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Matthew D. Curtner-Smith

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The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same: Factors Influencing Teachers' Interpretations and Delivery of National Curriculum Physical Education

MATTHEW D. CURTNER-SMITH

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA

ABSTRACT *A small number of studies have previously indicated that National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) policy texts have been adapted and recreated by teachers (Evans & Penney, 1993a; Laws & Aldridge, 1995). The purposes of this study were to describe teachers' differing interpretations of NCPE and to identify factors which influenced these interpretations. Two theoretical perspectives guided data collection and analysis. These were occupational socialization theory (Lawson, 1983a, b) and the technological, ecological, and cultural perspectives on curriculum change identified by Sparkes (1991a). Participants were 23 teachers working in eight secondary schools in three towns located in the south of England. Data collection techniques employed were passive participant observation, formal and informal interviews, and document analysis. Data were analysed using constant comparison and analytic induction. In addition, hypotheses were developed that were grounded in the data and which appeared to explain how and why this sample of teachers interpreted NCPE as they did. Results indicated that teachers' interpretations of NCPE were either conservative, innovative, or eclectic. Factors which influenced teachers' interpretations of NCPE were (a) their perceptions of the physical education working group's and government's interpretations of the new curriculum, (b) experience, (c) gender, (d) participation in sport and physical activity, (e) experiences during physical education and school sport, (f) initial teacher education, (g) other teachers, and (h) situational constraints.*

To date, few researchers have attempted to discover how curriculum change in physical education can be most effectively accomplished (Jewett, 1994). Specifically, there is a need to discover which methods or models lead to real change in teachers' practice (Jewett, 1994), which lead to superficial change (Sparkes, 1991a), and which result in no change at all. This paper reports a qualitative study which was part of a larger investigation of how the introduction of National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) influenced the working lives of teachers, their physical education programmes, their pupils, and the quality of their instruction.

NCPE, introduced in England and Wales in 1992 (Department of Education and Science & the Welsh Office, 1991a, b, 1992) and modified in 1995 (Department for Education, 1995), is a classic example of an attempt at what Jewett *et al.* (1995) referred to as top-down curriculum change. Rather than being fashioned by small groups of teachers in reaction to local problems and opportunities as occurs during attempts at

bottom-up curriculum change (Jewett *et al.*, 1995), NCPE was sponsored by the central government, designed by a government-appointed working group, and imposed through legislation and formal inspections overseen by a specially created government department known as the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Several scholars have been highly critical of top-down change models because teachers' lack of involvement in the change process alienates them and prevents real change from occurring (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Evans *et al.*, 1997; Kirk, 1988, 1990; Locke, 1992; Richardson, 1990; Ruddock, 1986). In addition, Fullan (1982) and Sparkes (1991a) observed that teachers who do adopt innovations imposed on them by outside agencies often take this course of action in order to survive and not because of changes in their beliefs or values. Moreover, critics of top-down approaches have generally argued that bottom-up attempts at innovation are much more likely to succeed because teachers are actively involved in and central to the process (Jewett *et al.*, 1995; Locke, 1992; Sparkes, 1991a).

In contrast, other researchers, including Hord *et al.* (1987), have been supportive of top-down change models. They have argued that these types of initiatives are likely to be successful because of their central source of support and because they are generally well-funded.

There is some evidence that small-scale top-down innovations can lead to real change in the teaching of physical education (McKenzie *et al.*, 1993, 1997, 1998). However, as yet, there has been relatively little research detailing the effects of large-scale top-down initiatives like NCPE. To-date, results of four investigations which were specifically aimed at describing the effects of NCPE on teachers and their programmes have been published.

Early research of NCPE was confined to two simultaneous surveys of 100 secondary school physical education department heads conducted by Harris (1993, 1994) 6 months after the introduction of the new curriculum and a later follow-up survey of 1000 department heads carried out by the same researcher in September of 1993 (Harris, 1995; Penney & Harris, 1998). Key findings from these studies were that teachers' opinions on whether NCPE would be a help or a hindrance were mixed, as were those concerning the need for changing current curricula and practice.

More recent survey work completed by Waddington *et al.* (1998) was aimed at examining the attitudes of 84 teachers towards teaching the six areas of activity included in NCPE (dance, games, swimming, gymnastic activities, athletic activities, outdoor activities). Results indicated that female teachers perceived outdoor education as a 'male-appropriate' activity while male teachers perceived dance as a 'female-appropriate' activity.

While acknowledging that survey research is useful in determining the effects of any new educational policy in terms of documenting what is going on in schools, Evans & Penney (1992) argued convincingly that such studies are limited in that they contribute little to understanding how or why certain phenomena occur. Therefore, in their team's own research of NCPE Evans and Penney and their associates [1] used qualitative methods to study 13 schools in one Local Education Authority (LEA) as well as surveying 94 secondary schools and 20 primary schools in the same LEA. Results indicated that what was actually practiced by teachers and experienced by pupils was rather different from the official aims and policy of NCPE. Rather than reproducing NCPE legislation as practice, teachers were adapting, modifying, and recreating it to fit with their own beliefs about physical education teaching and so that it was manageable within the unique contexts in which they worked.

In another qualitative study, Laws & Aldridge (1995) found that five teachers working in one secondary school were reluctant to make any changes at all in their practices following the introduction of the new curriculum. In addition, two of the teachers thought that NCPE was beneficial, two thought that it caused teachers to engage in unnecessary work, and two thought that it undervalued teachers' work.

Supporting these survey and qualitative data were the results of studies conducted by Curtner-Smith and his associates [2] aimed at discovering whether the introduction of NCPE influenced the quality of 20 teachers' instruction. During these studies a series of systematic observation instruments was used to code lessons taught by the teachers before and after NCPE was introduced. Results indicated that NCPE had little or no impact on (a) teachers' behaviours related with pupils' skill learning, (b) pupils' opportunities to learn sports skills, (c) teachers' behaviours related with pupils' psychosocial development, (d) teachers' and pupils' behaviours related with pupils' development of health-related fitness, (e) teachers' use of reproductive and productive teaching styles, and (f) teachers' managerial systems.

Purpose

Following their research of the effects of the implementation of the National Curriculum in other subjects Bowe & Ball (1992) observed that:

Policy texts are not closed, their meanings are neither fixed nor clear, and the 'carry over' of meanings from one policy arena and one educational site to another is subject to interpretational slippage and contestation. These texts are part of a policy cycle consisting of significantly different arenas and sites within which a variety of interests are at stake. (Quoted in Evans & Penney, 1992, p. 3)

Similarly, before beginning their own study of NCPEs implementation Evans & Penney (1992) noted that:

Even though state educational policy may strongly frame the range of opportunities which an individual teacher can enjoy, policy makers ... can rarely if ever control or determine the readings made of the policy texts in contexts of practice.... How will this piece of legislation [NCPE] be received, 'read' and implemented by teachers in schools? Will it be adapted, adopted, or as Bowe *et al.* (1992) found in their study of the NC [National Curriculum] implementation process in other subject areas, 'recreated' and 'produced' rather than simply reproduced? (p. 3)

The subsequent research completed by Harris (1993, 1994, 1995), Waddington *et al.* (1998), Evans & Penney and their associates [1], and Laws & Aldridge (1995) indicated that individual teachers and physical education departments had indeed reacted to, interpreted, and delivered NCPE in a number of different ways. The purposes of the present study were to build on these findings by (a) describing teachers' differing interpretations of NCPE and (b) identifying factors which influenced these interpretations.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives guided data collection and analysis during this study. These were occupational socialization theory (see Lawson, 1983a, b, 1986, 1988; Schempp &

Graber, 1992; Stroot, 1993; Zeichner & Gore, 1990) and the technological, ecological, and cultural perspectives on curriculum change identified by Sparkes (1991a).

Occupational Socialization

Lawson (1986) defined occupational socialization as 'all kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers' (p. 107). He also noted that three types of socialization were likely to shape physical education teachers' perspectives and practices. These were acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization (Lawson, 1983a, b).

Acculturation is an ongoing process which begins at birth and has a profound influence on prospective physical education teachers long before they enter initial teacher education (ITE). An understanding of what it means to be a physical education teacher is developed through interactions with significant people and childhood experiences. Of particular importance in this process are prospective teachers' observations and experiences of schooling in general (Lortie, 1975) and physical education (Schempp, 1989) and sport (Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds *et al.*, 1992; Sage, 1989; Templin, 1979) in particular, together with their interactions with physical education teachers and other adults responsible for coaching/teaching sport and physical activity. Moreover, Lawson (1983a, b) noted that the different physical education and sport experiences prospective male and female physical education teachers often have during childhood, coupled with prevailing societal attitudes towards male and female sport, are likely to lead to different perceptions of physical education as an occupation.

Professional socialization refers to the influence of ITE and is defined by Lawson (1983a) as 'the process by which ... teachers acquire and maintain the values, sensitivities, skills, and knowledge that are deemed ideal for physical education teaching' (p. 4). Evidence suggests that the impact of professional socialization is relatively weak compared with that of acculturation. However, ITE is more likely to be influential when faculty agree on a professional ideology and a 'shared technical culture' (i.e. the knowledge and skills required for physical education teaching) (Graber, 1993; Lawson, 1983a, b).

Organizational socialization refers to the influence of entering the workforce and is defined by Van Maanen & Schein (1979) as 'the process by which one is taught and learns the ropes of a particular organizational role' (p. 211). In cases where professional socialization has involved an attempt to innovate but has had little impact, and the conditions and attitudes found by new physical education teachers match those encountered during childhood, skills and knowledge learned in ITE are likely to be jettisoned. This process has commonly been referred to as the 'washout effect' (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981).

Finally, Lawson (1983a, b) noted that specific workplace factors could either support or restrict young teachers with new ideas. In addition, and building on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) work describing schools' socialization tactics, Lawson suggested that schools in which the socialization of new teachers was collective (with other new teachers), serial (involved mentoring by an experienced role model), sequential (occurred in a planned order), variable (did not occur in a fixed time), and involved divestiture (new ideas and skills were rejected) would deter innovation. In contrast, schools in which the socialization of new teachers was individual (faced alone), random (in no particular

order), informal, disjunctive (did not involve mentoring), and involved investiture (new ideas and skills were welcomed) would promote change.

Perspectives on Curriculum Change

Drawing on the work of Fullan (1982), Sparkes (1991a) noted that following any attempt at curricular innovation several dimensions of change are possible. Superficial changes such as the use of new curriculum materials are relatively easily accomplished. Attempts to change teachers' practices (e.g. the use of new teaching styles or approaches) are less likely to be successful. Finally, changes in teachers' beliefs, perspectives, and values are extremely difficult to achieve. However, it is this third dimension that Sparkes (1991a) refers to as 'real change':

Even if changes do take place in their practices this does not mean that teachers will necessarily challenge or begin to change the ideologies and beliefs that inform their educational practices in the gymnasium or their relationships with children.... If we are to talk of real change then a key dimension for consideration is the transformation of beliefs, values, and ideologies held by teachers that inform their pedagogical assumptions and practices. (p. 2)

Sparkes (1991a) also identified three perspectives from which policy makers and researchers have attempted and examined curriculum change. The technological perspective focuses on changing the content delivered to pupils. Often, technological attempts at change have been large-scale, top-down initiatives designed by teams of experts from higher education or government agencies. NCPE, then, is a good example of this kind of innovation.

As I have already indicated, top-down change attempts have been highly criticized in some circles. Moreover, they are primarily aimed at accomplishing a relatively superficial level of change. Nevertheless, Fullan (1982) notes that the adoption of new curriculum packages by teachers 'may be the necessary first steps which set the preconditions for real change in practice' (p. 51). Whether or not teachers take these first steps is often decided by their perceptions of their own 'procedural competence' (Sparkes, 1991b).

From an ecological perspective, change or lack of change by teachers following an intervention is explained in terms of their schools' political and organizational structures and the conditions in which they work. Of particular importance is the absence or presence of 'situational constraints' (Hargreaves, 1984; Sparkes, 1986, 1991a) such as large classes, poor facilities, or lack of equipment.

Finally, when attempting to innovate or examining the effects of attempted innovations from a cultural perspective the focus is on 'what the teacher thinks, what the teacher believes, [and] what the teacher assumes' (Hargreaves, 1989, p. 54). This perspective, then, is concerned with what Sparkes (1991a) called real change.

Those who have examined the impact of attempted innovations from the cultural perspective have observed that teachers are often very resistant to change (Giroux, 1983; Hargreaves, 1989; Sparkes, 1991a, b). This resistance can involve the use of 'strategic rhetoric' whereby teachers change what they say about their programmes but not what they do (Sparkes, 1987) and is 'part of intelligent action' (Sparkes, 1991b, p. 20). Teachers resist changes which they believe will not benefit their pupils and which are incompatible with their professional and personal goals (Jewett *et al.*, 1995). They are likely to take this course of action if innovations threaten their control of the teaching

environment, detract from the rewards they currently get from their work, and are viewed as not being 'practical' (Sparkes, 1991b).

In addition, Sparkes (1991b) notes that when innovations are introduced some teachers' positions are damaged while other teachers' positions are improved. Therefore, some teachers view themselves as 'losers' in the change process and others see themselves as 'winners'. Moreover, Sparkes (1991b) explains that a third group of teachers can be classified as 'sideliners' (Roskies *et al.*, 1988) because they consider an innovation as personally irrelevant or are undecided as to whether they will gain or lose if they implement the proposed changes. Not surprisingly, teachers who view themselves as losers in the change process are more likely to resist innovations, while those who perceive themselves as winners are more likely to implement them, and those on the sidelines are more likely to take no action at all.

Methods

Participants and Setting

The primary participants in this study were 13 male and 10 female specialist physical education teachers. On average, these teachers had taught for 10.22 years. Three of the teachers were in their first year of teaching while three others had taught for at least 20 years. All of the teachers were White.

The teachers worked in eight mixed-sex state secondary comprehensive schools situated in three towns in the south of England. Seven of the schools were located in rural settings and one was located in a suburban setting. Six of the schools were attended by pupils aged 11 to 16 years, one school was attended by pupils aged 13 to 18 years, and one school was attended by pupils aged 9 to 13 years.

Data Collection

I collected data during 1994 and 1995 by using a number of qualitative techniques (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1980). These were (a) passive participant observation, (b) formal and informal interviews, and (c) document analysis.

Passive participant observation. I conducted field work at five of the schools located in one town during the course of one academic term. This involved making 40 visits to the five school sites. During this time I observed 20 of the participants teaching lessons and coaching extracurricular sports practices.

Initial contact with each school physical education department head and headteacher had been made on my behalf during the preceding term by the LEA health and physical education advisor. The primary purposes of my first visit to each school were to gain entry and forge the beginnings of a positive relationship with the physical education teachers whom I hoped would serve as participants. This was achieved by explaining the purposes and methods of my research to department heads, tentatively scheduling future visits, and explaining that I would record and report data in a manner that would protect teachers' right to privacy. During my initial meeting with each teacher, I again explained the purposes and methods of my research and sought and gained his or her informed consent to participate in the study.

During subsequent visits, I recorded my observations with a mini-tape recorder or made written field notes. In congruence with the study's purposes, the focus of my

observations was on describing teachers' interpretations of NCPE and identifying factors which appeared to influence these interpretations. Recordings and notes were often expanded directly after the conclusion of a visit.

Formal and informal interviews. I formally interviewed 16 of the teachers at a time which was convenient to them during the school day. In addition, one formal interview took place over the telephone. Thirteen of the formal interviews were tape recorded while during the remaining four formal interviews, I took written notes. Teachers from all eight schools were formally interviewed.

In line with the theoretical perspectives which guided the study, during these interviews I asked the teachers about their (a) experiences of physical education as pupils, (b) past and present sporting and activity experiences, (c) ITE, (d) experiences as teachers including their work histories, and (e) interpretations of NCPE. In addition, I asked the teachers how the implementation of NCPE had affected their working lives, their physical education programmes, and their pupils.

Whenever presented with the opportunity, I also informally interviewed the teachers working in the five schools in which I conducted field work. These interviews took place just before or just after lessons, while eating lunch, during breaktimes and planning periods, and, occasionally, during lessons. Several informal interviews were also conducted over the telephone. During these interviews, I either repeated questions asked in the formal interviews or probed to gain clarification about or expansion of answers which the teachers had previously given to these questions.

Additional data were also collected by informally interviewing teachers of other subjects and senior staff when the opportunity arose. The aim of these interviews was to gain further insight into the physical education teachers' interpretations of NCPE and the factors which appeared to influence these interpretations. These 'secondary participants' were aware that I was conducting research with the physical education staff in their schools.

Responses to questions posed during informal interviews were recorded as soon as after the conclusion of each interview as possible. This was done either by recording my recollections of conversations with a mini-tape recorder or by making written notes.

Document analysis. The teachers either let me examine or supplied me with copies of schemes of work, lesson plans, departmental policy statements, pupil assessment forms, and pupil report forms which they had developed following the introduction of NCPE. They also allowed me to examine or supplied me with copies of any new guidelines regarding NCPE which they had received. On the occasions when I was not able to make copies of documents, I recorded my thoughts on their contents with a mini-tape recorder or in writing.

Data Analysis

During the first stage of analysis, I identified data which described how teachers interpreted and delivered NCPE. I also identified data which suggested why teachers interpreted NCPE as they did. Second, I sorted the data into categories using the techniques described by Goetz & LeCompte (1984) as analytic induction and constant comparison. This process involved scanning the data for tentative categories and relationships between categories. These categories and the relationships between them were then refined based on freshly reviewed data which did not fit original category

descriptions. Categories were based on concepts and themes from the two theoretical perspectives which guided the study. Third, I wrote hypotheses that were grounded in the data (Borg & Gall, 1989; Overholt & Stallings, 1976; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and which appeared to explain how and why this sample of teachers interpreted NCPE as they did. These hypotheses served as the basis for the results section in this paper.

Data Trustworthiness

The first method I used to establish trustworthiness of the data was triangulation (Borg & Gall, 1989; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). I cross-checked data for accuracy by using three data collection techniques. Second, I investigated occurrences during observations, responses to questions, and the contents of documents which were inconsistent with emerging themes. I used these discrepant and negative cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) to refine and modify emerging themes. Finally, I conducted source checks (Locke, 1989) in the form of follow-up informal interviews.

Researcher's perspective. Readers of this report should be aware that I had taught in one of the schools involved in the study 7 years before initial data collection took place. During this time I worked with three of the participants and came into regular contact with seven others at extracurricular sports fixtures, inservice days, union meetings, and while playing for local sports teams. In addition, another of the participants had been a close friend of mine since we had completed our ITE together. My perception was that these relationships aided my entry into the schools and enabled me to gain a better understanding of teachers' interpretations of NCPE and the factors that influenced these interpretations than I might otherwise have done.

Results and Discussion

Interpretations of NCPE

In congruence with the findings of previous research in physical education (Evans & Penney, 1993a; Laws & Aldridge, 1995) and other subjects (Bowe & Ball, 1992), in the present study, it became apparent that teachers were adapting, recreating, and modifying the National Curriculum to fit with their own perspectives on and beliefs about physical education teaching. Moreover, it was clear that some groups of teachers were 'reading', receiving, and implementing the NCPE policy texts (i.e. official documents produced by the government and its appointed representatives) differently than other groups. Specifically, three broad interpretations of NCPE emerged during the course of the study. These interpretations were (a) conservative, (b) innovative, and (c) eclectic.

Conservative interpretation. Ten of the teachers in the study interpreted NCPE conservatively. These teachers held what Sparkes (1991b) referred to as a 'sporting perspective' of physical education teaching and were mainly concerned with improving performance in traditional British team games including rugby, soccer, cricket, netball, and hockey, and producing successful school teams. During curriculum time, therefore, they focused on teaching the skills and strategies of these traditional games using direct styles of teaching. When asked about their interpretations of NCPE, the following comments were typical of those made by members of this conservative group:

I think a games focus is good. ... It's my personal preference and it obviously comes over in what I teach. (Alan [3], 10th year teacher)

Our focus is still on traditional games. ... My personal choice would be that. ... I am a games traditionalist and I actually believe in team games and I believe in competition. (Justin, 8th year teacher)

Conservative teachers often stated that they thought the introduction of NCPE had made 'little difference' to the content they taught and to the impact they had on their pupils. The majority claimed that they had been teaching most of the elements of NCPE before it was introduced:

Before the National Curriculum arrived there were a lot of good practices locally in schools. The National Curriculum now states this on paper.... There's a lot of good practice going on. It's now directed, isn't it? We're now told what we must teach at each stage. I think the government really didn't give us a great deal of credit for what was going on in teaching to be perfectly frank and honest. (Bruce, 16th year teacher)

However, some conservative teachers explained that they did not think some of the elements of the new curriculum were practical (Sparkes, 1991b) or beneficial for their pupils:

Certain of these trends, I don't care whether you're told to do it or not. I don't see it as being useful for the kids. (Justin, 8th year teacher)

I'm in favour of new strategies to get the kids more involved but a lot of it [NCPE] is bullshit and you can quote me on that. It's just for the sake of being trendy. Not practical in a school like this. (Alan, 10th year teacher)

Moreover, several conservative teachers explained that they employed strategic rhetoric (Sparkes, 1987) so that it appeared that they were delivering a more progressive curriculum than they actually were. Typical of these comments was the following made by Alan (10th year teacher): 'You can use words to twist it [what is actually being taught]. That's a coping strategy that people like us are using'.

Finally, as illustrated by the following comments, this group of teachers was also adamant that the new curriculum had not prompted them to change their instructional styles:

I just teach the same way and so do the rest of the PE [physical education] staff at this school. (Rex, 3rd year teacher)

Most of the stuff, to be honest, is the stuff we've been doing for years and years and years. (Justin, 8th year teacher)

Innovative interpretation. In contrast, seven of the teachers interpreted NCPE innovatively. These teachers held what Sparkes (1991b) called an 'idealist perspective' of physical education. This perspective 'tends to be egalitarian, child-centred, progressive, and concerned with the personal and social development of pupils via self-paced individual activities' (Sparkes, 1991b, p. 4). From the outset it was clear that teachers in this group were interested in teaching through physical activity and were focused on the learning process. They supported the emphasis in early NCPE documentation on teaching pupils to 'plan, perform, and evaluate' physical activity and favoured using a more expansive range of teaching styles than their conservative colleagues in order to realize cognitive, social, health-related, as well as performance-related objectives. In addition, they believed in teaching a wide range of traditional and non-traditional activities so that all

pupils would have the opportunity to develop a leisure interest and because they believed that different types of activity could facilitate the realization of cognitive and social objectives.

The innovative teachers were also very positive about the introduction of NCPE and indicated that the new curriculum had changed their thinking to some extent:

[NCPE] has made me far more aware of what we are trying to deliver in every lesson. (Bob, 14th year teacher)

[NCPE] has helped because now things are much more structured and you have a goal to aim for whereas before you could kind of do anything and it might be aimless. (Louise, 3rd year teacher)

In addition, this group of teachers was very enthusiastic about the changes which they had made in their curricula and their teaching styles as a result of NCPE being introduced:

I think it [NCPE] has been really good for us because basically some schools just offered kids a games programme and it's made them look at the whole spectrum of PE, not just games skills. I mean here we've done 12 hours of dance in year 7 and they're going to do 7 hours of dance in year 8 ... and I think that makes them better allrounders. (Bob, 14th year teacher)

You don't just teach a skill, you try to get them to understand why they are doing it. ... I think as teachers, we used to inflict too much. I mean there's a lot of learning that goes on within the kids. (Bob, 14th year teacher)

I don't think I teach the same way. ... It [NCPE] has made a difference to my teaching because of the elements [planning, performing, and evaluating] I've got to include. (Joan, 15th year teacher)

Eclectic interpretation. Six of the teachers interpreted NCPE eclectically. This group of teachers worked from a perspective of physical education which incorporated elements from both the conservative and innovative positions previously described. Like the innovative group, they believed in teaching a wide range of activities so as to provide opportunities for all pupils to develop a leisure interest. However, in congruence with the conservative group they focused almost exclusively on improving pupils' performance of these activities and employed direct teaching styles.

While conservative teachers were often fairly negative about the introduction of NCPE and innovative teachers were extremely positive, the eclectic group tended to 'hedge their bets' and took a neutral position:

[There are] some good things and some bad things like all innovations. It makes you think more about how you are organised and how you teach but I'm not sure whether, at the end of the day, it makes things any better. (Paul, 6th year teacher)

In addition, and again in similar fashion to the conservative group, eclectic teachers stated that the introduction of the new curriculum had not prompted them to make changes to their teaching methods. For example, Jane, an 8th year teacher, stated: 'Nothing has changed in the teaching. I don't do anything differently. No, not at all'.

However, in congruence with the innovative group, eclectic teachers were quick to point out that NCPE had led to the expansion of their curricula and noted that this was a change for the better because they were now able to offer pupils more 'variety' and

'balance', 'covered all areas of PE', and were in a better position to 'give kids something they could go out and do'. Typical of comments along these lines were the following:

The school's PE curriculum has shifted from a more traditional to a less traditional sports influence. (Frank, 12th year teacher)

Well it's got to be better hasn't it? It's more balanced. ... I think it's brilliant, it's the best thing that could have happened. It's not games-oriented any more. They get some inside and some outside. They get some aesthetic. They get some competitive games. It's great. (Jane, 8th year teacher)

Factors Influencing Teachers' Interpretations of NCPE

Perceptions of the original working group's and government's interpretations of NCPE. While discussing the production of the NCPE texts and the 'inequalities in the policy process', Penney & Glover (1998) observed that the original working group appointed to design NCPE by the government had included an element which very definitely represented traditional male sport (i.e. a professional footballer, a male track star, and a headmaster of a well-known private school for boys). The inclusion of this element, Penney and Glover argued, was not a coincidence but a clear attempt to 'privilege' the interests of this form of sport during the development of NCPE and 'reflected the government's specific interests in and for physical education' (p. 10).

The make-up of the original working group, comments made by ministers in public, and attempts to 'improve' school sport (Department of National Heritage, 1995) led teachers in the study to clearly recognize that the government's interpretation of NCPE was extremely conservative. However, they also perceived the early NCPE texts to be innovative and were of the opinion that this was because the two female representatives in the working group from physical education departments within institutions of higher education had been largely responsible for writing them. Moreover, although successive NCPE texts described an increasingly traditional version of the subject, the teachers believed that this was because of governmental pressure and interference and, therefore, continued to distinguish between the original working group's innovative interpretation and the government's conservative interpretation of NCPE throughout the course of the study. As Alan (10th year teacher) noted: 'We're bombarded with two different angles. Which way do you go? They contradict each other'.

The teachers' perceptions of the working group's and government's interpretations of NCPE served to legitimate their own interpretations of the new curriculum. Conservative teachers took comfort in the messages they were receiving from the government while those in the innovative group identified with the spirit of the early NCPE texts. Moreover, their perception that government and working group interpretations of NCPE were contradictory encouraged teachers in the eclectic group to draw from either interpretation or to take a neutral 'wait and see' position.

In addition, the reactions of conservative and innovative teachers to NCPE texts were gradually reversed as the implementation process progressed. When the new curriculum was first introduced and these documents were perceived as innovative, teachers in the conservative group saw themselves as losers in the change process and were naturally quite negative and resistant. Conversely, at this stage, teachers in the innovative group viewed themselves as winners in the change process and were very positive. Later in the implementation process, however, particularly following Sir Ron Dearing's proposals for revising NCPE (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1994) and the subsequent

adoption of these proposals (Department for Education, 1995), conservative teachers were much more upbeat while, as illustrated by the following comment, those in the innovative group were bitterly disappointed:

I think they just copped out. ... I think the documents up to this one were good but this [Dearing's draft proposals for NCPE revision] is a complete cop-out affected by a lot of members of PE staff in schools who looked at the other ones [earlier NCPE documents] and said, 'Oh no, we can't do that, it's a bit high-falluting ...'. I just think if we were ever going to be a subject on the scale of the other subjects, although performing is our major thing, we had to show that there was something more than performance in it because the kids learn more than just how to do it in a PE lesson don't they? And that document says that they don't, I think. I mean that document says that all we do is perform. ... I just don't think it's on a level with other subjects. It's such a rubbish document that everyone can manipulate it. What's the point in it? (Amanda, 1st year teacher)

Relative experience. Waddington *et al.* (1998) found that teachers' ages were not related with their attitudes about teaching different activities within NCPE. However, theoretical work on teachers' occupational socialization suggests that teachers with greater experience are more likely to resist attempts at innovation while teachers with considerably less experience are more likely to embrace new initiatives. This is because schools are notoriously 'custodial bureaucracies' (Lawson, 1983b) and relatively experienced teachers have been subjected to more years of what Zeichner & Tabachnik (1983) referred to as the 'institutional press' than relatively inexperienced teachers. This press is the means by which the culture of the school is transmitted and 'basic assumptions and beliefs are shared and taught ... as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel' (Schein, 1988, p. 6).

These theories of occupational socialization were supported by the results of the present study. Although there were exceptions, teachers identified as conservatives were generally more experienced than those in the eclectic and innovative groups. The mean number of years the conservative teachers had spent on the job was 13.70 (range = 3–21). In addition, 6 of the 10 members of this group had been teaching for more than 15 years.

As might be expected, teachers in the eclectic group (mean number of years teaching = 9.17, range = 1–20) were, in turn, generally more experienced than those in the innovative group (mean number of years teaching = 6.14, range = 1–15). Four of the six members of the eclectic group had been teaching between 4 and 12 years while 5 of the 7 members of the innovative group had been teaching less than 6 years.

Moreover, many of the teachers in the study expressed the opinion that those with more experience were less likely to implement new ideas while those with less experience were more likely to be innovative. For example, Alan (10th year teacher) stated: 'We're an older PE department. If you've got someone straight out of college they may have new ideas'.

Gender. Gender also appeared to influence how the teachers in this study interpreted NCPE. Seven out of the 10 teachers in the conservative group were male while the eclectic (3 male and 3 female) and innovative (3 male and 4 female) groups were fairly evenly divided between the sexes. Given the government's focus on promoting traditional male team games and previous research indicating that male physical education teachers

are, in general, particularly conservative (Kenyon, 1965; Lawson, 1983a; Pooley, 1975), these findings were not surprising.

In partial congruence with the findings of the studies conducted by Waddington *et al.* (1998) and Penney & Harris (1998), results of the present study also indicated that conservative male teachers engaged in what Penney and Harris described as 'gendered practices'. Specifically, they were very resistant to the idea of teaching dance and gymnastics. As Sarah, a 16th year teacher, noted: 'The men wouldn't touch it [dance and gymnastics] with a barge pole'. Several other female teachers pointed out that dance and, to a lesser degree, gymnastics were socially difficult activities to teach adolescent boys at the best of times. Boys, they argued, needed male role models to teach them these activities and the fact that they were taught almost exclusively by female teachers created a 'credibility problem'. As explained by one teacher:

Men are not very happy teaching dance. They're not particularly happy teaching gym either but they have to do that because obviously we can't do it all. ... And obviously what happens, particularly in dance, is the vibes come across that men aren't teaching it. Therefore, it's not a male thing. Therefore, they [boys] don't do it. (Jane, 8th year teacher)

Sport and physical activity participation. One reason many physical education teachers are attracted to the profession in the first place is a love of sport (Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds *et al.*, 1992; Sage, 1989; Templin, 1979). Citing the work of Spring (1974), Lawson (1983a) noted that 'sport has been identified as a carrier of conservative values' (p. 7). Additionally, Lawson (1983a, b) hypothesized that teachers who had participated in a high level of traditional sport were likely to be extremely conservative in their orientation towards physical education. Conversely, teachers who had participated in non-traditional sports and other forms of physical activity were more likely to be innovative in their orientation towards the subject.

Again, data in the present study supported these hypotheses. All 10 of the conservative teachers had participated at a high level (i.e. at the very least highly competitive local league standard) in rugby, football, cricket, netball, or hockey and five of them had excelled at two of these sports. Moreover, these teachers tended to identify strongly with their 'main sport' often referring to themselves as 'rugby men', 'footballers', or 'hockey players'.

By comparison, members of the eclectic group specialized less and could generally be classified as competent allrounders. Only three of the eclectic teachers had participated in a high level of traditional sport, while one member of this group had participated in a number of sports and activities at a lower competitive and recreational level, and two members had participated at a high level in non-traditional sports (karate and basketball).

Furthermore, while, at one time, all of the members of the innovative group had played a lower level of competitive traditional sport, at the time the study was conducted none was still participating 'seriously'. Instead, the members of this group took part in a variety of activities in order to 'keep fit' (e.g. swimming, walking, jogging, squash) or as a means of socializing with friends (e.g. tennis, golf, 'pub' cricket).

With these varying sporting backgrounds and interests, not surprisingly conservative, eclectic, and innovative teachers reacted rather differently to the later NCPE texts which dictated that traditional competitive team games be emphasized. As Kenny (10th year teacher) observed conservative teachers tended to be relieved: 'Secretly, I think they are saying, "Thank God for that. We can get back to what we enjoy teaching"'. Conversely,

both eclectic and innovative teachers expressed disappointment and suggested that this change had nothing to do with pupils' educational needs but had been influenced by a government concerned with the standard of England's male international sporting teams who saw schools as 'breeding grounds for future sports stars'. As illustrated by the following comments a number of these teachers also thought that the emphasis on competitive games was counterproductive and sexist:

I think it could be a turn-off. I just think the way you keep them interested is to offer them as wide a choice as possible.... If they're turned off by participating in games which are competitive because they have no liking for it, or perhaps not the skill, all we're going to do is reinforce that and they're never going to learn something they might have been interested in. They might have been interested in aerobics or going down to the fitness centre or in swimming or they might have been interested in badminton. (Joan, 15th year teacher)

If anybody walked into a school and saw a group of year 10 girls, all they want to do is aerobics and fitness or something like that. Asking them to play a sport is unrealistic. To get these kids active would be a major milestone, I think. And it might be through aerobics. I mean a lot of girls do aerobics week in week out but that's not a game. I think with the boys they will play sport, but I think you have to understand girls are different to boys. What works for the boys will not work for the girls. The girls need the dance and the gym. They need those sort of things because of the success. (Amanda, 1st year teacher)

Experiences during physical education and school sport. Teachers' experiences during their own schooling have a powerful impact on their teaching (Lawson, 1983a, b). This 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975) 'has a distinct and traceable influence on an individual's future decisions, practices, and ideologies as a teacher' (Schempp & Graber, 1992, p. 333). Moreover, research conducted by Schempp (1989) indicated that the apprenticeship is a time when future physical education teachers become familiar with pedagogical tasks and practices and begin to make judgements about what constitutes quality teaching.

In line with the results of previous research, data from the present study suggested that the physical education and school sport experiences of the teachers had a considerable influence on their beliefs about the subject and on their interpretations of NCPE. Conservative teachers invariably related how they had been taught 'traditional games' by teachers using 'traditional methods' at both primary and secondary school and that they had enjoyed this type of physical education hugely. In addition, extracurricular sport for this group of teachers had generally been restricted to 'major team games'.

For example, Justin (8th year teacher) explained that he was 'very fortunate' because during his primary school days he 'did some gym and dance, movement classes, that kind of thing, but as you went up there was much more traditional sport'. Justin also related how the headmaster of his 'traditional boys grammar school' had considered school team success 'tremendously important' and had hired teachers of all subjects who could 'contribute' to improving school team 'standards'. Furthermore, he recalled that the head of the physical education department was 'a rugby man through and through' who concentrated on 'teaching skills'. For these reasons the school was 'outstanding in rugby' and recognized as 'a rugby school'. Justin also explained that he had 'enjoyed' being taught rugby, hockey, cricket, swimming, tennis, cross-country, and athletics during

curriculum time because he 'excelled'. However, his fondest memories were of being 'immersed in rugby' after school and captaining the First XV.

By contrast, although some innovative and eclectic teachers also experienced very traditional forms of physical education and extracurricular sport as pupils, others experienced relatively progressive programmes. For example, during their primary school years there appeared to be more of a balance between educational dance and gymnastics and traditional sport. At the secondary school level they were taught a much wider range of activities by teachers who were interested in the less able as well as the elite. During their senior years they were more likely to be permitted to choose which activities to pursue from a set of options. Finally, many of the schools attended by the innovative and eclectic teachers did not appear to emphasize school team performance to the same extent as those attended by conservative teachers. In addition, they were inclined to provide extracurricular 'clubs' for those pupils who wanted to participate in non-traditional and non-competitive forms of sport and physical activity.

ITE. Profoundly influenced by their own school and sport experiences, most preservice physical education teachers enter ITE courses with a conservative orientation towards the subject. Therefore, if they wish to change the *status quo*, teacher educators must challenge recruits' existing perspectives and beliefs (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Teacher educators' chances of achieving this objective are increased if they have an innovative orientation towards physical education themselves and, as noted earlier in this paper, if they agree on a shared technical culture and professional ideology (Graber, 1993; Lawson, 1983a, b). Conversely, teacher educators with a conservative orientation towards the subject who see current practice as unproblematic merely reinforce what the majority of preservice physical education teachers have learned prior to ITE. As Schempp & Graber (1992) noted:

In the absence of a vigorous dialectic in teacher education, little is likely to change. Only when recruits encounter teacher educators with alternative orientations is a dialectic likely to emerge and enable change to take place. (p. 336)

In congruence with the results of most previous research (Lawson, 1983a, b), data from the present study suggested that little occurred in ITE which changed the teachers' perspectives and beliefs. The ITE courses which had been followed by all but the most recently qualified teachers generally appeared to promote a conservative orientation to the subject. Typically, the pedagogical components of these courses were taught by 'traditionalists' who had been or still were 'major games players' themselves. Therefore, not surprisingly, the focus of this pedagogical coursework was on teaching preservice teachers to perform and teach a fairly narrow range of 'traditional sports'. In addition, and again not surprisingly, school sites selected for early field experiences and teaching practice were often described as 'traditional' as were the cooperating teachers responsible for supervising preservice physical education teachers at these sites.

By contrast, some of the more recently qualified teachers indicated that their ITE courses had been relatively innovative. For example, several of these teachers stated that they had been specifically 'trained' to 'deliver' NCPE and taught to teach content from 'the six areas of activity' included in the new curriculum. They also explained that they were encouraged to use 'different teaching styles' and to take an 'understanding approach' when teaching games. Typical of the comments made by this group of younger teachers were the following:

We arrived [at college] when it [NCPE] was all starting. We are in a better position than the people who came before us. (Laura, 3rd year teacher)

We did a lot because obviously we had just got there [college] when it [NCPE] started to go through. We discussed the three attainment targets and things like that. (Amanda, 1st year teacher)

Unfortunately, data from the study suggested that these relatively innovative ITE courses influenced and inducted only those teachers who entered them with a relatively innovative orientation towards physical education in the first place. Conversely, based on their interpretations of NCPE, those who entered these courses with a conservative orientation towards the subject appeared not to have been influenced at all.

Other teachers. Teachers' interpretations of NCPE were also influenced by those of their colleagues. In four of the schools involved in the study, the teachers comprising the physical education department had similar opinions about the new curriculum. These shared reactions appeared to strengthen and solidify individual teachers' interpretations of NCPE. For example, Alan (10th year teacher) appeared to gain confidence about his own conservative interpretation because it was congruent with those of his colleagues. When asked about his reactions to NCPE, as well as expressing his own beliefs, he was quick to point out that his department head was 'a rugby man' and that he worked with 'two other traditionalists' who were also 'not very enthusiastic' about the earliest NCPE texts.

In the other four school physical education departments involved in the study, teachers had competing interpretations of NCPE. In these cases the beliefs of the department head and more experienced teachers usually dictated the type of programme that was actually taught. Less experienced teachers who disagreed with the prevailing interpretation of NCPE in these schools employed what Lacey (1977) called the adjustment mechanism of 'strategic compliance' and what Lawson (1983a,b) referred to as 'impression management'. This involved publicly expressing support for the views of their department heads and/or senior colleagues while, during the privacy of their own lessons and when they could not be discovered, employing pedagogies that were congruent with their own interpretations of the new curriculum.

Invariably, younger teachers who were forced to use these coping strategies were innovative while their department heads and senior members of their department were conservative. Moreover, the socialization tactics (Lawson, 1983b; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) in operation in each of these schools were fairly restrictive. For example, Amanda, an innovative first-year teacher who passionately believed that schools should be delivering NCPE in line with the original policy texts, worked with four very experienced conservative teachers one of whom was her department head. In Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) terms although her socialization was random and informal it was also collective (i.e. with another less experienced conservative teacher), serial (i.e. she was mentored by all four senior teachers in the department), and involved divestiture, tactics which forced her to keep her true beliefs about NCPE to herself.

Situational constraints. During the course of the study it became clear that there were a number of situational constraints (Hargreaves, 1984; Sparkes, 1986, 1991a) which limited the ability of teachers to implement NCPE in congruence with the early and more innovative policy texts even if they wished to. Specifically, teachers were hampered by the pace of change which was occurring in their schools, the lack of curriculum time

allocated for physical education, the lack of facilities available, their lack of procedural competence (Sparkes, 1991b), and their perceptions regarding accountability.

Following the completion of his own research of the influence of the National Curriculum in general, Silvernail (1996) observed that 'the pace of change has been hectic. ... The sheer number of changes and false starts have created havoc for teachers' (p. 49). Teachers in the present study also complained about the number of changes with which they had to deal and the pace at which these changes were being introduced. Moreover, several teachers who were initially very positive about NCPE stated that they were no longer prepared to implement the latest requirements because they would almost certainly be changed again. Typical of this kind of response was the following:

They keep moving the goal posts. ... This education minister has been in for a couple of years and the government is struggling so either they'll change the minister [they did] or there will be another government in soon [there was] and they'll do something new [they are]. (George, 4th year teacher)

In similar fashion to the teachers studied by Evans & Penney (1993a,b), participants in the present study were very critical of the amount of time allocated for NCPE and remarks such as the following were common during interviews:

[There is] an awful lot being asked for in five areas of study. ... Two lessons in a week in years 8 and 9—there's just not the time to cover everything. But if the government had said, 'Right, PE's got 3 [lessons], history's got 3, geography's got 3', we would have been working seven and a half days a week [laughs]. There's just not enough time. Every department wants more time. (Bruce, 16th year teacher)

Some teachers also pointed out that the lack of time had led to the curriculum being 'diluted' or 'watered down' to the extent that they could not teach activities to the same level or 'depth' as they had done pre-NCPE.

In addition, other teachers noted that increased administration, 'paperwork', and demands of teaching their second subjects detracted from the time they devoted to physical education. Indeed, several of the more experienced teachers seemed to be suffering from what sociologists have termed 'role conflict' (Sage, 1987). While they had originally chosen their occupation because they enjoyed teaching physical activities, they now found that this part of their job was being sacrificed to what they considered to be peripheral duties. Sarah (16th year teacher) explained that she was so upset by this state of affairs that she was contemplating 'getting out of teaching'.

Many of the teachers were also of the opinion that the indoor facilities at their schools were inadequate and that consequently they were unable to teach certain activities properly. This problem was most acute during periods of inclement weather when there was not enough space to give all pupils adequate indoor instruction. In some cases the lack of indoor space had meant 'dropping activities' from the curriculum. For example, one school dropped gymnastics from the upper school programme because an indoor facility was not available during the time in which lessons were scheduled.

Data also indicated that teachers simply lacked the expertise needed to implement some aspects of NCPE. For example, like those studied by Penney & Harris (1998), many teachers in the present investigation openly stated that they did not have the content knowledge to teach outdoor and adventurous activities. In congruence with the sample studied by Evans & Penney (1993a), other teachers indicated that they were terribly 'unsure' about how they were supposed to evaluate their pupils and, by their own admission, were 'floundering' in their attempts to come up with a workable system:

We've had one go at it [pupil assessment] but we found we need to take a little bit more time. ... We all sat down and said what was important to us [pause] skill level, technique, working with others, understanding the environment, looking at the aesthetic side of PE, and two other areas. Anyway, we produced the document and every child was given a card but, in practice, we found it totally impossible. ... I am looking for help. I would still like to see how people assess in practical terms. (Bob, 14th year teacher)

Finally, perceptions about what they were being held accountable for appeared to play a part in how some teachers interpreted NCPE. The vast majority believed that they were only being held accountable for changing curriculum content, pupil evaluation procedures, and 'having your paperwork down to cover yourself'. In addition, a few teachers clearly felt that regardless of what they were required to do during curriculum time, they were primarily being held accountable for producing successful school teams by their headteachers, colleagues, parents, and the public. For example, Bill (21st year teacher) made it clear that he felt he was under some pressure to produce rugby teams that could 'compete' with the local private schools.

Conclusions

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this study was that, in general, the introduction of NCPE did not result in a transformation of the values and beliefs which guided teachers' practices. Teachers who interpreted NCPE conservatively, innovatively, or eclectically believed in these orientations prior to the introduction of the new curriculum. Using the definition provided by Sparkes (1991a), then, no real changes in pedagogy occurred. Instead, teachers recreated and adapted the new curriculum so that it was congruent with their existing perspectives and ideologies. In some cases this process involved them making what Sparkes (1991a) called superficial changes in their practices. In others it meant that teachers made no changes at all. These findings appear to be congruent with those of much of the previous research of NCPE (e.g. see Evans & Penney, 1993a; Laws & Aldridge, 1995; Penney & Harris, 1998).

A second important finding during the study was that teachers' pedagogical beliefs and values, and hence their interpretations of NCPE policy texts, appeared to be influenced by their occupational socialization. Although, as Lawson (1983a) cautions, 'socialization is always problematic not automatic' (p. 4), the most powerful influences on teachers' thinking and practice appeared to be their pre-ITE biographies and the cultures of the schools in which they worked. In contrast, ITE appeared to have relatively little impact on teachers' perspectives and practices. These findings are in agreement with previous research of and theoretical work on physical education teachers' occupational socialization (Lawson, 1983a,b; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Stroot, 1993).

As well as providing a description of teachers' interpretations of NCPE and identifying factors which influenced these interpretations, the study provides a number of clues as to how real and large-scale physical education curriculum change might be accomplished in the future. However, since this was a qualitative study involving one sample of teachers the following observations and suggestions are made very cautiously.

First, the study indicates that there is a need to avoid giving teachers the impression that there are competing interpretations of a new curriculum among the parties responsible for its initiation, design, and development. Second, it seems sensible that the accountability system employed ensures that teachers actually engage in new practices

given that this course of action may be a prerequisite to changes in their beliefs and values.

Third, it seems logical to suggest that ITE programmes need to be strengthened considerably. As pointed out by Schempp & Graber (1992) 'the current pattern of teacher recruitment predominantly attracts those who revere the present social structure of education and wish to function within that system' (p. 335). Therefore, this strengthening process should include recruiting/selecting preservice teachers whose pre-ITE socialization and life histories are compatible with the philosophy, goals, and pedagogies of any new curriculum. In addition, and as suggested by Schempp & Graber (1992), it is vital that teacher educators with innovative orientations be responsible for training teachers and that schools in which early field experiences and teaching practices take place are selected on the basis of their compatibility with the goals of ITE.

Finally, the results of the study suggest that more powerful and intensive forms of inservice training need to be provided for practicing physical education teachers. In line with the thoughts of Faucette (1987) and Evans & Penney (1994), the study's results also indicate that in order to be effective, top-down innovations need a high level of administrative support for teachers who have problems or questions. Specifically, more support needs to be given to teachers in terms of resources and the eradication of organizational and political situational constraints. Most importantly, neophyte teachers need to be mentored and protected from conservative elements within their schools which, left unchecked, may lead to their recently acquired perspectives and practices being washed out.

Correspondence: Dr. Matthew D. Curtner-Smith, College of Education, Program in Human Performance Studies, The University of Alabama, Box 870312, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0312, USA. Tel.: +(205) 348-9209; Fax: +(205) 348-0867; e-mail: {msmith@bamaed.ua.edu}.

Notes

- [1] For reports and discussion of this research see Evans & Penney (1992, 1993a,b, 1994, 1995a,b), Evans *et al.* (1993), Penney & Evans (1991, 1994), and Penney & Glover (1998).
- [2] For reports of this research see Smith *et al.* (1993), Curtner-Smith, Kerr, and Hencken (1995a, b, c), Curtner-Smith, Chen, and Kerr (1995), Curtner-Smith, Kerr, Kuesel, and Curtner-Smith (1995), Curtner-Smith, Kerr, and Clapp (1996), Curtner-Smith, Kerr, and Todorovich (1996), Curtner-Smith and Hasty (1997), and Curtner-Smith, Todorovich, Lacon, and Kerr (in press).
- [3] The names of all individuals in this paper are fictitious.

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