

What's the Problem? Implementing School Mathematics Curriculum Reform

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School curriculum change is a consistent feature of the Australian educational landscape which creates challenges for teachers. Curriculum change also presents opportunities for engaging teachers in professional learning and for researching factors that support or hinder curriculum implementation. The development, implementation, and reviews of the *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics* provides the context for the research and development project we are conducting with a group of primary and secondary schools in Queensland. This project aims to support schools to interpret, plan, and implement the new mathematics curricula more effectively.

Remillard and Heck (2014) defined curriculum as “a *plan for the experiences* that learners will encounter, as well as the *actual experiences* they do encounter, that are designed to help them reach specified mathematics objectives” (p. 707, original emphasis). Their model of the curriculum policy, design, and enactment system points to mediating factors that inevitably influence elements of the *official* curriculum, as specified by governing authorities, and the *operational* curriculum enacted in classrooms. These identified influencing factors include; views of individuals and groups wielding power; research on learning, teaching, and assessment; teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices; teachers’ access to resources and support; contextual opportunities and constraints; and a range of student characteristics and cultural resources.

We are working with middle-level school leaders who were asked to propose a small action research project that investigates a “problem” or area for improvement within mathematics teaching in their school, with support from our project team. In this short communication, we seek to understand some unanticipated outcomes of the project by addressing the research question: *How do schools represent curriculum implementation problems and perceptions of their professional development needs?* Using Bacchi’s (2009) question “What’s the problem represented to be?”, we analyse interviews with mathematics leaders in two schools to explore factors that mediate and influence curriculum enactment (i.e. the *operational* curriculum). Findings revealed that the professional learning requirements identified by these school leaders did not always align with those of classroom teachers in their schools.

References

- Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?* Pearson Australia.
Remillard, J., & Heck, D. (2014). Conceptualizing the curriculum enactment process in mathematics education. *ZDM Mathematics Education*, 46, 705-718. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-014-0600-4>

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