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Evaluating the implementation of curriculum reform: the perspectives of Welsh teachers navigating the new Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience.

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Abstract

The Curriculum for Wales became statutory for Welsh schools in September 2022. This study aimed to gather insight from Welsh teachers embedding the New Curriculum for Wales within their context, with a specific focus on the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).

Participants included fifteen teachers (secondary n=8, primary n=7), currently teaching in Wales, who had been involved in the curriculum design of the HWB AoLE within their context. This research utilised a novel research design combining both research insight and professional learning within an innovative workshop design. A qualitative case study approach was used with multiple data entry points (work booklet, audio recordings, workshop tasks, online evaluation form) during a one day workshop event. The case study was

underpinned by a modified appreciative inquiry approach. The data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

This study was successful in gathering insight from Welsh teachers. Reflecting upon the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales has useful implications for other countries worldwide that are considering curriculum reform. This research recommends that the implementation of pedagogical and curricular change be taken as seriously as the new curriculum content itself.

Key words National Curriculum for Wales, Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience, Appreciative Inquiry, Curriculum Reform, Curriculum Implementation.

Introduction

The previous Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government 2008) largely followed the National Curriculum for England (Department for Education and Employment 1999) by following subject pathways and key stages, but it was tailored for the Welsh context, such as the inclusion of the Welsh language being taught in all schools. However, following increasing pressure for less complexity and more autonomy in the delivery of the curriculum, a Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales was conducted in 2014 (Donaldson 2015). The review process involved consulting with approximately 60 schools across all key stages in Wales. The resulting recommendations were to implement four central purposes that guide future policy decisions and underpin all teaching in Wales, as well as six Areas of Learning and Experience with progression steps to replace phases and key stages (Donaldson 2015). These recommendations were upheld and have formed the central framework of the

new Curriculum for Wales, which became statutory in September 2022. The ‘Four Purposes’ have become the all-encompassing aspirations of the new curriculum and the starting point for each school’s interpretation. These are to support learners in becoming:

- ambitious, capable, 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.

(Welsh Government 2022b)

What is evident from these aspirations is a principal intention to place health and wellbeing at the new curriculum’s centre (Public Health Wales 2022) in order to help each child and young person ‘grow as a capable, healthy, well-rounded individual who can thrive in the face of unknown future challenges’ (Donaldson 2015, 5). Engaging children and young people in physical activity is recognised not only to improve physical health but also cognitive and mental wellbeing (Whitehead and Durden-Myers 2018). However, concerns around levels of physical activity and the health of school children in the UK have been raised for some time, with recommendations to place Physical Education (PE) as a core subject in the curriculum (Schools and Physical Activity Task and Finish Group 2013). These concerns are ongoing with the Sport Wales’ School Sport Survey (2022) reporting a decrease in engagement in out of school sport in Wales from 48% in 2018 to 39% in 2022, possibly influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Decreased physical activity is reflected globally with 80% of young people not meeting the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) recommended levels (WHO

2022). Simultaneously, mental health issues are rising. A study which analysed data from 36 national surveys of nearly 150,000 children and young persons (aged 4-24 years) in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) between 1995-2014, found a significant increase in long-standing mental health conditions, with a noticeable worsening trend in psychological distress in Wales (Pitchforth et al. 2019). Mental health issues have been significantly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (WHO 2024) with the Youth Sport Trust (2023) declaring that children are now ‘unhappier’, ‘unhealthier’, and ‘more disconnected’.

As part of its response to health and wellbeing concerns worldwide, UNESCO (2022) is calling for nations to develop inclusive sport policies that focus on the delivery of evidence-based sport and quality PE interventions in schools and communities.

Scotland had already introduced their Curriculum for Excellence in 2019 (Education Scotland 2019) as part of their commitment to providing children and young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century (Education Scotland 2019). This included the new curriculum area of Health and Wellbeing. Post-pandemic, other nations’ stakeholders have swiftly acted. The Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America launched national PE standards to improve the quality of PE curricula in the United States (SHAPE 2024). Following widespread support for health and wellbeing to be given more emphasis in Welsh schools (Wavehill, 2019), Health and Wellbeing (HWB) has become a core discipline in the new Curriculum for Wales. Concurrently, many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are considering curriculum reform to prepare students for lifelong learning in the 21st century (OECD 2020). However, as also reported by the OECD (Gouëdard et al. 2020), there is much focus on the reform

of curriculum content but little on implementation. This results in ‘top-down’ processes, rather than engaging the perspectives of teachers on the pedagogical change necessary to bring about successful implementation. The reflections detailed in this study on the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales will contribute to the developing body of international literature on school curriculum reform (Alshamari 2013; Bantwini 2010; Byrne and Prendergast 2020; Pham et al. 2023; Yan 2012) while also providing useful considerations for other countries worldwide that are considering curriculum reform.

The New Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience: Curriculum for Wales

HWB is one of the six statutory and integrated Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) of the new Curriculum for Wales, which also include Expressive Arts; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology.

Mandatory statements of ‘What Matters’ also form an essential aspect of the curriculum so that schools and settings maintain consistency in their curriculum design, and progress pupils’ understanding and knowledge within each AoLE. The five ‘What Matters Statements’ for the HWB AoLE are:

- Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits.
- How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.
- Our decision-making impacts the quality of our lives and the lives of others.
- How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being.

- Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being.

(Welsh Government 2022a)

Progression in all AoLEs should be embedded in curriculum planning and delivery and is guided by descriptions of learning that allow for varying rates of progress.

Essentially, any progress should be assessed individually in a holistic manner through a partnership between all involved in the learner's development (Welsh Government 2022a, 2022b).

The Four Purposes, AoLEs, What Matters statements and shift in progress monitoring differ considerably from previous curricula and so have caused some confusion and contention. The Welsh Government carried out an extensive consultation with schools to co-design the new curriculum (Welsh Government 2022a, 2022b), which resulted in many teachers welcoming the new framework as 'fresh and exciting' (Lewis 2022).

However, many also felt that the formal implementation date of September 2022 was too soon for every school to achieve due to lack of time and resources (Institute of Welsh Affairs 2021; Lewis 2022). As the curriculum has been rolled out, many schools have reported challenges with its implementation. These include staff capacity, time to plan sufficiently, changing mindsets, increased practitioner autonomy leading to uncertainty, and lack of clarity over assessment data for accountability – potentially resulting in divergent practice between schools (Government Social Research, 2023).

By gathering further insight from teachers in Welsh schools, this study hoped to shed additional light on these challenges. The OECD recommends that any curriculum reform engages school-based and network activities such as professional learning communities and collaborative design within teacher teams to cultivate understanding

and ownership (Gouëdard et al. 2020). This study also aimed to demonstrate how schools could be better supported through a needs-led approach including targeted resources, future events and professional learning opportunities.

Methodology

Participants and school settings

An open invitation to attend a workshop was disseminated using Sport Wales and PE Scholar (PES) networks. Convenience sampling selected 15 participants for the study. The teachers were all based in Welsh contexts and were involved or responsible for designing the HWB AoLE within their context. The sampling method resulted in a relative balance between contexts (secondary schools n=8, primary schools n=7). All secondary teachers were specialist PE teachers, while primary teachers were either generalist class teachers or specialist PE teachers. The participants included ten female and five male teachers. Although the invitation was sent to all four regional consortia of Wales, there was a disproportionate representation with 12 teachers from Central South Wales, and only 3 teachers from other regions of Wales (2 from the West and 1 from the South East), with no teachers from North Wales, which has the highest percentage of Welsh speakers (Welsh Government 2021). However, the perspectives of Welsh speakers were involved in the final sample. This research complied with ethical guidelines as set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018).

Case study and appreciative inquiry

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore both the unique and shared experiences of teachers implementing the new curriculum. Multiple data collection points were used in order to gain a holistic picture (L. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018) during a

one day workshop held at Sport Wales in June 2023. The research design was underpinned by appreciative inquiry, an organisational development process that focuses on opportunities for development (Coghlan, Preskill, and Tzavaras Catsambas 2003). Appreciative inquiry is a transformative research paradigm (Watkins and Cooperrider 2000) that *appreciates* the best of every organisation and the individuals within it to bring about change (Coghlan, Preskill, and Tzavaras Catsambas 2003; Enright et al. 2014). Influenced by the application of appreciative inquiry in physical education and sports coaching studies (Gray, Treacy, and Hall 2019; Pill 2015; Sargent and Casey 2020), the workshop used the ‘4-D’ (discovery, dream, design and destiny) cycle (Cooperrider and Whitney 2000) to avoid ‘deficit based changes’ (Gray, Treacy, and Hall 2019, 20) and promote an aspirational stance, motivated by the curriculum aim of developing healthy, well-rounded individuals who are able to thrive (Donaldson 2015, 5).

Data Collection Phases and Analysis

Dream and design were combined during the workshop resulting in three collection phases: Discovery, Dream and Design, and Destiny. Each phase and the data collection process are outlined below:

1. **Discovery:** The discovery phase of the workshop aimed to capture current thoughts, feelings and approaches to implementing the HWB AoLE of the new curriculum for Wales. In order to reflect on pedagogy and practice, it is important for teachers to be able to engage in critical dialogue (E.J. Durden-Myers and Keegan 2019). Initial themes were selected to provide discussion prompts and generate meaningful discourse (Ertmer, Sadaf, and Ertmer 2011). These themes were chosen to give a broad overview relating the planning and delivery of HWB in the participants’

schools. Participants were asked about strengths and challenges to the whole school approach, HWB approach, assessment methods and types. Highlighting strengths and challenges is an initial tool of appreciative inquiry to facilitate a supportive, equitable and trusting basis for positive discussion (Paige et al. 2015).

Discovery data collection: Participants were divided into groups of mixed settings (primary and secondary). Comments generated during group discussion were recorded by group members onto flip chart paper and are presented verbatim in the Results section.

2. **Dream and Design:** In accordance with the aspirational intention of appreciative inquiry, participants were asked to imagine themselves, their group or their community at its best and attempt to identify what could be. Having identified common aspirations, participants are questioned to explore what the ideal situation would be.

Dream and Design Data Collection: Participants with similar interests and same school phases (primary or secondary) gathered in groups to develop one of the example approaches provided or build on their existing ideas to apply the AoLE guidance in an accessible and practical way. Two of the example approaches, Head - Know, Heart - Show, Hands - Grow (HHH) (Frapwell 2014; Orr 1992; Sipos, Battisti, and Grimm 2008); and MOVE (Trowbridge 2023) were selected as models that were known by the researcher to have been implemented successfully in Welsh contexts. The WELL framework (Swaithes n.d.) was offered as a comparative example used in successful curriculum implementation in England. Real PE (Create Development,

2024) was an existing tool used by one of the groups, and the final group wished to explore whether a solution could be found by developing a new application (app). The

Table	Group	Selected model
1	Secondary 1	Head Heart Hands
2	Secondary 2	Real PE
3	Secondary 3	MOVE
4	Primary 1	WELL
5	Primary 2	App Development

approaches and their corresponding

groups can be seen in Table 1 below.

After 90 minutes of collaborative

working, each group provided their

feedback. This was audio recorded and

transcribed and is quoted verbatim in the

Results section.

Table 1: Selected models by table/group

3. **Destiny:** Researchers explored and worked with participants to investigate how ‘what could be’ practices explored in the Dream and Design phase could be actioned and sustained (Cooperrider and Whitney 2000).

Destiny Data Collection: Participants were asked to complete individual workbooks.

These included a learning reflection at the beginning and end of the workshop, a

record during the workshop of developing ideas for assessment and implementation at

individual, team, school and policy levels, and a record at the end of the workshop of their commitment for change and what this will entail. These records are quoted verbatim in the Results section.

Professional learning

Deliberate reflection is an aspect of appreciative inquiry that aims to enhance the nurturing of innovation (Trudel, Gilbert, and Rodrigues 2016). This involves gathering all contributions to encourage individual and collective success using a strengths-based reflection framework (Ghaye 2010). Therefore, a reflective task was undertaken after each phase to gain further insight into the professional learning gained during the workshop. The final reflection used the KISS (Keep, Improve, Start, Stop) framework (Education Bureau n.d.) to encourage consideration of context-specific approaches, strategies, tools and resources that were already available to participants or could be adapted for their purpose.

The richness of data provided thick description (Geertz 2008) and multivocality (Tracy 2010), resulting in an in-depth picture of the participants' experiences. Analysis used an inductive approach to identify common themes in the data (Schwandt and Gates 2017), while also using quotations to represent the voices of participants and frame more complex and individual experiences (Budd and Kandemir 2018). It is recognised that the combination of primary and secondary participants in the Discovery group work resulted in the data not being distinguishable between school phases. However, the subsequent workshop phases continued to break down this shared experience by school phase and individual experiences. This is reflected in the Results section.

Follow-up meetings, research debriefings and an online workshop were also conducted to member check findings (Tracy 2010). All participants provided their informed consent and de-identification was assured.

Results and Discussion

The research findings are presented to follow the 4-D themes of discovery, dream and design and destiny. Two further sections explore the professional learning of participants and the evaluation of the workshop and general participant feedback.

Discovery

As Figure 1 demonstrates, a range of themes emerged from the discovery phase. These were ‘level of guidance and autonomy’; ‘utilisation of existing tools and assessment strategies’; ‘curriculum mapping and provision’; ‘non-linear, intangible and variable’; ‘integration and identity’; and ‘practicalities, feasibility and consistency’.

Figure 1. Discovery Themes

consistent and balanced. The variation in this balance between the settings suggests that each school modified the level of autonomy of teachers to meet the needs of their own stakeholders and context, but that a clear vision was not always apparent (Reis 2018). This left some teachers having to make important decisions based on limited information. Byrne and Prendergast's (2020) longitudinal study of secondary school curriculum reform in Ireland serves as a reminder that if such inconsistencies are not addressed, then this may have long-term implications.

Utilisation of existing tools and assessment strategies

The schools in this case study were keen to use their existing frameworks, platforms, tools and infrastructure to implement the new curriculum and the list of apps and systems was extensive. The types of assessment used by participants included, '*stakeholder surveys*', '*pupil voice*', '*observations*', '*teacher assessments*', '*learning walks*', '*progression steps*' and '*book work marking*'. These types are more compatible with assessment of learning that supports young people's holistic development (E. Durden-Myers and Bartle 2023). However, few participants were able to comment on why and how these informed a strategic approach to assessment or indeed how the results were fed into existing systems and software for monitoring purposes. The importance of a coherent assessment strategy in successful curriculum implementation is well recognised (Barnes, Clarke, and Stephens 2000; J. C. K. Lee et al. 2010; Medland 2012) yet only two responses related directly to an assessment strategy. These discussed how information is aggregated across the '*Individual areas (PE/RSE/Etc.)*' that form the HWB AoLE and the importance of including '*ipsative assessment*' to monitor individual progression by comparing past and present performance.

Curriculum mapping and provision

Participants felt that the HWB AoLE provides a unique opportunity to develop '*skills – physical competence*' and well-being through practical delivery. They highlighted numerous strengths in their current provision. In particular, they felt their school provision to be '*strong*' with good infrastructure and '*teacher expertise*' to positively meet the new challenge to design '*opportunities to support and capture wellbeing*'. Infrastructure, which includes the roles, structures, and resources within a school, must work synergistically for successful curriculum reform (D. K. Cohen, Spillane, and Peurach 2018). Though teacher subject expertise was cited as a strength, it is also vital to develop their design expertise through tailored support throughout the process of implementation to enhance this synergy (Huizinga et al. 2014).

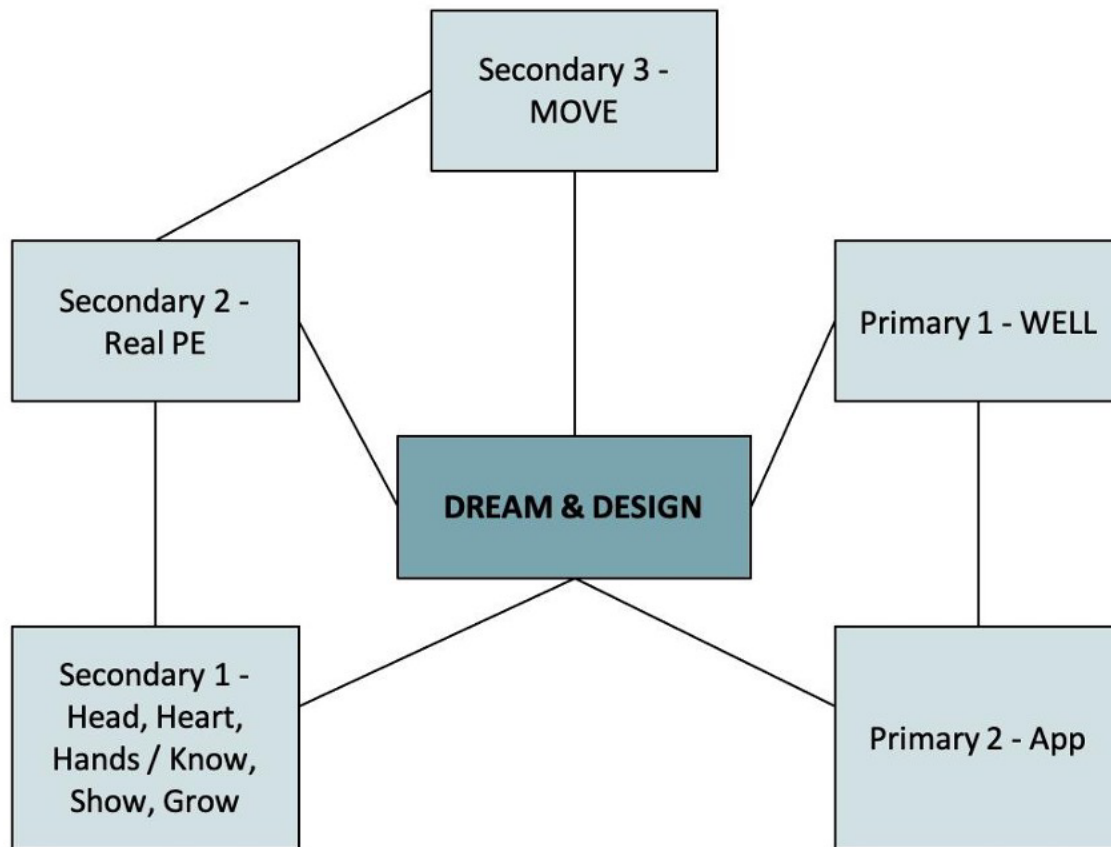
Curriculum mapping was identified as a common area for development with a need to maintain consistency across AoLEs and within HWB. Curriculum mapping involves aligning curricular objectives, content, and assessment with intended learning outcomes (Lam and Tsui 2013). However, delivering a more integrated approach to HWB was felt to be challenging as a result of the non-linearity, intangibility and variability of wellbeing, which was described as '*highly subjective*' and '*different everyday [and] across schools*'. Inconsistent curriculum mapping may impact student achievement and teacher job satisfaction in the long run (Mills 2001) and this was a concern of participants in this study who were apprehensive of '*PE being lost*' and '*Pupils' value of PE decreasing*' in the process. There are a variety of elements that might improve the process of curriculum mapping such as consistent leadership, adequate training and resources, and ongoing communication and support (Shilling 2013). However, as participants of this study concluded, any solutions need to be practical and feasible so that '*evidence is not time consuming*'.

In summary, the discovery phase highlighted the existing strengths schools are capitalising upon to implement the new curriculum. However, teachers required more guidance and support from their clusters, senior leadership, colleagues and wider organisations in tailoring the curriculum to their specific context and their pupils' needs. They welcomed the opportunity to increase support of students' health and wellbeing across the curriculum; however, designing and delivering a new approach has thus far been a time-consuming and a daunting task.

Dream and Design

This section discusses key selections from each group's feedback, alongside the corresponding curriculum framework examples they used, to portray each group's contributions to creating, refining, mapping and scrutinising the frameworks. The composition of groups and the frameworks they used are detailed Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Dream and Design table composition



Secondary Group 1: Head, Heart, Hands/Know, Show, Grow

Secondary Group 1 selected the Head, Heart and Hands model (Figure 3). This was originally proposed by Orr (1992) as a framework that refers to the Head for knowledge creation, the Heart as a tool for reflection and the Hands to represent active participation in all learning activity. It has since been developed by Sipos et al. (2008) as a transformative teaching tool and embraced in PE by those wishing to move away from a performative-based approach (Frapwell 2014). This group appreciated that *'it was pupil and staff friendly'* while still being *'quite structured in how it showed progression through the 5 steps'* through the use of keywords, such as *'emerging, acquiring, developing'*. As encouraged by Jacobs and Johnson (2009), enhanced learning is not achieved through the use of uniform templates but instead by scaffolding skills and spiralling competencies. This was recognised by the group who appreciated that the template was *'memorable. and it gave examples'*, but thought that it could include *'something showing where that progression is going'*. They felt that skills should be

explored with *'more substance'* such as *'tactical decision making'* and describe what that looks like *'within different sports, and different contexts.'* They then discussed *'mapping the curriculum and using seven steps within each of the different progressive steps, and how we could use that to map out schemes of work'*. Secondary Group 1's feedback demonstrated the benefit in applying a common model for curriculum mapping that is flexible enough to be adapted to the contextual needs of each school (Jacobs and Johnson 2009).

Figure 3. Head Heart Hands Curriculum Framework Example - Heart Only (Campbell, 2023 adapted from Frapwell 2014; Orr 1992; Sipos, Battisti, and Grimm 2008)

Thriving

I show excellent attitudes towards my personal and social responsibilities at all times and have become a role model to other students.

I demonstrate an excellent understanding of Concept Curriculum themes and can apply them to aspects of my lesson and life.

I have excellent emotional control and know how to use strategies effectively.

I demonstrate an outstanding mindset in PE at all times and approach all challenges with enthusiasm.

I show respect and have empathy for the experiences of others at all times.

I demonstrate honesty and sportsmanship at all times.

I promote healthy relationships and communicate positively with everyone.

I have strong evidence of resilience, motivation and effort during physical activity both in and out of school.

Securing

I show a very good attitude toward my personal and social responsibilities most of the time I am becoming a role model.

I demonstrate a very good understanding of Concept Curriculum themes and can apply them to aspects of my lesson or life.

I have very good emotional control and know how to use strategies effectively most of the time.

I demonstrate an a strong mindset in PE at all times and approach challenges with positivity in most activities.

I show respect to others and have empathy for the experiences of others most of the time

I demonstrate honesty and sportsmanship in most activities

I promote healthy relationships and communicate positively with most people.

I have good evidence of resilience, motivation and effort during physical activity in PE and extra curricular

Developing

I show a very good attitude toward my personal and social responsibilities at times.

I demonstrate a good understanding of some Concept Curriculum themes and am beginning to link them to my lesson and life.

I am demonstrating evidence of using strategies to control my emotions during lessons and am beginning to recognise my tiggers.

My mindset in PE is continuing to improve and I am approaching challenges with increasing confidence.

I show respect to others most of the time.

I demonstrate honesty and sportsmanship in activities some of the time.

I promote healthy relationships and communicate positively with many people in my group.

I have good evidence of resilience, motivation and effort during physical activity in PE and extra curricular.

Acquiring

I am starting to consider my attitude toward my personal and social responsibilities and how my behaviour impacts my progress.

I am beginning to develop an understanding of some Concept Curriculum themes and attempt to link them to my lessons.

I am trying to control my emotions in lessons but sometimes need help to do this.

I show respect to others sometimes and can recognise when this goes wrong.

I demonstrate honesty and sportsmanship mostly when I'm winning. I struggle to do this when I am losing.

I promote healthy relationships and communicate positively with my friends.

I have some evidence of resilience, motivation and effort during physical activity in PE lessons.

Emerging

I am starting to understand my personal and social responsibilities but I sometimes disrupt learning.

I am beginning to develop an understanding of some Concept Curriculum themes contribute towards some discussion.

I can become frustrated easily and find it difficult to reengage in my lesson.

I show respect to others sometimes.

I demonstrate honesty and sportsmanship mostly when I'm winning. I struggle to do this when I am losing.

I promote healthy relationships and communicate positively with few people.

I am working towards improving my resilience and motivation in PE lessons.

HEART
'Grow'

**ENERGY LEVELS - ENTHUSIASM - EMOTIONAL LITERACY - POSITIVE
MINDSET - RESPECT - HONESTY - SPORTSMANSHIP - POSITIVE
RELATIONSHIPS - ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION - RESILIENCE -
MOTIVATION - CONFIDENCE - PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY -
PATIENCE - KINDNESS - CONCEPT CURRICULUM**

Secondary Group 2: Real PE

Secondary Group 2 chose to evaluate the Real PE programme used by primary schools in their cluster (collaborative network of schools). Provided by Create Development (2024), the programme assists primary schools in their delivery of a PE curriculum and is aligned to the previous Curriculum for Wales requirements. The Group used the dream and design phase to try to pull together the learning, understanding and applying stages of its assessment framework and identify which statements were social or physical. However, they reached a conundrum when they tried to change the wording, *'But if we have got the progress steps, why are we then going to change the wording? Because to me, it totally takes everything and all the work that's gone into this...seems to be reinventing the wheel.'* These kinds of complexities and obstacles are commonplace in the negotiation of interests at school-level (Salonen-Hakomäki and Soini 2023). The advantages of school-based approaches to curriculum reform are that teachers have the autonomy to refine pedagogy according to their contextual needs. However, although it is paramount to provide agency to actors across the centralised to decentralised spectrum of curriculum reform, it is common for teachers to feel they are 'reinventing the wheel' as a result (Gouëdard et al. 2020; Hubball and Burt 2004; T. Lee, Cheng, and Ko 2018).

Secondary Group 3: MOVE

Secondary Group 3 chose the MOVE model (Figure 4). This was developed by Trowbridge (2023) and uses the acronym to express the intent of his school's curriculum to encourage students to Motivate, Obtain, Value and Explore. The group reported they selected MOVE because *'it covers themes across the AoLE'* and offers holistic coverage when usually *'PE departments will focus heavily on what matters statement 1 and almost think that, actually, what matters statements 2-5 isn't really our responsibility. But it absolutely is because, depending on what pedagogical models use, you cover a lot of it within your lessons'*. They

used the dream and design phase to discuss *'how the experiences that students are subjected to or that we facilitate would start simply from progression step one... Without just becoming topics that they move on through, how do we show a genuine progression, or level of complication as we go through? So, we started by introducing things like core tasks in our lesson where we can genuinely see how students are progressing over time and where they are.'* The group's discussion demonstrates the level of knowledge that can only be gained at the decentralised end of the curriculum reform spectrum by teachers who are 'as close to the classroom as possible' (Kennedy 1996, 79). An additional point of discussion within the group was *'the intricacies of making a Welsh acronym'*, which spotlights the need for contextualisation to regional differences, including language and dialect, within a single nation (Henchey 1999).

Figure 4. MOVE Curriculum Framework Example (Trowbridge 2023)

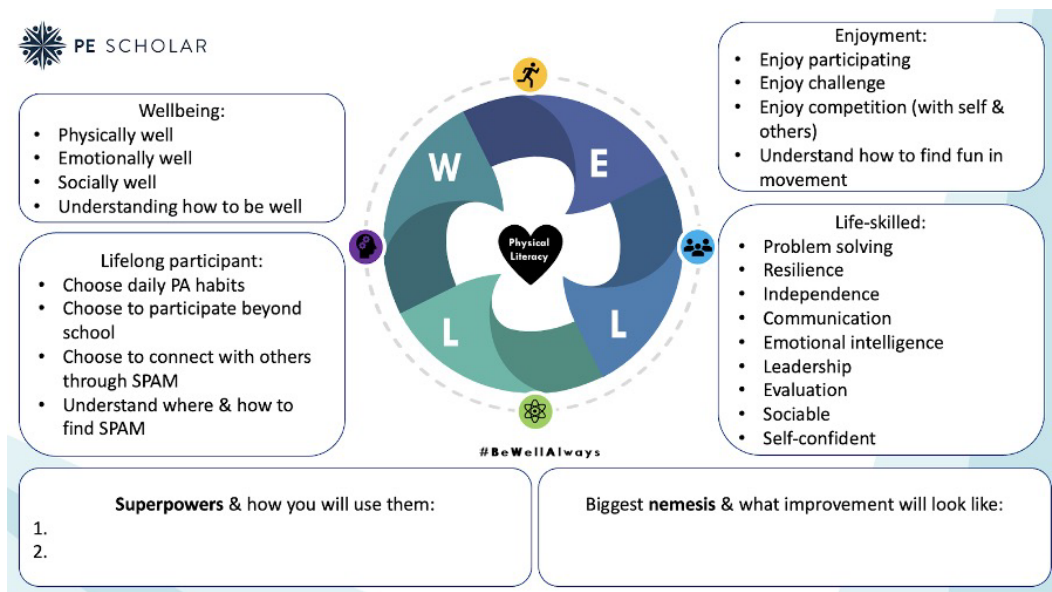


Primary Group 1: WELL

Primary Group 1 selected the WELL framework (Figure 5), a model created by PE Scholar (2024) to encourage active recognition of the importance of physical activity for wellbeing.

The holistic nature of the model appealed to them because they *'liked the idea of 'well-being' being made up of wellbeing, enjoyment, lifelong, and life-skilled...it was a clear and simple layout for children and staff.'* The need for a curriculum framework that is understood by all stakeholders in schools, including students, is integral to effective curriculum change. As noted by Gouëdard et al. (2020), students require clarity about learning objectives and assessment criteria to understand their progress and inform their learning. Further discussion by the group highlighted the necessity to align pedagogical models with their national culture. They wished to *'make it Welshified...with the four purposes...the wellbeing being the healthy, competent individuals. The enjoyment being the creative part of our purposes, and then lifelong learners obviously relates to the others in the four...The milestones...we would be calling the threads because that's what...links to the Welsh curriculum'*. Feng's (2006) paper on curriculum reform in China acknowledges the challenges that arise when a curriculum is based on the conflicting values and practices of another country. The new Curriculum for Wales has moved away from an adapted English model to allow more autonomy to Welsh teachers in delivery. Group 1's feedback illustrates that this autonomy can resolve potential cultural conflict at the implementation level of curriculum reform.

Figure 5. WELL Curriculum Framework Example (PE Scholar, 2024)



Primary Group 2: App Development

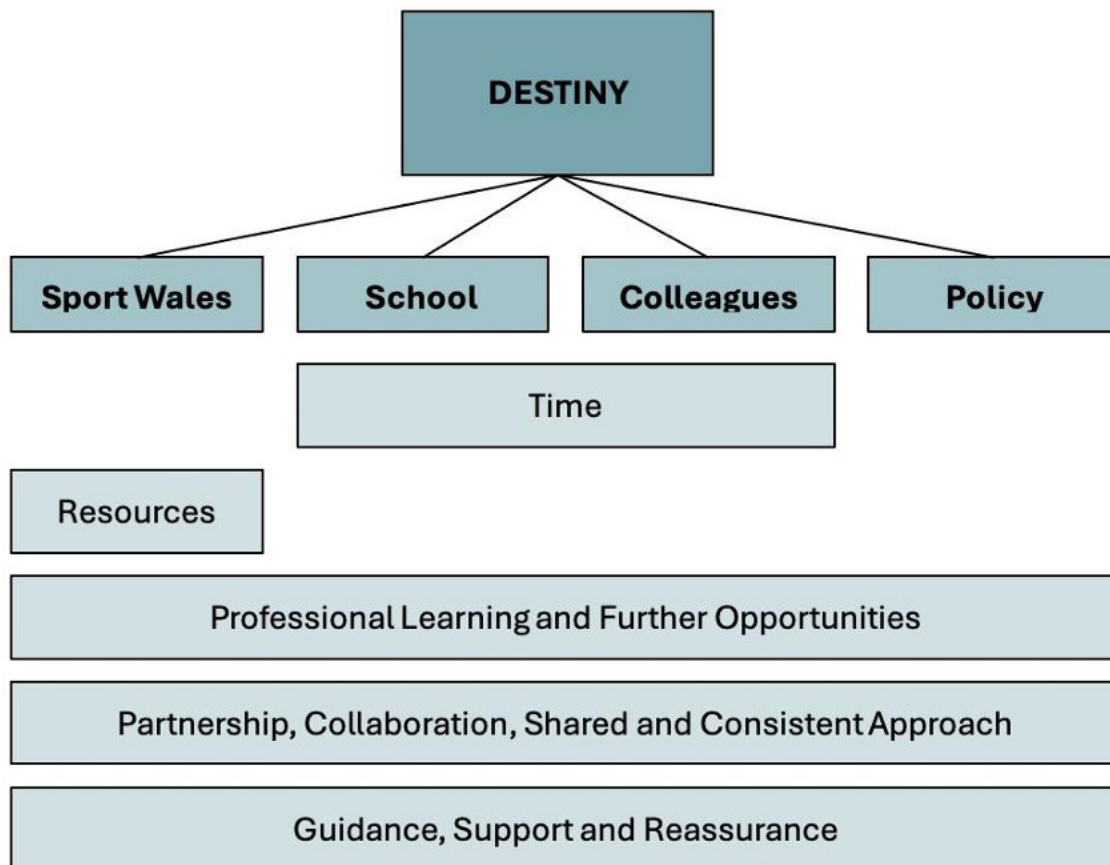
Primary Group 2 imagined an app that could enable easier implementation of the HWB AoLE. *'So, we were talking about the fact that in primary, obviously we've got lots of subjects to teach and PE is perhaps one hour, maybe two hours a week for us. So, whatever we make needs to be quick and easy to use. So, we came up with a bit of a pie in the sky idea that if there was an app similar to a kit bag. Say you're working on a certain skill or a certain element like teamwork or something like that...it would come up with a load of games that could perhaps hit those skills, then that would generate a success criteria for you. And then that success criteria you can use quickly at the beginning of the lesson to see who can do that...then that would be almost the first part of your lesson or first part of a couple of lessons. And then the children who can't do a certain thing would work on those skills for the next couple of lessons.'* The group's discussion reflects the possibilities offered by technology in assessing skills formatively in a fun and accessible manner. The development of a tailor-made app would enable schools to incorporate assessments sensitive to their own context within the confines of national standards (Binkley et al. 2012).

In summary, the group discussions during the dream and design phase depict how there is not a 'one-size-fits-all-approach'. Needs varied between primary and secondary settings, between and within school networks and across the regions of Wales.

Destiny

The destiny phase of aspirational inquiry seeks to build consensus on the dream and design phase in order to generate momentum for innovation (Bushe 2012). Therefore, the workshop asked participants to identify in their workbooks what they need from key supportive stakeholders including Sport Wales, their school, colleagues and policy makers to achieve their destiny. As Figure 6 outlines, their requirements are summarised as 'time'; 'resources'; 'professional learning and further opportunities'; 'partnership, collaboration, shared and consistent approach'; and 'guidance, support and reassurance'.

Figure 6. Destiny Themes



Time was a common theme referred to by nearly all participants. Participants felt more time was needed to '*plan*', '*meet*', '*collaborate*', '*create*', '*co-create*', '*develop*', '*prepare*' and '*work*' to perform this role. Penuel et al.'s (2007) survey of 454 teachers in the United States corroborated that time for teachers to plan for implementation is pivotal for success. Participants from all settings but mainly primary, requested a '*resource bank*' of updated and new resources and schemes of work '*aligned to the New Curriculum*' to support the implementation of HWB. Other suggestions included '*physical development baseline guidance*' and an '*app*' or '*assessment tracker* [which] *identifies key skills across the progression steps*'. Further professional training aligned to the new curriculum was also requested. Collaborative working was seen as key to consistency, shared learning and a '*Community of practice*' and most participants

requested more support in developing this. Handelzalts's study (2019) explored the role of teacher collaboration as the bridge between school and classroom-level practices and found that resources developed through such collaboration resulted in more significant changes to the curriculum.

Participants also asked for more guidance and reassurance in '*what good practice looks like*' especially in Welsh contexts. Both primary and secondary settings asked for updated '*guidance from Estyn*', with secondary teachers asking for advice specific to KS4 and GCSE, and WJEC KS4 assessments. It was acknowledged that policy makers would need to provide '*Funding so that all staff are trained*' and be able to access future '*CPD in school for all staff involved in the AoLE*'. Ultimately, there was a strength of feeling that '*reassurance*' is needed from '*Estyn*' and '*Senior Leadership*' to provide the confidence that they '*are doing it right*' and '*what we are creating will support... pupils to be successful*'. The use of technology was often mentioned by participants and this would be a beneficial tool for delivering the pedagogical knowledge, resources and ongoing professional learning and development (CPD) requested. However, any digital tool should allow for tailoring to local context and enable stakeholders '*to create the curriculum together*' as a community of practice to capacitate successful curriculum implementation (Penuel et al. 2007)

In summary, the participants highlighted that they needed time, resources, future opportunities for professional learning, continued collaboration and further guidance, support and reassurance from a range of stakeholders. Schools were still in the early stages of implementing the Curriculum for Wales and so required support.

Professional Learning

The first two reflections elicited that participants were reassured by their fellow participants' uncertainty around implementation of the new curriculum, and that each setting had different needs. Participants had gained new ideas for manageable and meaningful assessment processes, appreciating the holistic strategies introduced during the workshop. The workshop had progressed all participants' approaches to implementation of the HWB AoLE, with one participant stating that they, *'Finally have a working document for Assessment which will work for us'*.

During the final reflection, participants identified a number of improvements, which included introducing a variety of assessment methods and tools to evidence and track individual progress in more shared ways; a more coherent, cross-curricular approach; planning linked to progression; and a change in ethos in the way PE is promoted that involves consistency in learning based on holistic, formative assessment. Participants aimed to improve pupil perception of assessment by encouraging a positive mindset through a pupil-centred curriculum. They will also create and refine curriculum resources to map out progression and link the physical to the mental aspect of HWB, as well as develop a whole-school approach to improve consistency. Participants identified that they should stop assessing skills in isolation and treat it as a fun activity that has a purpose. Overall, they would stop worrying as *'others are in the exact same boat!'*.

Participants were reassured by their fellow participants, had generated new ideas and a better understanding of effective assessment strategies. They felt confident in taking

positive action (Ghaye 2010) by applying their learning to their own practice to better implement the HWB AoLE.

Workshop evaluation and feedback

The workshop evaluation was an online survey that participants completed at the end of the workshop. All participants rated the session using the key of 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. The results from the participants are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Workshop Rating Results

S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Average
5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4.6

All participants rated the session 4 or 5 out of 5. With more secondary participants rating the workshop 5 out of 5. The average score across participants was 4.6 out of 5. This is likely due to the delivery team having more expertise in secondary education. Many participants wanted to verbally express their final feedback and gratitude to the group, tutors and Sport Wales as the facilitator. Comments included that the professional development was *'well pitched', 'informative', 'helpful', 'enjoyable' and 'worthwhile'*. One participant commented that it was *'One of the best and most useful CPD sessions that I have attended on assessment and curriculum design'*.

The aspects that were highlighted as particularly valuable by participants were, *'interaction' and 'sharing with colleagues', 'tutor expertise', 'the use of existing case*

studies, examples and frameworks', professional development input on the 'different approaches to assessment' and 'time with others'.

The participants also identified that they would like further professional development opportunities stating *'It would be good to hold another of these sessions at the beginning of the Academic Year'* and suggested the formation of a range of more bespoke working groups such as 'HHH group', 'Real PE', 'Move group' etc. as a way on promoting ongoing collaboration. It was clear from the evaluation and feedback that this was a successful event that supported participants in their exploration and implementation of the H&WB AoLE. It was also clear that participants require further and ongoing support. These comments highlight the effectiveness of combining research with meaningful professional development as an innovative practice which returns positive two-way transactions between the researchers and participants. This approach has the potential to have international appeal for educational research and professional development.

Conclusion

The research design and innovative approach enabled a rich gathering of insight combined with meaningful professional development. This novel design returned high levels of participation satisfaction alongside rich research data extraction. During the discovery phase, participants were able to draw on a breadth of school infrastructure that might be enhanced and clarified that, while they were making progress towards implementing the new statutory guidance, they were perhaps hindered by the lack of guidance and support from their clusters, senior leadership, colleagues and wider organisations in tailoring the curriculum to their specific context and their pupils' needs. Therefore, it was recognised that a coherent and

supportive strategy was needed to drive these in order to foster more synergistic implementation. The dream and design phase evidenced this further by eliciting the idiosyncrasies of the strengths and needs of each school setting. Participants felt their expertise could be maximised if ongoing, coherent and collaborative channels of communication and support were available throughout the process. In the destiny phase, participants were more specific about the nature of support required, which included more time, resources, future opportunities for professional learning, continued collaboration and further guidance, support and reassurance from a range of stakeholders. This phase, and the evaluation and feedback collected, also identified that the workshop provided an effective and transformative space for participants to reflect with colleagues, feel reassured that they were all in a similar situation, take away new ideas, gain a better understanding of effective assessment strategies, and apply this by enhancing their own frameworks to better implement curriculum reform.

The reflections that emerged from this qualitative case study support the OECD recommendation (Gouëdard et al. 2020) that successful implementation of curriculum reform depends on collaborative and contextualised design at the school level so that needs-based application is achieved. The iterative nature of appreciative inquiry demonstrated through this study highlighted that 'Engagement in professional development and subsequent pedagogical change or adaptation is an intricate process that is situated in multiple contextual factors' (E. J. Durden-Myers and Mackintosh 2022, 1). While the new curriculum offered teachers the opportunity to reshape their offer in support of students' health and wellbeing, the reality of designing and implementing a new approach was daunting, time consuming and a momentous task. Therefore, effective implementation requires a strategic, collaborative and coherent

approach that considers the contextual information specific to the school/setting and offers sufficient bespoke training, guidance and time.

Limitations and Recommendations

We acknowledge that the findings of this study are limited to the fifteen participants that attended the workshop and that some of the methods used did not allow for primary/secondary contexts to always be distinguishable. We also acknowledge that the support provided during the workshop was also only delivered to these fifteen participants. Therefore, future work should consider how to disseminate support to a wider network of teachers across Wales. Specifically, further examples of Curriculum frameworks across Wales would assist future work, especially from Welsh speaking and primary contexts. We also recommend that an ongoing programme of professional learning and collaboration opportunities are scheduled to support teachers with this ongoing work.

We strongly recommend that educational researchers worldwide consider the combining of research insight and professional development to create a productive two-way and meaningful transaction between researchers and participants. Finally, this research highlights the intricacies and complexities of implementing curriculum reform from the perspectives and realities of teachers. We therefore make a call to action that future curriculum reform initiatives comprehensively and carefully consider the ongoing process for implementation.

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