

Between Product and Process: A Curriculum Lead's Reflexive Account of Developing and Enacting a Values-Based Curriculum in Irish Publicly Managed Schools

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Abstract

This self-study paper offers a reflexive account of the experiences of a curriculum lead on Identity, Multi Belief and Values Education (IMBVE) - a values-based curriculum developed in line with the ETBI Patrons' Framework on Ethos for Ireland's publicly managed post-primary schools. The focus is on how insider positionality shaped key decisions and revealed both opportunities and blind spots throughout the curriculum's journey from inception to enactment. Drawing on insights from 52 interviews with policy actors- including ethos coordinators, advisory committee members, a national teacher network, principals, teachers, and the curriculum lead - this analysis, informed by the ethos lead's reflections, examines how curriculum purposes, power dynamics, and development processes were negotiated and enacted in practice

Guided by Ball et al.'s (2011) framework on material, interpretive, and discursive dimensions and Braun et al.'s (2011) contextual dimensions, this analysis explores how leadership and diverse voices shaped the balance between product and process in curriculum development. Five key lessons emerged: (1) co-constructing purpose early to prevent feasibility displacing values; (2) positioning teachers as epistemic partners from the outset; (3) explicitly naming and managing the product-process tension through iterative co-design; (4) investing in structures and infrastructure to support leadership; and (5) recognising time as a contextual mediator that reshapes what is possible.

By highlighting the perspective of the curriculum lead, this study provides practical guidance for future curriculum development that is both contextually responsive and theoretically informed, while highlighting the value and challenges of insider research in educational policy and practice.



Keywords: Self-Study; Curriculum Development; Curriculum Leadership; Values Education; Irish Publicly Managed Schools