Journal of Education Policy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/tedp20

Middle leaders as policy translators: prime actors in the enactment of policy

Craig Skerritt, Gerry McNamara, Irene Quinn, Joe O'Hara & Martin Brown

To cite this article: Craig Skerritt, Gerry McNamara, Irene Quinn, Joe O'Hara & Martin Brown (2023) Middle leaders as policy translators: prime actors in the enactment of policy, Journal of Education Policy, 38:4, 567-585, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2021.2006315

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.2006315

Published online: 02 Dec 2021.

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION POLICY
2023, VOL. 38, NO. 4, 567–585
https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.2006315

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Middle leaders as policy translators: prime actors in the enactment of policy

Craig Skerritt, Gerry McNamara, Irene Quinn, Joe O'Hara and Martin Brown

Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

ABSTRACT

This paper picks up and elaborates on the conception of policy translators in schools – key actors in the enactment of policy. The qualitative data presented here highlight how it is often middle leaders doing high-profile policy work in schools, turning ideas into actions and bringing policy to life. As translators, they organise, manage, lead, plan, produce, inspire, persuade, and appease, and in doing so they translate policy into practice and make it a collective effort. At the same time, they are often overloaded and inundated. In focusing on middle leaders as policy translators, this research makes several important contributions to scholarship: empirical data is provided to support and expand on policy enactment theory, the limited research base on middle leadership is developed, and understandings of how school self-evaluation plays out in schools are strengthened. Thus, it is envisaged that this paper will not only be of interest and of use to researchers and policymakers concerned with policy, evaluation, and leadership but to practising teachers and school leaders attempting to make sense of their own experiences at the coalface.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 May 2021
Accepted 10 November 2021

KEYWORDS
Policy enactment; policy actors; translators; middle leaders; school self-evaluation

Introduction

Policy is understood in this paper as being an ongoing process that is interactional and unstable (Ball 2021) and that can be conceptualised both as text and as discourse (Ball 1993); what is written and said, and how such statements are formed and made possible (Ball 2015a). Policies can be textual in the form of legislation and national strategies and policies can also be 'discursive processes that are complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3). They are open to different interpretations and subject to different translations. From the centrally mandated kind to the advised, policies are taken up, amended, and worked on differently by a diverse range of teachers, or policy actors (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010; Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). For instance, in a given school teachers will be at different points in their careers and have different accumulated experiences, bringing with them different amounts and kinds of responsibility, aspirations and competences (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012) and some will be

CONTACT Craig Skerritt craig.skerritt2@mail.dcu.ie Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

more dominant than others (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015). How policies come to be perceived and play out will be determined, in part, by the meanings and commitments that school staff hold, as well as their positions in the school hierarchy and relative power (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010).

Utilising the typology of policy actors and positions put forward by Ball et al. (2011a), (2012)), we have recently shown how school self-evaluation, a mandatory national policy in Ireland, is performed in various ways by various people in Irish post-primary schools: narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators, critics, and receivers (Skerritt et al.2021a). Here, we follow the developing trend of scholars focusing on single aspects of the typology, such as narrators (Maguire and Braun 2019), translators (Perryman et al. 2017), and critics (Golding 2017; Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2018), and home in on one specific policy position. In doing this, we build on a new understanding of both how policies are enacted and how school self-evaluation plays out in Irish schools. In this paper we direct our attention to the influential 'translators' leading school self-evaluations in Irish schools, and policy enactments more broadly, picking up and elaborating on a specific policy position deserving of further attention:

> The role of translators in particular is not to be underestimated, and principals in particular emphasised the importance of staff members doing what would be called 'translation' work (Skerritt et al.2021a, 15).

Translators are the 'policy activists' in schools (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 59). They 'plan and produce the events, processes and institutional texts of policy for others' and induct them into its 'discursive patterns' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 59), and thus are, as we will show, the key actors in bringing school self-evaluation to life in Irish schools. While sometimes principals, the translators we refer to here are predominantly teachers assigned posts of responsibility i.e. they are post-holders and members of middle leadership and management (MLM) in their respective schools. To explore the role of translators in the enactment of school self-evaluation in the Irish context we draw on data collected through interviews with six senior leaders and six middle leaders at primary school level as well as one retired school inspector.

This paper is of significant relevance to Ireland but will also be pertinent to readers in international settings too in that we both provide novel ways of thinking about, understanding, and explaining how school self-evaluation is enacted in schools and provide much needed empirical data to bolster a creative and contemporary typology only now entering its second decade. With reference to the latter point, it has been the case that until recently little attention has been 'given to the formative role of actors in the policy process' and perhaps this, to a large degree, remains the case for the 'small' and 'middling' actors (Ball 2015b, 467). To this end, this paper, with its emphasis on the important policy work being carried out by middle leaders, also makes a strong contribution to the school leadership literature which tends to focus on principals (O'Brien and Murphy 2016; Gumus et al. 2018; Edwards-Groves et al. 2019; Grootenboer and Larkin 2019; Shaked and Schechter 2019; Leithwood et al. in Harris 2020). Harris et al. (2019, 271) have recently concluded that 'interest in middle leaders/leadership in schools remains of interest to researchers around the world but that the empirical base remains relatively limited'. According to Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2021), the nature of middle leaders' work remains considerably opaque and Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, and Lamanna

(2021) similarly highlight that a 'larger research base on middle leadership is needed to fill the gaps in the empirical research'. Thus, the data presented and discussed here will not only be of interest and of use to researchers and policymakers concerned with policy, evaluation, and leadership but to practising teachers and school leaders attempting to make sense of their own policy, evaluation, and leadership experiences at the coalface.

Policy context

Background

School self-evaluation (SSE) has been mandatory in Ireland since 2012 and its introduction must be understood in the context of the time. In the years preceding SSE Ireland was suffering from a severe economic depression and performed poorly on an international standardised assessment of students' knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science. An era of austerity and reform ensued: Initial Teacher Education programmes were reformed, a national strategy for literacy and numeracy was introduced, and SSE became compulsory, while at the same time financial and personnel resources decreased: reduced salaries and allowances, the removal of middle-management posts, and embargos on appointments in various staff categories, to name a few, have been harmful to not only the system but to staff morale (Coolahan et al. 2017).

School self-evaluation

The model of school evaluation that has gradually emerged in Ireland is very much in the European mainstream in that it involves a limited degree of school autonomy operationalised through SSE coupled with a 'low stakes' form of external inspection (McNamara et al. 2020). Since the introduction of compulsory SSE in 2012, schools have been required to formally collect data in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to put improvement plans in place. These internal evaluations then help inform the work of external inspectors. The Department of Education and Skills (2016a, 10) explain that school self-evaluation 'is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review'. It is an iterative six-step procedure (see Figure 1) and is mainly performed by school staff in collaboration with other school stakeholders such as parents and students, and typically takes place at the school as opposed to the classroom level via the development of whole-school action plans (O'Brien et al. 2020).

It has previously been put forward by MacBeath (2005a, 2005b, 2006) that SSE is driven by economic, accountability, and improvement logics, and in Ireland it would appear that while improvement is predominantly promoted in official discourse, accountability and economic logics dominate (McNamara et al. 2021). In the current age of accountability, Ottesen (2019) points out that such a climate is not ideal for meeting the positive implications and assumptions of SSE, and recent research by Aderet-German (2021, 309) highlights the importance of achieving a balance between accountability and improvement goals and how staff can perceive SSE favourably when the focus is on improvement, 'as opposed to the way teachers commonly view evaluations'. In Ireland, the culture of accountability is considerably softer than in other education systems, however, and Irish schools operate in a low-stakes accountability

Figure 1. The six-step SSE process (Department of Education and Skills 2016a)

environment with little or no negative consequences for schools or teachers (Gustafsson et al. 2015; O'Brien et al. 2019; Brown et al. 2020). Given the relatively recent introduction of SSE in Ireland, combined with the absence of strong accountability mechanisms or procedures, how schools perform SSE in Ireland has been rather inconsistent. Schools comprise a wide variety of actors, and not all will be engaged with and in SSE as these teachers explain:

> I think SSE is unfortunately something that people think that I do, slightly at the side. That I do these presentations and it's great, but I don't know if people fully believe it's their responsibility as well. I'm just the coordinator, I shouldn't be the only person driving the bus but I do think there's a little problem there (Skerritt et al. 2021a, 16).

> Teachers wouldn't be thinking all the time about the school self-evaluation process. It wouldn't impinge their, I mean if you're by and large teaching kids you wouldn't automatically be thinking about the school self-evaluation process. It's there in the background and it does happen but it wouldn't be the most immediate thing as you go about your day to day work (Skerritt et al. 2021a, 18)

Compulsory SSE has coincided with an era where volunteerism and the goodwill of staff in Irish schools has perhaps never been so stifled. While the moratorium on middle-management posts has been alleviated to some extent, the number of current posts remains significantly below the pre-recession numbers.[1]

School self-evaluation and middle leaders

As part of the leadership and management structures in Irish primary schools a post of responsibility system exists specific to the school size, with these post-holders receiving additional monetary allowances in return for carrying out supplementary work in addition to their duties as generalist classroom teachers (Clohessy, Bowles, and Ní Chróinín 2020). These middle leaders now have an important role to play in SSE which is promoted as a collaborative process. For example, an official circular[2] published in September 2017 'sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools' (Department of Education and Skills 2017, 1) which is deeply influenced and underpinned by the theory of distributed leadership. While this circular does not clarify how exactly leadership should or could be distributed in Irish schools, it directs readers to the official quality framework that outlines statements of both 'effective' and 'highly effective' practice (see Department of Education and Skills 2016b). It is stated that middle leaders 'occupy positions of strategic importance in the leadership, management and administration of the school' and in in accordance 'with the principles of distributed leadership', they 'work in teams in collaboration with the Principal and/ or Deputy Principal and have shared responsibility, commensurate with the level of the post' for areas such as school development, school improvement, and the 'leadership/management and development of individuals and staff teams' (Department of Education and Skills 2017, 7). Indicative of the role middle leaders are envisaged to play in SSE, the Department of Education and Skills (2017, 19) suggests that their objectives 'may be linked to school self-evaluation and strategies used in school self-evaluation may be applicable'.

Policy actors enacting policy

The use of the term 'enactment' here refers to an understanding that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors in schools and not simply implemented (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010, 549). Relative to implementation, enactment is a theoretically richer concept (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015) and through the creative processes of interpretation and translation it involves the re-contextualisation of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010; Braun et al. 2011; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). Interpretations are meaning-making processes (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2013) whereby a policy is read to consider what it means and what it possibly requires (Ball et al. 2011b; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2013; Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015). Translation, then, involves taking texts and putting them into action and literally enacting policy through tactics, talk, meetings, plans, events and so on (Ball et al. 2011b; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012).

According to Ball et al. (2011a), (2012), except for school leaders the policy interpretation genre often tends to consider all policy actors to be equal and working on and with policy in similar ways but actors in schools are actually positioned differently and take up different stances in relation to policy, including positions of indifference or avoidance. To take student behaviour for learning policies as an example, the various staff members in schools can have different interpretations of what constitutes 'disruption'

Table 1. Policy actors and 'policy work' (Ball et al. 2011a, 2012).

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by head teachers and senior leaders
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/ supporting, facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artifact and events
Critics	Union representative: monitoring of management, maintaining counter -discourses
Receivers	Mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants :coping, defending and dependency

and different views on how to discipline students (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010). These policies can be 'enacted in different ways because of different personal and professional orientations as well as because of the different posts of responsibility held by various policy actors' (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015, 492). Indeed, policy has different meanings to and for different people:

> Policy actors are always positioned; how policies are seen and understood is dependent on 'where' we are figuratively and literally. An obvious contrast would be to compare a member of the leadership team with a newly qualified teacher (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 28).

Policy enactments can also be influenced by, inter alia, the annual arrival and departure of staff (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015). A policy that once held centre stage can fade into the background (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010). For example, if a particular senior leader was closely 'tied' to a policy and then left the school so too can their policy portfolio and their particular approach (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015).

Various kinds of policy actors, or policy positions, involved in making sense of constructing responses to policy through the processes of interpretation and translation have been put forward by Ball et al. (2011a), (2012)). The policy actors and policy work outlined in Table 1 are not necessarily specific individuals nor are they fixed, unified or mutually exclusive, and some individuals will move between and fulfil multiple roles (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). In this paper we focus on what are known as 'translators'; the actors planning and producing texts, artefacts, and events and making policy a collective effort. Not only are translators enthusiastic about policy but they plan and produce policy for others and enrol others in this policy work (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). The enactment of policy involves producing institutional texts, doing professional development, changing structures, roles, and relationships, and very importantly, the identification and allocation of posts of responsibility and the allocation of resources (Ball et al. 2011b; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). Indeed, sometimes assigning a staff member responsibility over a policy is the enactment of policy and its embodiment (Ball et al. 2011b; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). Thus, translators are often senior or middle leaders, but typically the latter. For middle leaders, or aspiring middle leaders, policy can, in this sense, be a career opportunity in that it presents a route to promotion and further advancement (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012).

Method

Conscious of how SSE has not been consistently implemented in schools, this paper sets out to provide new ways of thinking about, understanding, and explaining how SSE plays out in practice and we have recently highlighted the various actors enacting policy in this area in Irish post-primary schools (Skerritt et al.2021a). In this paper we draw on interviews with six middle leaders, six senior leaders, and one retired school inspector (outlined in Table 2) to specifically focus on what appears to be the key actor bringing SSE to life in Irish schools: the translator. The 12 senior and middle leaders came from 12 different primary schools of varying sizes (i.e. small, medium and large) and had all previously completed a voluntary questionnaire for one of the researchers where they indicated their willingness to be interviewed. These participants were then specifically invited to partake on the basis that a range of school sizes were represented. As part of the purposive sampling strategy, a retired school inspector was also invited to participate in the interviews. Having three different groups included in the interviews serves 'as a form of triangulation' (Edwards-Groves et al. 2019, 316).

The 13 participants were all interviewed individually, either in person or by telephone, and with their permission an audio recording was made of each interview and transcribed afterwards. Interviews were generally between 30 minutes and one hour in duration and were of a semi-structured nature. Each interview explored the key issues regarding the role of middle leaders in overseeing SSE in Irish schools. As part of the aforementioned questionnaire, 50% of respondents reported doing SSE for accountability reasons (i.e to serve school inspection purposes), but the majority of participants interviewed here reported a very positive attitude to SSE and were in favour of it and agreed with it in principle. Due to increasing demands on both senior leaders and MLM, however, time constraints and the demands of paperwork were commonly reported as being an issue. While there was no direct line of questioning on external inspections, the participants did implicitly indicate that the SSE process supports inspections. Guided by the policy actors first outlined by Ball et al. (2011a), (2012)) and subsequently found in our own recent research (Skerritt et al.2021a) we have set out here to highlight some key aspects of and challenges to translators' work in bringing SSE to life.

In small-sized schools at primary level in Ireland principals often have full-time teaching duties in addition to their administrative duties while in larger schools principals are more likely to work in full-time administration, and there are likely to be additional members of MLM. The post-holders and principals based in small schools were operating in contexts with teaching principals while the others were coming from schools with full-time administrative principals. It is worth stressing that none of the

Table 2. The research participants

	Small schools	Medium schools	Large schools	Retired
Middle leaders	Post-holder 1 Post-holder 2	Post-holder 3 Post-holder 4	(Post-holder 5) (Post-holder 6)	
Senior leaders	Principal 1 Principal 2	Principal 3 Deputy principal	Principal 4 Principal 5	
School inspectors				Inspector

post-holders interviewed had sole responsibility for SSE in their schools. SSE is a collective responsibility and while none of these post-holders had a specific leadership role for SSE such as being the SSE coordinator, there is an expectation, outside of smaller schools where SSE is typically overseen by the principals, that middle leaders would play a role in leading it in their schools. Thus, this paper represents a case of how 'focussing on their practices rather than their titles is the most effective approach' to take to understand the work of middle leaders (Lipscombe et al. 2020a, 418).

Given the focus of this study, the voices of middle leaders tend to dominate over the principals and the inspector. However, within this some middle leaders, as translators, feature more heavily than others. As Ball et al. (2011a, 2012)) point out, some roles can be more prominent or significant in some schools. Indeed, in some cases translators can be absent (Skerritt et al. 2021b).

Limitations

In using data collected from 13 participants we cannot claim generalisability. While there are clearly many similarities and consistencies in these participants' accounts, and we are confident that we reached a point of data saturation, we do not contend that the findings here can be applied to all schools. Instead, the trends and patterns evident in the following section should be considered as indications of how things are in some schools, from the perspectives of some individuals.

We are also conscious that our initial study concerned policy actors at post-primary level (Skerritt et al.2021a) and that in this present study we are drawing on data generated through interviews with participants from a different sector. While the principles and procedures of SSE in Ireland do not differ between primary (Department of Education and Skills 2016a) and post-primary (Department of Education and Skills 2016c) schools, in that in both sectors SSE is 'primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement' and follows the same six-step process, there are some contextual differences. For example, Ireland's Chief Inspector Dr Harold Hislop has previously acknowledged that SSE was more advanced in the country's primary schools (Hislop 2017) and it must also be acknowledged that the nature and reality of school life can contrast between primary schools and post-primary schools. In also moving from post-primary schools to primary schools in research in England, Braun and Maguire (2020, 436) explain how the policy enactment environment differs:

> Primary schools are smaller, and head teachers are more visible within everyday school life and closer to the classroom; there is a more truncated management structure and relations with staff and children may be more personal. All these cultural and practical factors may be called up in the responses to, and interpretations of, policies and they position primary schools, primary teachers and primary head teachers in unique ways with regards to policy enactment.

Indeed, even in terms of primary schools alone, readers should be mindful that contextual differences often exist between schools based on factors such as school size.

Middle leaders as translators

Organising, managing, and leading

In larger schools it tends to be MLM leading on internal evaluations in Ireland. SSE is delegated to them and they are assigned the task of bringing it to life. For example, one principal explained that the MLM would lead SSE to a very large extent and that post-holders really 'stepped up to the mark when it came to SSE', demonstrating 'exemplary leadership' (Principal 4). While there are a range of policy actors in schools, it is MLM post-holders, taking up roles such as translators, connecting policy and practice and making this connection viable. It was widely recognised by participants that MLM were coordinating and overseeing SSE in their schools. MLM members often explained their roles as organisers, managers, and leaders:

> MLM would lead SSE to a very large extent in our school . . .; The post-holder is the one who organises it all and facilitates its implementation. It is necessary to get feedback from the whole staff regarding a particular area or aspect. The post-holder would take the lead at the staff meeting to ascertain from the staff which aspect to focus on. (Post-holder 5)

> I'm doing the donkey work. I'm ringing people, I'm doing this outside (of work time).[3] There'd be a list of things to do at the end of the meeting and I'd have looked up a lot of them. I would arrange the committee meeting. I would arrange meetings and arrange for (timetable) cover for the class teacher. (Post-holder 3)

SSE was largely positioned as being the duty and responsibility of MLM in their schools. Members of MLM saw themselves as the key players here and bought into this notion:

> Well, I definitely think it should be a role of leadership. It's a very important role and they should be leading it for sure. They know what their colleagues are thinking, they know what the students are thinking. (Post-holder 6)

> I think the main role of MLM regarding the implementation of SSE is to oversee . . .; the implementation of SSE throughout the whole school. I think MLM must take responsibility for SSE in the school and this involves going in and leading a regular discussion at staff meetings regarding the implementation of SSE. (Post-holder 4)

However, while this was the case in most schools it was not universal. Different schools are made up in different ways and in smaller schools in particular, SSE might not be delegated to MLM and instead it might be the principal doing the translation work. The retired school inspector was conscious of school context:

> Well it is the role of MLM to support the principal and whoever the principal delegates SSE to, so in a small school it is probably the principal who will lead SSE, in larger schools it may be the deputy principal or some of the assistant principals if such exists. And so it depends on the size of the school what the role of the MLM team (is). (Inspector)

Indeed, as can be seen in the remarks made by this post-holder based in a small school, translation work is not necessarily confined to middle leaders:

> I'll go by my own school here—the MLM wouldn't do it—really it would be a whole school, all staff would be fairly equally involved and the principal would be more involved . . .; I suppose really it would be more collaborative—everybody working fairly equally—the principal would have a bigger role. I think that works as well. (Post-holder 1)

Translators are organising, managing, and leading SSE but translators can vary across schools. They are very often middle leaders but in smaller schools with smaller MLM teams principals and other colleagues also have greater roles to play.

Planning and producing

Translators turn interpretations and ideas into actions, literally putting policies into practice. In leading SSE in schools, an important part of post-holders' (or principals') translation work is the planning and production of events, processes and texts. Translators design and introduce the internal policies that guide the work of schools. They are also likely to do transaction work and monitor policy:

> MLM take responsibility for drawing up the SSE plan in conjunction with other staff members in the school and organise regular discussions at staff meetings in relation to SSE. It is important also that the MLM would monitor the implementation of it as time goes on. (Post-holder 4)

In order for the institutional texts to guide and shape practice and to ensure that staff members do not work in vacuums or silos, translators must bring staff together through meetings, events, and other processes, both formal and informal. It is imperative that policies remain high profile and relevant:

> MLM can encourage teachers to take ownership of the SSE process by ensuring that all staff members contribute to the SSE process in schools. This can only be done by ensuring that SSE is discussed regularly at staff meetings and that the idea of implementation comes from the staff themselves and not ideas that are just handed to the staff. It is also important that MLM reminds teachers about the importance of documenting in their plan what they are doing in their class in relation to SSE in accordance with the school's SSE plan. And also MLM can also encourage teachers to take ownership of the SSE process by pointing out to teachers the improvements, which will be seen over time in the school in the focus area and reminding teachers this is due to the hard work which was put into SSE in the school by all teachers. (Post-holder 4)

> I suppose the principal in our school anyway mainly mentions it at the staff meeting and everyone is aware of what's in our SSE policy or what's in the plan and it's just reiterated at every staff meeting and then usually generally we just get on with it actually. As I say a smaller school is quite different to a large school. It's more challenging I think in a bigger school, anyway, I think. (Post-holder 1)

An essential component of translation work evident in our data relates to committees and their role in enlisting teachers in policy work and ensuring policies such as SSE remain high priorities. According to one principal, 'committees are great in the sense that you can have a representative from each class level and they share their ideas, knowledge and expertise' (Principal 5). Similarly, it was mentioned by a post-holder that committees can be 'a good way of letting people without posts who are talented in a specific area come to the fore' (Post-holder 5). Thus, committee work facilitates others' introductions to and adoptions and enactments of policy. These networks enable policy to penetrate and permeate school life and they can also bring about positivity, passion, and propulsion:

> Meeting with my committee and getting feedback at different levels . . .; address each issue, research it, whatever we need to do, look up for example this year we took on a new spelling programme. Then we presented that to the staff, we used the curriculum day and everyone on the committee stood up and gave a presentation. They were amazing. I would not have been able to do that on my own. They were absolutely superb . . .; It's good for people to come on board the committees, just for the whole staff morale and staff relations. (Post-holder 3)

Indicative of the value of committees to translation work is how in contexts where committees have been dissolved, MLM can wish for their return. In the following example we hear from a post-holder disheartened by the lack of committee work taking place since the arrival of a new principal:

> We've moved a little bit away from the committee thing I think which is a bit of a pity because certainly I thought that worked very well. It was kind of distributing down the leadership because you had one representative from each level, junior to senior representative on every committee so it definitely worked. (Post-holder 6)

Inspiring, persuading, and appeasing

The work of translators not only involves making SSE meaningful to and possible for others but recruiting others to SSE and making it a collective effort. Translators must connect policy with practice and convey this in realistic and practical ways:

> All in leadership need to help staff to demystify SSE, to see it for what it is, that is a reflective process that can lead to real change and improvement. (Principal 3)

> I think it's important to make SSE relevant to teachers and their teaching. If the staff is genuinely involved in the identification and selection of the topic they will come on board and take ownership of the SSE. (Post-holder 5)

Post-holders (and sometimes principals) are the chief translators, but translations should, ideally, be collaborative:

> I feel it's important for the post-holder to realise and accept that yes they have a role in overseeing the implementation of SSE but it's a collective responsibility too. It's important to get everyone on board. (Post-holder 5)

> Well, I think MLM and the principal should take responsibility for overseeing SSE in schools . . .; But I also think it cannot be done without all teachers taking responsibility for the implementation in their own classes. (Post-holder 4)

As part of this translation work it is important that MLM get staff 'on board' with SSE as many participants said. Translators bring policy to people and bring people to policy. For example, in the following extract, a principal clearly satisfied with the buy-in from staff compliments the work done first by one particular post-holder, and then additional post-holders:

> She was fantastic. She got all the staff on board. She presented the results at staff meetings and it was great for everyone to see the results. The improvement was great . . .;.Likewise, this practice was continued by other post-holders. We chose English and then Irish after

> that. The post-holders in these two areas also did a huge amount of work with regard to SSE. Again they got the staff on board and we saw great improvements in the pupils' work. (Principal 4)

In another example, a post-holder is appreciative of the buy-in garnered through committee work:

> I hear the other post-holders speak about the committee members on their teams as well. People are just very willing and very interested as I said. It's brilliant. I am blessed, I really am. I love to work with people who are interested. (Post-holder 3)

Of course, how successfully SSE is sold to staff can be 'down to personnel' (Post-holder 6) and some might not feel that they have 'the necessary skills to lead the school's engagement' (Post-holder 5). As the retired inspector explains, the internal delegation of responsibility should be calculated and tactical:

> A school principal who is wise would select the members of the MLM team who are committed to improvement and say to them maybe we will start off with your area. And then we will see some success there. You can then report back the success at a staff meeting and now there might be two or three others who will be willing to do it after that . . .; it's a small success and it's selecting the committed people. (Inspector)

There are certain traits and qualities that might be considered desirable here:

> MLM need to be active listeners, advising senior management, leading and implementing agreed changes for improvement. MLM have to have the drive and the courage and confidence to speak out. They need to take ownership of the culture of change and improvement, a shared vision and a shared leadership culture . . .; and be willing to take on board ideas of others, allow other staff to take a leadership role and acknowledge this input at meetings and when having those professional conversations. (Principal 3)

Organising, managing, leading, planning and producing, and enrolling others is more suited to certain individuals than to others. Thus, there is, perhaps, a need for translators to be courageous, charismatic, communicative, and convincing characters who can inspire, persuade, or at the least appease their colleagues

Overloaded and inundated

While SSE is, in theory, a collaborative form of internal review, and it is to some extent as our data show, it is largely assigned to MLM to lead on and to put into practice, inducting other staff members as they do so. The retired inspector stressed the need for someone to lead the process:

> You cannot allow a free for all. There has to be somebody who will facilitate the staff to say which is the most important priority in this year . . .; if there is no overall coordinator and if the school leader the principal, is not willing to do it then you need an outside facilitator . . .; I think that the school leader, the principal needs to ensure that these people are invited to take a leadership role. (Inspector)

However, an issue for schools is that those leading the translation work are often overloaded and inundated:

> I certainly think that MLM have a very important role to play in overseeing the implementation of SSE in primary schools but they also have lots of other responsibilities also. As a conscientious and hardworking member of MLM in my own school I must say I'm finding it very difficult at the moment to get all my duties covered. (Post-holder 3)

> Our post-holders have designated roles and they're big—and this is added on to it so you would nearly want to have a post-holder with the responsibility of SSE. They could give the time to the process but what you're doing, you're putting the work onto work onto work. And people don't have that time. The first part of the SSE process is very simple and very effective. It's the continuation of it that is the problem. (Deputy principal)

> Perhaps if post-holders were allocated an hour a week in their timetables to be used for collaborating with teachers this would help a lot. (Post-holder 5)

In smaller schools too, it was reported that time was an obstacle:

> Staff meetings are the only time we get to discuss things really. There's never time during the day. Some days you could be having lunch on your own. We have a lot of informal meetings before or after school where we would discuss something briefly. (Principal 2)

> There should be more time given for these things. I suppose everyone is so busy at school. Time to collaborate with other teachers really about the SSE. (Post-holder 2)

Furthermore, the general consensus was that SSE was severely restricted by the lack of additional opportunities for promotion in Irish schools at present:

> I have seen a huge reduction in the number of posts since I took over as principal . . .; So our management team has been greatly reduced . . .; The MLM won't be able to lead the SSE to the same extent that they can do it now. (Principal 4)

> They're not getting the opportunity to progress. They have great talent and expertise and so much to offer and contribute to the school. (Post-holder 5)

There were suggestions that additional members of MLM and the establishment of posts with specific responsibilities for SSE could help:

> So in my opinion I think more people need to be promoted to MLM in schools going forward. (Post-holder 3)

> For it to work very, very effectively it should be a designated post of responsibility. At the very least, it should be a designated post of responsibility . . .; You could have a designated post of responsibility for SSE which would be phenomenal. It would be absolutely brilliant if you had one person that was given the time you know and the position to do SSE and it would be very effective. (Deputy principal)

A particular problem regarding the promotion of teachers, however, is that it can bring about disengagement and disinclination on the part of other staff members.

> It's difficult for us because if a person's getting paid to have a leadership role then another person might think 'Well Mary Jane is getting paid to do that, why should I do it?'. You know you need to ask people to take on these roles and you need to enable them, not to follow them, you know just to let them, you know if it's not the way you would do it, just accept it. It is difficult and I suppose from the point of view of them seeing the leadership team getting paid, then they'll be thinking why should they have to do this? (Post-holder 6)

> This is tricky because a lot of non-post-holders want to take on leadership roles but they feel 'Well it's your post, you're the one who's getting paid'. This attitude exists. Teachers are content to do what's needed to be done for their class but mightn't necessarily take on extra work. Posts can be divisive like that. (Post-holder 5)

> There can be politics involved too. If someone on the staff went for a post and didn't get it, it can be hard to turn around and look for his or her expertise especially if that person was better qualified for the post. (Post-holder 4)

Finding translation time is an issue in schools as translators are often overloaded and inundated with a wide range of duties and responsibilities. Considering the need for collaborative work, and the various dispositions of a school's staff, there is a need for translators to not only inspire and persuade colleagues, but in some cases appease them or maybe even work around them.

Discussion

While schools are made up of a wide variety of different staff members at different career stages and in different career positions, this research points to how important middle leaders have become (De Nobile 2018) in school improvement (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves, and Rönnerman 2015; Edwards-Grove et al. 2019; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, and Lamanna 2021) and in the enactment of policy. In terms of policy enactment, principals and their senior teams tend to be policy narrators in schools (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Maguire and Braun 2019; Skerritt et al.2021a) while the role of translators tends to be picked up by other staff members such as those in MLM. Translators are key players in the enactment of SSE in Irish schools (Skerritt et al.2021a) and we see here how it is largely MLM doing high-profile policy work, turning ideas into actions and bringing SSE to life in schools. Of course, a variety of actors contribute to policy enactments in schools, and the intention here is not to downplay the roles played by others, but to stress the key role of MLM as translators in policy enactments. These actors organise, manage, lead, plan, produce, inspire, persuade, and appease, and in doing so they translate policy into practice and make it a collective effort. A range of staff members and policy actors contribute and play roles, but it is the middle leaders serving as the 'engine' of schools (Shaked and Schechter 2019) when it comes to the enactment of policy.

While the responsibility for school improvement priorities is often delegated to middle leaders (Armstrong, Ko, and Bryant 2018), there is the risk, as our data attest, that middle leaders, as policy translators, become overloaded and inundated with policy work. Having time is important for middle leaders in order for them to be able to influence change (Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, and Grootenboer 2020b) but as De Nobile (2018) points out, time is a major issue in the literature. While actors and positions such as policy receivers perhaps still require 'further work and more nuancing' (Ball et al. 2011a, 638), there are indications that through superficial compliance (Golding 2017) receivers are more common than might be expected (Skerritt et al.2021a). Not all teachers actively participate in policy interpretations and translations and their priorities can be elsewhere (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015). Even policy enthusiasts can be receivers of policy (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). As Maguire et al. (2015, 496) explain,

> some policy actors are typically much less invested in policy enactment in the wider school setting as their concerns are driven by their level of experience, their position and their engagement with their classrooms and students on a day-to-day basis.

Receivers depend on, for example, local texts, materials and guidelines generated by translators (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), if of course they have the intention of enacting a policy (Golding 2017). All of this raises questions about the sustainability of translators' work. Our data stress the integral role of MLM in bringing a policy such as SSE to life and as middle leaders are still practising teachers we should consider how effectively policies can be translated into practice when they are the prime actors.

While the data presented here illustrate the important work of translators, these actors can also fulfil other policy roles (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Skerritt et al.2021a) and they are also often, for example, transactors engaged in policy monitoring – as Grice (2019, 167) highlights, 'spying is a middle leading practice'. Similarly, while this paper highlights the important work middle leaders do as policy translators in schools, it is important to stress that not all middle leaders will be translators (Skerritt et al. 2021b) and not all translators will be middle leaders. Along with position in the school hierarchy and individual characteristics, translators, we suggest, are determined by a range of other contextual factors including, but not limited to, the sector and size of their schools. Context is important in both leadership (Ribbins and Gronn 2000; Clarke and O'Donoghue 2017; Brooks and Normore 2018) and policy (Braun et al. 2011; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Maguire et al. 2020) and our data suggest that the smaller structures of primary schools' management and leadership teams means that middle and senior teams can become conflated (Forde et al. 2019) vis-à-vis policy enactments in the smallest of schools where MLM teams are smaller and principals maintain teaching duties. However, while this is how policy enactments appear to take place in Irish primary schools, we are also mindful that enactments could differ somewhat in school systems that are larger, organised differently, and more high stakes than the Irish system.

Conclusion

In this paper we have elaborated on the conception of policy translators – key actors in the enactment of policy. In doing this, several novel contributions to scholarship are made: we have provided empirical data to support and expand on policy enactment theory, we have added to the limited research base on middle leadership, and we have strengthened understandings of how SSE plays out in schools. Thus, building on our previous work (Skerritt et al.2021a), we continue to provide new ways of thinking about, understanding, and explaining how polices are enacted in schools.

This research has shown the important role of translators in policy enactment, and the important role of middle leaders as policy translators. Researchers should continue to explore policy enactments and the various policy actors in schools. Here, we found focusing on a single policy position to be advantageous in developing our understanding of policy enactments and suggest that this is a route for researchers to take in future studies on translators and other actors and on SSE and other policies both in Ireland and beyond. Again, it is important to stress that translators in schools are not necessarily

middle leaders and middle leaders are not necessarily translators, and that there are various kinds of policy actors shaping policy in schools, including roles that translators also fulfil. However, the translators are key to the enactment of policy and our data both elsewhere and here suggest that these actors are predominantly middle leaders, although context can be a significant factor.

The role of a translator can be an isolating one. Translators induct others to make policy a collective effort (Ball et al. 2011a; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012) but at the same time they are often working alone. They are doing 'the donkey work', as one participant put it. Traditionally, principalship might have been considered a lonely position while now, despite the emphasis on distributed and teacher leadership, and discourse becoming replete with notions of collaboration, perhaps middle leaders are at risk of solitude. As well as being an under-researched group, middle leaders are perhaps underappreciated, and we suggest deserving of greater attention in both respects. We conclude by recommending that greater attention needs to be paid to the role of middle leaders in the enactment of policy if we are to better understand how policies play out in schools.

Notes

1. It is currently approximately 73% of what it was.
2. Circulars are written statements produced by government departments to provide a centralised, coordinated system of practice. Circulars provide information and guidance on laws and procedures and are regularly used by Ireland's Department of Education and Skills.
3. The duties are meant to be done outside of schooltime.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Craig Skerritt http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3695-758X
Gerry McNamara http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9725-9304
Irene Quinn http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8446-7876
Joe O'Hara http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1956-7640
Martin Brown http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5436-354X

References

Aderet-German, T. 2021. "Sustainable School Self-evaluation: Enactments and Perceptions of Balancing Accountability and Improvement Goals." *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* 33 (2): 291–315. doi:10.1007/s11092-021-09361-z.

Armstrong, P. W., J. Ko, and D. A. Bryant. 2018. "Values-driven Leadership through Institutional Structures and Practices: How Successful Schools in England and Hong Kong "Absorb" Policy." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 17 (3): 360–372. doi:10.1080/15700763.2018.1496341.

Ball, S. J. 2015a. "What Is Policy? 21 Years Later: Reflections on the Possibilities of Policy Research." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36 (3): 306–313.

Ball, S. J. 2021. *The Education Debate*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Ball, S.J., M. Maguire, and A. Braun. 2012. *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. Oxon: Routledge.
Ball, S.J., M. Maguire, A. Braun, and K. Hoskins. 2011a. "Policy Actors: Doing Policy Work in Schools." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32 (4): 625–639.
Ball, S.J., M. Maguire, A. Braun, and K. Hoskins. 2011b. "Policy Subjects and Policy Actors in Schools: Some Necessary but Insufficient Analyses." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32 (4): 611–624.
Ball, S.J. 1993. "What Is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes. Discourse:." *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 13 (2): 10–17. doi:10.1080/0159630930130203.
Ball, S.J. 2015b. "Policy Actors/policy Subjects." *Journal of Education Policy* 30 (4): 467-467. doi:10.1080/02680939.2015.1038454.
Braun, A., and M. Maguire. 2020. "Doing without Believing–enacting Policy in the English Primary School." *Critical Studies in Education* 61 (4): 433–447. doi:10.1080/17508487.2018.1500384.
Braun, A., M. Maguire, and S.J. Ball. 2010. "Policy Enactments in the UK Secondary School: Examining Policy, Practice and School Positioning." *Journal of Education Policy* 25 (4): 547–560. doi:10.1080/02680931003698544.
Braun, A., S.J. Ball, M. Maguire, and K. Hoskins. 2011. "Taking Context Seriously: Towards Explaining Policy Enactments in the Secondary School." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32 (4): 585–596.
Brooks, J. S., and A. H. Normore. 2018. *Foundations of Educational Leadership: Developing Excellent and Equitable Schools*. New York: Routledge.
Brown, M., G. McNamara, S. O'Brien, C. Skerritt, J. O'Hara, J. Faddar, . . .; G. Kurum. 2020. "Parent and Student Voice in Evaluation and Planning in Schools." *Improving Schools* 23 (1): 85–102. doi:10.1177/1365480219895167.
Clarke, S., and T. O'Donoghue. 2017. "Educational Leadership and Context: A Rendering of an Inseparable Relationship." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 65 (2): 167–182. doi:10.1080/00071005.2016.1199772.
Clohessy, L., R. Bowles, and D. Ní Chróinín. 2020. "Follow the Leader? Generalist Primary School Teachers' Experiences of Informal Physical Education Leadership." *Education 3-13*. doi:10.1080/03004279.2020.1765835.
Coolahan, J., S. Drudy, P. Hogan, A. Hyland, and S. McGuiness. 2017. *Towards A Better Future: A Review of the Irish School System*. Cork: Irish Primary Principals' Network and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals.
De Nobile, J. 2018. "Towards a Theoretical Model of Middle Leadership in Schools." *School Leadership & Management* 38 (4): 395–416. doi:10.1080/13632434.2017.1411902.
Department of Education and Skills. 2016a. *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020: Primary*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
Department of Education and Skills. 2016b. *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
Department of Education and Skills. 2016c. *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020: Post-Primary*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
Department of Education and Skills. 2017. *Leadership and Management in Primary Schools: Circular Letter 0063/2017*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
Edwards-Groves, C., and P. Grootenboer. 2021. "Conceptualising Five Dimensions of Relational Trust: Implications for Middle Leadership." *School Leadership & Management* 41 (3): 260–283. doi:10.1080/13632434.2021.1915761.
Edwards-Groves, C., P. Grootenboer, I. Hardy, and K. Rönnerman. 2019. "Driving Change from 'The Middle': Middle Leading for Site Based Educational Development." *School Leadership & Management* 39 (3–4): 315–333. doi:10.1080/13632434.2018.1525700.
Forde, C., G. Hamilton, M. Ní Bhróithe, M. Nihill, and A. M. Rooney. 2019. "Evolving Policy Paradigms of Middle Leadership in Scottish and Irish Education: Implications for Middle Leadership Professional Development." *School Leadership & Management* 39 (3–4): 297–314. doi:10.1080/13632434.2018.1539962.

Golding, J. 2017. "Policy Critics and Policy Survivors: Who are They and How Do They Contribute to a Department Policy Role Typology?" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38 (6): 923–936.

Grice, C. 2019. "007 Spies, Surveillance and Pedagogical Middle Leadership: For the Good of the Empire of Education." *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 51 (2): 165–181. doi:10.1080/00220620.2019.1583173.

Grootenboer, P., C. Edwards-Groves, and K. Rönnerman. 2015. "Leading Practice Development: Voices from the Middle." *Professional Development in Education* 41 (3): 508–526. doi:10.1080/19415257.2014.924985.

Grootenboer, P., and K. Larkin. 2019. "Middle Leading Small-scale School Projects." *International Journal of Educational Management* 33 (7): 1733–1745.

Gumus, S., M. S. Bellibas, M. Esen, and E. Gumus. 2018. "A Systematic Review of Studies on Leadership Models in Educational Research from 1980 to 2014." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 46 (1): 25–48. doi:10.1177/1741143216659296.

Gustafsson, J. E., M. C. M. Ehren, G. Conyngham, G. McNamara, H. Altrichter, and J. O'Hara. 2015. "From Inspection to Quality: Ways in Which School Inspection Influences Change in Schools." *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 47: 47–57. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.07.002.

Harris, A., M. Jones, N. Ismail, and D. Nguyen. 2019. "Middle Leaders and Middle Leadership in Schools: Exploring the Knowledge Base (2003–2017)." *School Leadership & Management* 39 (3–4): 255–277. doi:10.1080/13632434.2019.1578738.

Harris, A. 2020. "COVID-19–school Leadership in Crisis?" *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* 5 (3/4): 321–326. doi:10.1108/JPCC-06-2020-0045.

Hislop, H. (2017). "*A-Co-professional Approach to Inspection for Accountability and Improvement: Progress and Prospects in the Irish Context*." Inaugural Public Lecture to mark the incorporation of the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection within the DCU Institute of Education, 11th May 2017, Dublin: Dublin City University.

Lipscombe, K., C. Grice, S. Tindall-Ford, and J. De-Nobile. 2020a. "Middle Leading in Australian Schools: Professional Standards, Positions, and Professional Development." *School Leadership & Management* 40 (5): 406–424. doi:10.1080/13632434.2020.1731685.

Lipscombe, K., S. Tindall-Ford, and J. Lamanna. 2021. "School Middle Leadership: A Systematic Review." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 174114322098332. doi:10.1177/1741143220983328.

Lipscombe, K., S. Tindall-Ford, and P. Grootenboer. 2020b. "Middle Leading and Influence in Two Australian Schools." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 48 (6): 1063–1079. doi:10.1177/1741143219880324.

MacBeath, J. 2005a. "A New Relationship with Schools: Inspection and Self-evaluation." *InFORM* 5: 1–7.

MacBeath, J. 2005b. *Self-evaluation: Background, Principles and Key Learning*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

MacBeath, J. 2006. *School Inspection & Self-Evaluation: Working with the New Relationship*. Oxon: Routledge.

Maguire, M., and A. Braun. 2019. "Headship as Policy Narration: Generating Metaphors of Leading in the English Primary School." *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 51 (2): 103–116. doi:10.1080/00220620.2018.1563531.

Maguire, M., A. Braun, and S. Ball. 2015. "'Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit': The Social Construction of Policy Enactments in the (English) Secondary School." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36 (4): 485–499.

Maguire, M., A. Braun, and S. Ball. 2018. "Discomforts, Opposition and Resistance in Schools: The Perspectives of Union Representatives." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (7): 1060–1073. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1443431.

Maguire, M., S. Ball, and A. Braun. 2010. "Behaviour, Classroom Management and Student 'Control': Enacting Policy in the English Secondary School." *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 20 (2): 153–170. doi:10.1080/09620214.2010.503066.

Maguire, M., S. Gewirtz, E. Towers, and E. Neumann. 2020. "Contextualising Policy Work: Policy Enactment and the Specificities of English Secondary Schools." *Research Papers in Education* 35 (4): 488–509.

Maguire, M., S.J. Ball, and A. Braun. 2013. "What Ever Happened to . . .; ?'personalised Learning' as a Case of Policy Dissipation." *Journal of Education Policy* 28 (3): 322–338. doi:10.1080/02680939.2012.724714.

McNamara, G., C. Skerritt, J. O'Hara, S. O'Brien, and M. Brown. 2021. "For Improvement, Accountability, or the Economy? Reflecting on the Purpose(s) of School Self-evaluation in Ireland." *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 1–16. doi:10.1080/00220620.2021.1985439.

McNamara, G., J. O'Hara, M. Brown, and I. Quinn. 2020. "Quality Assurance in Irish Schools: Inspection and School Self-evaluation." *Administration* 68 (4): 161–180. doi:10.2478/admin-2020-0029.

O'Brien, J., and D. Murphy. 2016. "Leadership, School Leadership and Headship." In *School Leadership*, edited by J. O'Brien, 1–29. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press .

O'Brien, S., G. McNamara, J. O'Hara, and M. Brown. 2019. "Irish Teachers, Starting on a Journey of Data Use for School Self-evaluation." *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 60: 1–13. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.11.001.

O'Brien, S., G. McNamara, J. O'Hara, and M. Brown. 2020. "Learning by Doing: Evaluating the Key Features of a Professional Development Intervention for Teachers in Data-use, as Part of Whole School Self-evaluation Process." *Professional Development in Education* 1–25. doi:10.1080/19415257.2020.1720778.

Ottesen, E. 2019. "Evaluation with a Purpose?" In *School Evaluation with a Purpose:Challenges and Alternatives*, edited by E. Ottesen and F. Stephens, 106–114. Oxon: Routledge.

Perryman, J., S. J. Ball, A. Braun, and M. Maguire. 2017. "Translating Policy: Governmentality and the Reflective Teacher." *Journal of Education Policy* 32 (6): 745–756. doi:10.1080/02680939.2017.1309072.

Ribbins, P., and P. Gronn. 2000. "Researching Principals: Context and Culture in the Study of Leadership in Schools." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20 (2): 34–45. doi:10.1080/02188791.2000.10600181.

Shaked, H., and C. Schechter. 2019. "School Middle Leaders' Sense Making of a Generally Outlined Education Reform." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 18 (3): 412–432. doi:10.1080/15700763.2018.1450513.

Skerritt, C., J. O'Hara, M. Brown, G. McNamara, and S. O'Brien. 2021a. "Enacting School Self-evaluation: The Policy Actors in Irish Schools." *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 1–23. doi:10.1080/09620214.2021.1886594.

Skerritt, C., J. O'Hara, M. Brown, G. McNamara, and S. O'Brien. 2021b. "Student Voice and the School Hierarchy: The Disconnect between Senior Leaders and Teachers." *Oxford Review of Education* 1–16. doi:10.1080/03054985.2021.2003189.