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**Building a New National Curriculum for Wales: Practitioners as Curriculum Policy Makers****Ty Golding<sup>1</sup>, Tom Crick<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Ysgol Y Ddraig Primary School, United Kingdom; <sup>2</sup>Swansea University, United Kingdom; [goldingt1@hwgmail.net](mailto:goldingt1@hwgmail.net), [thomas.crick@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.crick@swansea.ac.uk)

Wales has followed the direction of England in curriculum policy in recent years, being subject to various iterations of the prescriptive National Curriculum, before political devolution to the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. Since 2015, Wales has been developing a new purpose-led, process-driven curriculum (Donaldson, 2015), in line with international trends towards school autonomy in determining curricular content, child-centred pedagogy and a focus on so-called 21st century skills and competencies (OECD, 2017).

The new Curriculum for Wales has been advanced through a co-construction process that has actively engaged practitioners in "Pioneer" school networks, across three phases over a four-year period, from the development of guiding principles to the specification of the six new Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). This research examines the role of practitioners in this process from the viewpoint of embedded policy makers over this period; it primarily focuses on the outcomes of this involvement on practitioner agency and practice, their schools ability to improve under this new system of increased autonomy and subsidiarity, alongside the implications for the wider educational system across Wales.

This paper is based around two complementary approaches to provide insight into and analysis of this development of emerging national curriculum policy in Wales, especially focusing on the role of practitioners in promoting educational change. Firstly, it is based upon the experiences of both authors and their direct involvement in the curriculum reform process in Wales over the previous four years: one as a primary school headteacher of eight years who has been seconded to the Welsh Government for the last two years as the Head of Curriculum Design and Development (Golding); the other as a STEM education research academic who has been chairing the development of the Science & Technology AoLE since 2017, having previously chaired the development of a new national Digital Competence Framework in 2015 (Crick). Secondly, this work reflects upon several ongoing research and evaluation projects at the national, regional and school level, to provide external context to this experiential insight, primarily focusing on the Pioneer school model (WISERD, 2017; Arad Research, 2018; Wavehill, 2019) and the practitioners who have been directly involved in the process (Crick & Priestley, 2019)

This work casts light on the processes and conditions that can foster practitioner engagement with the formulation of national education policy, the potential weaknesses of such approaches, as well as the wider benefits for practitioners, schools and the system in Wales as a whole. In particular, our insight and evaluation suggests that this approach has long-term implications in the development of a cadre of expert practitioners able to support colleagues in the subsequent enactment of a new national curriculum, through the building of system capacity for curriculum making. Though this critical evaluation of an emerging national case study of education system reform in Wales, we also present a number of recommendations across policy and practice (including initial teacher education, professional learning and school leadership), to provide the foundation for potential replicability and portability to other jurisdictions.

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