact, the first introduction of CfE felt similar to some of the teachers, as an opportunity to imagine education differently. Hence, imagining, as one of the ten mental activities, will be the major theme to discuss internal conversations of teachers in this section, in addition to mulling over.

#### Imagining

The internal conversation of Sara, from Wales, had the aspects of 'imagining' of the ten mental activities related to the new curriculum.

"Especially now with the new curriculum because nobody really knows so it is open to more imaginative outcomes. […] I always think whole school now. I'd like to see the bigger picture. What I would start to our planning session is, right what does a 16-year-old Expressive Arts student look like? When I first started, it is like, what we are doing this term? And not thinking in a much broader sense." (Sara – internal conversation interview).

Skye, from Scotland, emphasised cross-curricular links and interdisciplinarity during imagining, but she felt that this was not achievable in her context.

"I sometimes imagine what would happen if we pull the whole thing apart and start over again in terms of interdisciplinary learning. There is so little of it. It is so difficult and it is seen as an add on. You want to be authentic but it is so difficult to

organise. So part of me thinks, just pull all things apart. But that is not gonna happen." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

I argue here that Skye was inclined to imagine different future possibilities regarding curriculum making, but that this was hindered by potential structural and cultural factors. These factors included a lack of motivation among staff or perhaps the difficulty imagining what interdisciplinarity looks like in curriculum making. This brings us back to the discussion of providing meso curriculum support to teachers. Teachers' networks can provide a good place to start identifying some opportunities, for example, to provide required support or enhance already established connections. Alister underlined this by stating his internal conflicts, regarding how to imagine interdisciplinarity in a classroom context when there was not any satisfactory explanation, which required a piece of empirical evidence, and examples of day-to-day practicalities. What we see in Kirsty's case is a similar example of how structural pressures can influence internal conversations:

"I: What if there are no exams or marking schemes, what would you do at the senior level in terms of curriculum making?

Kirsty: It depends on what the people at the top are telling. If it was me making the judgement, well done, you get the Higher A. You could plan the course to give the opportunity to show me how you should have a Higher A. We can video, document to provide any evidence." (Kirsty – internal conversation interview).

As the quotation illustrates, there is still a trace of the influence of performativity culture and the feeling of being held accountable. This suggests that structural factors, such as accountability pressures, may impede on teachers' internal conversations, and consequently how teachers project their actions to enact curriculum change.

### Mulling over

The introduction of a curriculum reform could open up spaces to make intended change happen (Kirk et al., 2018), depending on different factors, such as the intensity and pace of the reform (Wallace & Priestley, 2017). In response to this claim, Fiona gave an example of her internal debate about the former History curriculum just before CfE was introduced.

"When I first started, we had History Christianity. I thought: 'Oh, this is awful and we can't be teaching this to kids. No wonder History numbers are terrible. But I have been here for only a month so I can't say this aloud.' And then all the Benchmarks came out and it was absolute luck. They did not match so we had to change. I brought in a new course. Benchmarks have allowed to change happen, which has been good for updating things." (Fiona – internal conversation interview).

Nevertheless, as Ball (2003) indicates, this change did not always lead to making a success of themselves; in contrast, it may result in internal conflicts and resistance as evidenced in other cases (e.g., Alister) as discussed previously. What Fiona's case might present is that perceived need and motivation to create a new course are essential elements to make change happen. Sustaining that motivation had proven to be difficult. She felt demotivated during the last interview, due to several reasons, not least because of some tensions in the department and a lack of praise and support from her faculty, which I shall turn to discuss in the next section.

## "How would I know if I am a good enough teacher?"

Skye's quotation above is linked to Stenhouse's (1975) idea that curriculum development and teacher development should be considered and enhanced in tandem. Hence, teachers conducted their internal debates about curriculum making regarding the ways they reflected on their teacher self. Re-living, prioritising and imaginary conversations will be the focal areas, where I present some examples of teachers' internal conversations in this section.

### Re-living

There was a tendency to re-live the cases, where teachers felt there was more to be done but they were not able to do, or where teachers felt that things had been a concern for some time. For example, Skye relived a lesson to consider the quality of her teachings.

"I might think back through the way that I taught something and what happened and whether it was successful. For example, within the third-year course, we have looked at fracking. One year, we had a big event in the hall and we had half of the class debating for and debating against. They made a really great event and lesson. I did the same thing next year. They were not as confident in public speaking and did not take the topic, and it was not also in the news as much that year. […] I was really reliving the thoughts which have an impact on how I deliver the lessons." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

Re-living was not always considered a helpful thing, especially if the focus was on the things with which a person is dissatisfied. Sometimes, teachers did not even find the time to relive, as Sara said, *"It is like go, go, go."*

### Prioritising

One of the repeated concerns was the lack of praise and intolerance of mistakes, especially in the context of Scotland. This, in turn, played a role in what teachers thought should be prioritised, mediated by personal, structural and cultural factors (e.g., modes of reflexivity, accountability pressures, performativity culture). Fiona, for example, stated one key reason why curriculum making was not a priority for her any longer: a lack of praise for creating good lessons and enacting a good curriculum.

"You can be teaching a course which is printed in 1992 or you can make a new course every year to fit the needs of your kids and you are still getting paid the same. My Head has no idea how much effort I put into curriculum development. Absolutely none. This is demotivating. They do not even value it enough." (Fiona – internal conversation interview).

"Results day in August, my favourite days when the Insight data comes out. They are insane, amazing. No one ever comes to says well done. If you are doing a working group [extra-curricular whole-school activities], you are told." (Fiona – first interview).

In addition to these, she also believed that there was no need to change her practice as 'her' exam results showed a high success rate (70%). As such, she prioritised the

exam results as a prominent indicator of her success. A similar issue, also raised by Kirsty, was that curriculum making was not praised in job interviews. These insights may indicate the importance of extrinsic motivation for some teachers, as a stimulus to curriculum making practices. Moreover, the autonomous mode of reflexivity may explain why these incentives were prioritised in curriculum making practices (Hizli Alkan & Priestley, 2019).

### Imaginary conversations

The people with whom teachers had imaginary conversations included inspectors, senior leadership team and other staff members. Aileen highlighted the importance of seeking other perspectives in her curriculum making through such imaginary conversations.

"It is really bizarre because sometimes I find myself doing it [imaginary conversation]. It is sort of processing for me trying to consider other perspectives. I think because it is really easy particularly planning for the curriculum to become very selfish and think this is what I would like to do and stop forgetting it is thirty other people with you in the classroom." (Aileen – internal conversation interview).

The existence of Insight data[5] also initiated some internal debates. For example, Skye was asking "*Who did I do a particularly good job of teaching?*" and "*Who didn't do that well and was there anything at all I could have personally done to impact on their attainment?*" Such questions then stimulated some internal debates on to make a decision:

"The only main area we are unhappy with this year is the Advanced Higher attainment which is lower than elsewhere and we know this is due to some students who stop working when they are given unconditional university offers and they fail the exam due to putting in no effort. So now we need to consider how we can attempt to make these students keep working, or whether we need to tell them they are not allowed to take the course if they stop working because if they didn't sit the exam then our data would appear far more favourable." (Skye – reflective diary).

Such performativity tools can easily become one of the key drivers of curriculum making practices. Hence, it is important to underline the impact that Insight data has, as a curriculum making constraint, both on how teachers' internal conversations were shaped and how they projected their actions accordingly.

### Other mental activities

The aforementioned activities were familiar to all of the teachers when having internal conversations about curriculum making. Fiona perceived them as stages of curriculum making. At the end of the interviews, I asked them whether there were any other mental activities associated with internal conversations about curriculum making. Most of them thought these ten mental activities captured their internal conversa-

[5] Insight is mechanism to monitor the development and attaintment levels of students for targeting improvements for schools and local authorities in Scotland. See for more information: Schools: National Improvement Framework (NIF) - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

tions about curriculum making well. However, Aileen, for example, suggested that she was 'puzzling out', especially when designing learning materials to fulfil the whole range of needs of her students, while making them engaging and challenging. Similarly, Elsbeth described how she was 'having lots of doors open', when thinking about curriculum and how quickly she just switched and opened new ones in her head through her internal dialogues. Further, Skye asked some agentic questions related to curriculum in her head:

"How much influence can I have? Who has got the power to take the curriculum in a different direction? Maybe I have that kind of internal conversations. For example, would it be appropriate for me to make suggestions … That comes to a lot in my internal conversations." (Skye – internal conversation interview).

This aspect of agency is indeed fundamental to address in this study to explain how teachers, as reflexive agents, navigate their way through curriculum making practices in the contexts where different structural and cultural affordances and constraints emerge and interact.

## Discussion and Conclusion

I have examined several ways in which teachers' reflexivity might be exercised, and a variety of forms of internal conversations that condition teachers' practices in different ways. Turning back to the quilt-making metaphor in the title, which indicated the complex and relational nature of curriculum making, it occurred that the texture and content of teachers' internal conversations were essential in creating a coherent and meaningful curriculum. For example, some teachers mulled over the question of whether they were reinventing the wheel, which seemed to point to a lack of curricular support and collaboration across stakeholders. Others had tried to clarify for themselves the coherence of different parts and practices of curriculum, or had imagined alternative ways of curriculum making through their internal conversations. These internal conversations were closely related to what concerned them or what they had to prioritise at the time of this research. This suggests that teachers may hold different concerns and priorities at different stages of a curriculum reform, which ultimately alter how they practise a certain mode of reflexivity, and perhaps while exhibiting a provisional mode at the same time. In fact, research have argued that people may practise different modes at the same time (Kahn, 2013; Lord, 2016) or they may have provisional, temporary (Wimalasena, 2017) or 'auxiliary' modes (Lord, 2016) alongside their dominant reflexivity mode. In fact, Bethan's case concurred with these findings that people may exhibit a provisional or relational mode depending on the circumstances and the concerns and priorities of the social actor, and then they draw on these modes when required. This was also observed elsewhere (Hizli Alkan & Priestley, 2019; Kahn, Everington, Kelm, Reid, & Watkins, 2017). Thus, the intensity and form of reflexivity changes, depending on the different factors, including the structural and personal. For example, the performativity culture may enforce some kind of passivity or compliance, which the system demands. Additionally, teachers' formal roles, modes of reflexivity, and the contexts in which they were situated, influenced the content, intensity and the texture of internal conversa-

tions. This suggests that how teachers positioned themselves in curriculum making and how they adopted certain standpoints and actions related to curriculum can be explored through internal conversations.

This research suggests that teachers' internal conversations are powerful mediator of curriculum making and help us understand curriculum change. For example, Alister's case illustrated that having a relatively satisfactory experience with the previous curriculum, unsatisfactory sense-making activities regarding the new curriculum, and some troublesome events, may shape how teachers' reasoning and decision-making change. This is a fine and difficult balance that Aitken (2006) mentions when introducing new curriculum reforms. He argues that curriculum reforms should challenge teachers' previous schema to a degree, but should not lead to misconceptions or superficial adjustments. Hence, the key seems to be ensuring coherent and supportive sense-making activities (Soini et al., 2018; Sullanmaa et al., 2019). Also, Aileen's case demonstrated how a propensity towards keeping mental wellbeing healthy and a need for a community in the midst of an unsatisfactory social context partially explained teachers' decisions regarding curriculum, and broadly the profession as a whole. There is growing research around the impact of accountability measurements and performativity culture on teachers' health and wellbeing (e.g., Skinner, Leavey, & Rothi, 2019) and their practices. Thus, this finding calls attention to examine teachers' internal conversations and to determine what contextual factors may trigger a particular mode coming into presence through repeated unsatisfactory internal conversations. More research is needed to understand how teachers' internal conversations develop certain mode of reflexivity and engender certain practices that influence how curriculum reforms are mediated by teachers. It is a strong entry point as Ryan (2014) suggests that, if people are aware of their modes of reflexivity, they may be able to find ways to manage and improve their practices. It may be even possible to develop a certain mode through teaching about critical reflection (Cavener & Vincent, 2020). This has implications to initial teacher education and professional development programmes. For example, the link between teachers' reflexivity and curriculum making in those programmes should be strengthened through nuanced discussions on different modes of reflexivity and underlining the importance of contextual influence in exercising different modes. For example, some systematic initiatives can support teachers' ongoing professional development, by interrupting habitual thinking and doing (e.g., Priestley & Drew, 2019), and offer some constructive and critical exercising of reflexivity through internal conversations. Moreover, the modes of reflexivity, as forms of reasoning and acting upon, can enhance teachers' repertoires through, for example, delving into their concerns, discourses, narrative, and lines of reasoning to gain new insights and make new connections that they might not have considered. Further reflections on the modes of reflexivity might make the mediation process more transparent and manageable, which ultimately may help teachers to navigate their actions more effectively.

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