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A figurational analysis of Health and/or Physical Education teacher educators' conceptualisations of policy, and their sociogenesis

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ABSTRACT

Policy engagement is key to promoting 'quality' physical education yet it has been identified as a 'grand challenge' for Health and/or Physical Education (H/PE) internationally. All H/PE professionals, including teacher educators, have a collective responsibility to engage with policy but existing research tells us little about how H/PE teacher educators (H/PETEs) understand and engage with policy. It is important to examine H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy for a few reasons, not least because teacher educators play a crucial role in supporting future generations of teachers who themselves will need to engage with policy as a core feature of their professional lives. Drawing on figurational sociology, and the concept of assemblage, this paper offers insights into the nature and development – or sociogenesis – of teacher educators' conceptualisations of policy. The data shared in this paper was generated through semi-structured interviews with 12 H/PETE from 7 countries. Inductive-deductive analysis – drawing largely on figurational concepts such as interdependence, power, habitus and sociogenesis – revealed that H/PETEs conceptualised policy as: (i) informing intended action and change; (ii) a way to govern practice; (iii) imposition and possibility. In terms of how these conceptualisations came to be, key features of the H/PETE figuration that were identified as influential include: (i) interdependence with human and non-human elements; (ii) balances of power and (iii) social and individual habitus. It is concluded that capitalising on these elements through professional learning, for example, could support H/PETEs in engaging with policy in productive and meaningful ways. Given that engaging with policy is viewed as a collective responsibility of H/PETEs, and many – if not all – of the H/PETEs felt they needed support in this regard, this should be a key focus for the field.

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

Introduction

Policy engagement is key to promoting 'quality' physical education (UNESCO, 2015) yet it has been identified as a 'grand challenge' for Health and/or Physical Education (H/PE) internationally (MacPhail & Lawson, 2020). All H/PE professionals, including teacher educators, have a collective responsibility to engage with policy (Penney, 2017; van der Mars et al., 2021) but existing research tells us little about how H/PE teacher educators (H/PETEs) understand and engage with policy. It is important to examine H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy, not least because teacher educators play a crucial role in supporting future generations of teachers who themselves will need to engage with policy as a core feature of their professional lives.

Drawing largely on Elias (1978) conceptualisations of figuration, interdependence, power, habitus and 'We' and 'I' identities – and complemented by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage – this paper offers insights into the nature and development – or sociogenesis – of H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy and their sociogenesis. These insights are important because if those within the H/PE figuration can identify the different elements which shape and support teacher educators' conceptualisations of policy, we can better support them in their necessary policy engagement.

We begin by sharing a broad definition of policy, and emphasise that this is only one way of understanding policy. As co-authors, we align with the definition of policy as being 'any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definitions of values or the allocation of resources' (Olssen et al., 2012, p. 17). Policy can include big 'C' and little 'c' curriculum, teacher standards and other policies, strategies or guidelines that are developed across various sites of activity within and beyond education systems internationally (Priestley et al., 2021). Whilst it is important to share a working definition of policy to provide a focus for the study, this paper ultimately centres H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy, and these are shared in the second half of the paper.

As inferred, there is little scholarship pertaining to H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy, though there is a small and growing body of work written by H/PETEs that places direct focus on policy discourse (e.g. Aldous et al., 2022), teachers' engagement with policy (e.g. MacLean et al., 2015) and/or their own engagement with policy. One project involving four H/PETEs from Australia, for example, was a case study investigation of their policy enactment (Lambert & O'Connor, 2018; Lambert & Penney, 2020; Lambert et al., 2021). At the time, the four H/PETEs were teaching on a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Education (HPE) course preparing teachers to teach primary and/or secondary HPE in Victoria, Australia. In the first paper, Lambert and O'Connor (2018) examined how the four H/PETEs responded when multiple policies (including curriculum) and discourses, originating from within (e.g. new university teaching and learning strategy) and beyond (e.g. new National/State curriculum) their university, 'collided'. Like many researchers focusing on policy in H/PE, they drew on Ball et al.'s (2011) policy actor typology to provide insight into the roles and actions of policy actors who were both constrained and enabled by policies. This typology highlights that teachers can adopt different 'positions' in relation to policy over time, and it reinforces that whilst some teachers are 'receivers' within the policy process, many advocate, create, resist and invest in policy in different ways (Ball et al. 2011). Lambert and O'Connor (2018) concluded that Ball et al.'s (2011) typology is a 'valid method' for both analysing and theorising the policy work of educators who are enacting multiple policies. In support of previous research, they also highlighted the tendency for the roles and actions of policy actors to fluctuate over time (Ball et al., 2011), especially at the more active ends of the typology (i.e. narrator, enthusiast, entrepreneur, translator and transactor). Lambert and O'Connor (2018) suggest that teacher educators, and policy actors more broadly, who are already engaged, interested and inspired by curriculum policy are more likely to enact policy in innovative ways. They also offer the following for educators/teacher educators in developing their engagement with policy.

1. Say yes to opportunities to engage with policy;

2. Accept that policy enactment might be uncomfortable, but remain optimistic;
3. Embrace the complexity of policy and its enactment;
4. Seek new ways to think, talk about and do policy;
5. Work with policy collectively in a focused and cohesive way that has at its heart a sense of belonging, vision and purpose.

The second paper was authored by Lambert and Penney (2020) and this paper served to make curriculum interpretation a more transparent, collaborative and generative process. It also highlighted and detailed the crucial role that teacher educators, as policy actors, can play in the enactment of new curricula. The third and final paper from the aforementioned project – Lambert et al. (2021) – examined the production and dissemination of policy artefacts by H/PETE's. Lambert et al. (2021) drew on earlier work of Penney (2013, p.192) to highlight that curriculum text is 'a text with gaps to be filled amidst enactment, through the collective input of various professional voices and via the strategic production and dissemination of various artefacts' (e.g. curriculum documents, textbooks, on-line resources, lesson plans). Lambert et al. (2021) reported and analysed the production and reproduction of a specific set of artefacts, a set of cards designed to support the enactment of the 'Five Propositions' of the ACHPE in universities and schools. This paper argued that artefacts can be strategically significant for H/PETEs, teachers and others invested in new policy and curriculum developments. Indeed, they propose that artefacts have important 'performative policy potential' and can play a pivotal role in supporting and shaping curriculum policy enactment (Lambert et al., p.258).

A Welsh study led by Aldous et al. (2022) explored secondary H/PETE professionals' negotiations and implementation of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) Health and Well-Being Area of Learning and Experience (HWB-AoLE) and associated policies related to the ongoing transformation of H/PETE. As with Lambert and O'Connor (2018) and others, analysis of the data drew upon Ball et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation of policy actors and contexts to critically examine the policy positions participants adopted in navigating and negotiating enactment of the HWB AoLE in their transformation of H/PETE provision. In relation to the focus of this paper, the work of Aldous et al. (2022) highlighted how participants engagement in the research enabled reflection on the challenges related to the complex implementation of new policy. Rather than merely constraining policy positions, the work of Aldous et al. (2022) highlights how this engagement supported what they term 'sophisticated policy work'. This consisted of beginning to recognise how cultural and institutional histories of H/PETE influence the ongoing negotiation, interpretation and translation of the Curriculum for Wales within H/PETE. This reflects the work of Lambert and Penney (2020) whose work also highlights how supporting teacher educators engagement in productive debate generates possible meanings around the possibilities of curriculum.

Looking more broadly, Scanlon et al. (2023) explored the influence of complex policy perspectives (over traditional policy perspectives) on policy engagement possibilities. They drew on Diem et al.'s (2014) conceptualisations of traditional (i.e. a rational, scientific approach that assumes effective change) and complex (i.e. an approach which views construction and enactment of policy through complex systems) policy perspectives. Scanlon et al. (2023) shed light on how engaging in complex policy perspectives may encourage practical considerations for teacher educators. For example, the authors suggest 'policy work outside the teacher education 'silo' can challenge the traditional policy process assumptions one might become reliant on if not exposed to other spaces and associated complexities' (p. 8). Broadening the role of teacher educator across policy spaces (e.g. through a boundary spanner approach) can heed to Scanlon et al.'s suggestion.

This paper offers a meaningful contribution to the scholarship in that it highlights the significance of understanding conceptualisations of policy, and their role in the enactment of policy within context. To further explore the process of conceptualisation we draw upon Elias' use of figurational sociology (1978) and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage to analyse the sociogenesis of H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy. This is important to do if we are to better understand

and support them and other H/PE stakeholders in necessary and meaningful policy engagement. The conceptual position of the paper enables us to respond to the following questions: (i) How do H/PE teacher educators' (H/PETEs) conceptualise policy? and (ii) *how* have these conceptualisations come to be? The answers to these questions will be of particular interest to H/PETEs and those who are tasked with supporting them in their work. In what follows, we offer further insight into our use of figurational sociology and the concept of assemblage.

Theoretical framing

Elias (1970) developed Figurational Sociology – sometimes referred to as Process Sociology – in which the central concept of 'figuration' is used to describe the inescapable and complex nature of human interdependencies. From this perspective, a figuration is a network of interdependencies formed by mutually orientated individuals (Elias, 1970). As outlined by van Krieken (1998), the guiding principles of figurational sociology are: (a) social life comprises unintended consequences of intentional human actions formed through figurations (e.g. policy is designed with particular intentions but through processes of interpretation, translation and enactment, unintended consequences of such 'intentional' policy play out in practice in a range of ways due to interactive and interconnected human action); (b) human beings are understood as always and to varying degrees interdependent, and a part of figurations with each other (e.g. teachers, teacher educators and curriculum writers are all enmeshed in the H/PETE figuration); (c) sociologists should be concerned with dynamic processes of development and change (sociogenesis) rather than static states (e.g. how we understand and engage with policy will continue to evolve over time, and are influenced by wider social processes such as curriculum renewal) and (d) power always in flux, and is an inherent component of all social interdependencies (i.e. ever-shifting power balances will influence how H/PETEs engage with particular policies, or not). In this paper, a figurational perspective is used to make sense of the ways in which H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy are evolving.

For Elias (1970), the dynamics of figurations – such as the international H/PE figuration – are influenced by shared social habitus that may be shared to varying degrees by individuals (e.g. teacher educators) positioned in particular figurations (e.g. H/PETE figuration). Social and individual habitus are functions of interdependence, and refer to relatively durable dispositions that influence action/s throughout a particular domain of life (van Krieken, 1998). For example, valuing embodied learning is a characteristic of the shared social habitus of H/PETEs from around the world. Individual habitus, which is constructed and developed through one's figuration, and operates as a 'second nature' influencing all human action (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). Moore (2010) suggests that habitus has a 'material reality' as it is produced through our practices and interdependent relationships. Social habitus is based on shared experiences, understandings, positions and practices of a group. Elias (1991, p. 182) referred to social habitus as 'the soil from which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from others members of … society'. Therefore, individual habitus can only ever be understood in relation to social habitus. Individual and shared habitus are used in this research as means to understand the historically-rooted process of H/PETEs becoming teacher educators (individual habitus) and a 'member' of their profession (social habitus). This can be connected to another of Elias's concepts, 'I' and 'We' identities. Using pronouns (e.g. 'I', 'We', 'They'), Elias (1970) argues how we can only develop our 'I' (self) identity in relation to our network of interdependent relationships ('We' and 'They'). The personal pronoun model is used in this research to provide insight into the ways in which H/PETEs conceptualise policy in different ways depending on the identity they are aligning with at any one time.

Whilst figurational sociology provides an overarching framework for this study, the rhizomatic concept of 'assemblage' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) supported us in both acknowledging non-human influences, and categorising the influence more broadly. An assemblage is an 'aggregate of elements, both human and non-human, that function collectively in a contextual unique

manner to produce something (e.g. teaching practice, a situated identity)' (Strom & Martin, 2017, p. 7). Clarke's (2003) categorising work assists in understanding the different elements of an assemblage – i.e. human elements (e.g. teacher educator), non-human elements (e.g. books – tangible) and non-tangible elements (e.g. frustration – no physical existence).

It is also important to note how categorising elements may give the impression that they are neatly siloed; this is not the case. All elements overlap, negotiate and interrelate in an assemblage. For example, a book (non-human element) is written by a person (human element) as a result of a situation involving, for example, motivation (non-tangible element) – all of these interacting and negotiating elements produced a certain situation. Returning to figurational sociology, and in particular a figuration, Scanlon et al. (2020) argued that locating teacher (educators)

> 'in their web of interdependent relationships … gives us insight into their actions with other human elements (and the influence of such interdependent relationships). The figuration operates within a teacher assemblage which allows us to explore the interaction and negotiations between human, non-human, and non-tangible elements … rhizomatic understanding pushes the boundaries of figurational sociology … figurational sociology provides this added (complex) dimension to human elements and their interaction and negotiation with other non-human and non-tangible elements in a teacher assemblage'.

Following this train of thought, while figurational sociology focuses on the 'who' (interdependent relationships – human elements), Scanlon et al. (2022) encourages to also consider the 'what' (non-human elements and non-tangible elements) in a figuration-assemblage. This can provide a deeper exploration of peoples' understandings and actions. It is important to note how Elias discussed emotions such as frustration and disgust in relation to his work on the civilising process and, therefore, acknowledged the role of non-tangible elements. Non-human elements seem to be the missing component in Elias's figuration. An assemblage also allows us to explore the negotiations between different elements and how such negotiations co-produce a certain situation. To understand the co-produced situation, each element needs to be acknowledged and by categorising the elements into human, non-human and non-tangible elements (in no hierarchical priority) allows us to delve deeper into the operations of production. While the concept of figuration provides a theoretical lens through which to analyse the interdependent relationships between human elements (and arguably, non-human elements such as emotions), an assemblage allows us to analysis all elements (human, non-human and non-tangible) to provide a deeper exploration into certain situations.

Viewed through a figurational lens, how H/PETEs concpetualise and engage with policy is a consequence of a historically-rooted interplay of interdependent people, processes and power balances which have served to impact the sociogenesis of how policy is understood and experienced within the H/PE figuration, and the H/PETE figuration in particular. Given that the authors themselves are a part of the H/PETE figuration, it was deemed important to share a little detail pertaining to the collective positionality of the authors.

Positionality

We acknowledge that author positionality is an important way that research can be better understood (Charmaz, 2014). The research team who co-conceptualised this research comprised curriculum writers, researchers, teacher educators and school teachers (who have since gone on to become tertiary educators). The team have worked in multiple countries (Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Wales), and each have/had different policy experiences and interests. For example, some of us have spent more time enacting policy in schools and universities, others in researching policy in academic spaces, others in developing policy for government and other organisations. Since 2021 we have regularly connected as a community of learners, with a common aim of supporting ourselves and other H/PE professionals in policy engagement, to enhance H/PE outcomes for young people. Given that this paper is informed by figurational sociology, it would be remiss of us not to

acknowledge that our collective positionality as researchers interested in policy and policy work means that we approached this research from a value-laden perspective. As such, we have continually and intentionally engaged in ongoing process of 'detour via detachment' (Elias, 1956) as a way of attempting to minimise the limitations that can accompany value-laden approaches to research. Such detours involved being circumspect about how H/PETEs view policy engagement as part of their work, and the value of exploring how H/PETEs conceptualise policy, and how those conceptualisations came to be. Drawing on relevant literature and talking to colleagues helped us in this regard. Ultimately, following a number of 'detours' we were confident that this research was a worthy pursuit, as evidenced by the number of H/PETEs willing to participate in the research. The methods used are now outlined.

Methods

Following ethical approval, recruitment of the H/PETEs took place via the social media platform 'X', and through professional associations (e.g. Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Physical and Health Education Canada). Teacher educators ($n = 12$) responded voluntarily to the call for participants. They completed an online survey, and in response to the final question agreed to be interviewed to capture more detailed insights into their engagement with policy within their professional experiences. Participants engaged in a 1:1 online, semi-structured interview. Attempts were made to capture a range of voices and professional experiences across H/PETE, though only 12 participants from 7 countries in the Global North participated. As such the sample represented H/PETEs from seven countries (see Table 1). Twelve interviews – one with each participant – were conducted by the research team via Zoom and ranged from 60 to 90 min. The interviews were 1:1 and were carried out by all authors.

The survey responses informed the interview schedule to some extent with responses to questions about how policy was understood being drawn on in the interview. That said, the interviews had a slightly different purpose (i.e. rich data about the processes through which policy conceptualisations came to be) and focus (i.e. less about how policy features in H/PETEs teaching, and more about policy within the H/PETE figuration). The interview asked questions such as 'How do you think about and understand policy?', 'How did you come to your current understanding of policy?' and 'In what ways do you view yourself as a policy worker, or not?'. The interviews were analysed by Laura and Dylan, with David offering guidance at times in NVivo which supported an inductive – deductive analysis (Charmaz, 2014) consisting of initial coding (inductive), focused coding (inductive) and theoretical coding (deductive). Initial coding was conducted through a combined line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding approach. This approach allowed the coding of implicit and explicit messaging, and codes represented the participants' words to keep in line with the inductive approach. The second phase was focused on coding. This involved combining the initial codes

Table 1. Participants, location and years of H/PETE experience.

Participant	Location	Years as a H/PETE
Adam	Canada	0–3
Archie	England	8–15
Albert	England	0–3
Beau	Australia	8–15
Connor	Australia	4–7
Catalina	Spain	4–7
Frankie	Ireland	24–30
Gerald	England	16–23
Reggie	USA	4–7
Rob	Wales	0–3
Sally	Australia	>31
Tom	Canada	8–15

and constructing sub-categories and categories. This was a more selective phase whereby author interpretation was introduced (as the coding process moved into a deductive space). The final phase of coding was theoretical coding. Following Charmaz's (2014) advice, we used figurational concepts (figuration, interdependence, power, habitus and 'We' and 'I' identities) as sensitising concepts. These sensitising concepts guided this phase of coding as we used these concepts to best explain the constructed data. It was important to not be tied to these concepts, but have an open mind (Charmaz, 2004) to other theoretical understandings which may further explain the constructed data. This occurred as assemblage was introduced which provided a deeper understanding of our constructed data.

Findings

We begin the findings section with insights into H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy, and their sociogenesis. Informed by that, our theoretical perpsectives, and further data analysis, we then present an H/PETE figuration (Figure 1) which highlights key elements found in the data, and which will be examined more deeply in the discussion.

Conceptualisations of policy within the H/PETE figuration

There were three main ways that H/PETE conceptualised policy: *Policy as informing intended action and change, Policy as a means to govern and shape behaviour and Policy as imposition and possibility.* These are now explained below.

    Policy as informing intended action and change – The participants suggested that 'policy is lots of different things' (Beau). That said, teacher educators commonly referred to policy as the means to inform intended action and change. When asked how they would define policy, Archie suggested that 'the key word at the heart of policy is change'. Similarly, Reggie and Fred commented respectively that, 'policy is the only way that you can actually make meaningful change on a larger level'; 'policy is important because it's a way to enact change … It's important if we want to enact

Figure 1. A network of the H/PETE figuration influencing conceptualisations of, and engagement with policy.

change that's contemporary.' Adding another dimension, Nathan referred to policy as 'a statement of intent, statements to how things should be'. In terms of whose intentions are being referred to here, Fred was more specific, suggesting that policy is 'a statement of a Government, an organisation, a party, a department, that position, their intent, and that their action'.

Policy as a means to govern and shape behaviour – Speaking of the Government, Beau felt as though policy is 'their attempt to kind of shape conduct from a distance in some kind of way'. The idea that policy is a means to govern and shape behaviour was communicated by a few of the teacher educators. Some, such as those just quoted, spoke in relatively broad terms but Fred, for example, was more specific about policy within the context of H/PE. He commented that

> policy shapes what we're trying to achieve within physical education and what we're trying to achieve shapes teaching behaviour, and also policy can shape the social cultural dynamics in which the teaching behaviour is in. So, for example, current education policy, based on cognitive science, shapes language, shapes what is considered success, shapes what good teaching is, and that affects everyone that you're working with. So understanding that policy is a constraint that shapes teaching practice is important.

Policy as imposition and possibility – The teacher educators generally referred to policy as important, and acknowledged that 'it is very much influenced by the context' (Frankie). Most felt that policy was 'imposed' on them but at the same Tom acknowledged arguably felt a sense of agency to interpret and enact policy in their context as they thought best. Fred, for example, stated that,

> most policy in education is imposed, from my perspective, particularly if you are a subject teacher or a teacher educator … but I guess we all have some flexibility about how we interpret it or enact it … there's always some level of flexibility and freedom within that.

Adam made a similar observation when he stated that 'there does need to be a level of interpretation, because policy doesn't necessarily respond to the very specific context that we are in' In summary, the HPETEs tended to view policy as informing intended action and change, and a means to govern and shape behaviour. It was often viewed as something that was imposed on them, but they simultaneously acknowledged their agency in how policies were engaged with and enacted.

Across the teacher educators, there was a trend in relation to how their conceptualisations of policy had shifted over time. A representative quote from Tom is below, who shared that,

> I would say my understanding of policy has changed over the last 5–10 years. Prior to that, I sort of saw policy as this thing over there. I saw it as the realm of government. I wasn't really sure what defined policy and what didn't. And that's changed. And so I have a more flexible view of it, I guess. Fluid. Not so cut and dried. I've come to see that a bit more holistically. I suppose it's more up to the stakeholder to decide what they do with it.

The data suggest that a range of processes influenced the teacher educators' conceptualisations of policy over time. Drawing on figurational sociology, the following section explores and examines the sociogenesis of H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy.

Sociogenesis of policy conceptualisations within the H/PETE figuration

Figure 1 presents the network of interdependent relationships – the H/PETE figuration – that the data suggest were influential upon the H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy.

This figure has been created deductively (i.e. the concept of a figuration) and inductively (i.e. populated by the data of this research). The 'teacher educator' at the centre of the figuration represents the participants of this study, and each hexagon around the teacher educator represents a group of interdependent people, for example, teacher educator colleagues. This web of interdependent relationships is connected, but some relationships are stronger than others; this is represented in Figure 1 by the shade of the multi-directional arrow (the darker the arrow, the stronger the relationship). As Green (2002) reminds us, some interdependent relationships are face-to-face (i.e. hexagons beside the teacher educator, e.g. PSTs) and others are non-face-to-face (i.e. hexagons further away from

the teacher educator, e.g. schools). While we acknowledge figures can be limiting, the hexagons in Figure 1 are left open to recognise how further interdependent relationships exist and are not captured here. With that in mind, Figure 1 captures the complexity of the situation and how multiple (recognised, unrecognised, face-to-face, non-face-to-face) interdependent relationships influence a teacher educators' conceptualisations of, and engagement with policy.

Accepting Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) invitation to 'experiment', we theoretically extend this Figure to include non-human (e.g. books and journal articles – denoted by the square box in Figure 1) and non-tangible (e.g. frustration and awareness – denoted by the bubble shape in Figure 1) elements alongside the human elements (i.e. interdependent relationships). Social and political processes are ever present in these figurations and are captured on the right – and left-hand side of Figure 1. As such, and noted in Figure 1, we can see the interacting human, non-human and non-tangible elements operating with the figuration which negotiate to co-produce a certain situation (in this case, conceptualisation/s of policy). Figure 1 captures the 'bigger picture' in explaining the 'why' of the 'what' (theme 1).

Features of the H/PETE figuration

We now share key features of the H/PETE figuration that were identified as shaping conceptualisations of policy, namely: (i) interdependence with human and non-human elements; (ii) balances of power and (iii) social and individual habitus.

Interdependence with human and non-human elements – Figure 1 presents a snapshot of the multiple interdependent relationships which exist in an H/PETEs figuration, and influence their conceptualisations and practices of policy. In questioning the H/PETEs on their conceptualisations of policy, and who and what informed their understandings, many of the teacher educators pointed to their colleagues as an enabling influence. For example, Tom discusses how one colleague influenced them in taking a different perspective of his role as a teacher educator as it relates to policy:

> Just sort of talking to her (colleague), and hearing her perspectives on it, which are far more educated and advanced than mine, and so, from hearing about how she viewed it [policy], and I guess how she viewed my role or our role as teacher educators in it, I started to take a very different perspective, where I began to see myself as a policy actor of sorts.

Another common and strong interdependent relationship was between the teacher educators and their own pre-service teachers (PSTs), as illustrated by the darker shade multi-directional arrow in Figure 1. Adam reflects how his PSTs extended and enriched his understanding through questioning:

> I would say that I came to the understanding that policy is important through my experiences, especially teaching at the University, because, like one of the greatest things about being a teacher [educator], is that you always have your students asking you why? Like, why do we need to do this? Why do we need to learn this?

As intimated above, the findings also suggested that non-face-to-face relationships (i.e. interdependent relationships which are influential but are not in direct interaction on a regular basis, Green, 2002) also influenced the H/PETEs conceptualisation and enactment of policy. For example, in the following quote, Beau identifies schools, as a non-face-to-face interdependent relationship for him. While Beau may not interact with schools on a regular basis, and therefore may not have a 'strong' face-to-face interdependent relationship (as indicated by the distance of the hexagon to the teacher educator in Figure 1), schools have still influenced his conceptualisations of, and engagement with policy, 'From an academic point of view, the work has been more about what's happening within schools as opposed to what's happening within teacher education'. In looking at the reported non-human elements, the teacher educators often discussed how books, journal articles and curriculum policies influenced, and continue to influence, their conceptualisation. For example, Connor shared that he developed his understanding of policy through 'a lot of reading about how policy is

developed and implemented … reading and trying to understand the history and journey of the Australian curriculum'.

Other teacher educators alluded to the complexity of interacting policies and the influence such non-human elements can have on the teachers' ability to teach:

> They [PSTs] probably need to understand that getting through their lessons and doing that well is in part influenced and shaped by government policy, by local policy, by school policy, by department policy, and being aware of that can help them make better judgments and decisions within their teaching. (Fred)

In looking at a teacher educator's figuration (Figure 1) as an assemblage, we can map the different interacting human, non-human and non-tangible elements which co-produce a certain situation, in this case, coming to a particular conceptualisation of policy. We take an extract from Reggie's data to map such co-production, and identify what enabled his changing perspective on policy:

> Policy was definitely an afterthought for me for a very long time. I understood that it was probably something that I'd have to pay attention to at some point, but it wasn't something that was impacting me on the day to day, and that I felt that I couldn't necessarily change … I was [then] asked to write a chapter for a colleague and it was on policy in [country] and I asked this colleague, 'Are you sure you want me to write that? Have you looked at my [CV]? I have zero published papers on policy, and I have no idea what I'm doing!' And they were like, 'We want you to be a part of this … This is where you fit in, you don't know much about policy, but you have time to read up on it'. And I like a good opportunity … So I just dove into the literature and started reading a lot and understanding what policy is, and what advocacy is, and what / how it works in [country], and what we know.

For Reggie, being prompted to engage with policy scholarship raised his consciousness in relation to limited offerings in his country. Once he realised this, he

> started kind of being aware of the conversation that people are having in journals and saying that nobody does policy work in [country]. And then I was screaming, 'Nobody does policy work in [country]?!?', and they're like, 'Yeah, welcome to the club'. And so through writing that paper, that's where I learned the most by far was from that … like your papers about how teachers process policy and how they enact it, and I kind of changed my mind into thinking that it [policy] was more. I guess, more of a living document.

We can see from this extract that Reggie (human element) shifted from a more traditional perspective on policy (i.e. something that he could not change – a top-down perspective) to a more complex perspective on policy (i.e. a processual viewpoint on policy – 'a living document'). Taking a figurational-assemblage viewpoint on this, we can see how he shifted from a traditional understanding of policy (non-human element) as something static through the influence of a colleague (human element) inviting him to co-write a book chapter (non-human element). Further, despite his initial lack of self-belief (non-tangible element), through reading literature (non-human element) and conversations with others (human element), he became frustrated (non-tangible element) with the policy discourse. Policy research (human and non-human elements) increased his awareness (non-tangible element) of the possibilities of policy which shifted his perspective to a more complex position on policy.

While Reggie pointed to the influence of a colleague in his shift in perspective, it was the combination of elements (human, non-human and non-tangible) in his figuration which co-produced this shift. To emphasise a point made in the early part of this paper, while categorising these elements is useful for analytical purposes, they are not standalone elements, they combine, interact and co-produce a situation (Scanlon et al., 2022). For example, a curriculum policy (non-human element) is written by policymakers (human elements) which becomes a teaching and learning experience for teacher/s (educators) and students (PSTs) (human element/non-human element/non-tangible element). We show here how we are pushing the theoretical boundaries of figurational sociology and rhizomatic understanding to demonstrate the complexity of co-producing conceptualisations of policy which are encouraged and constrained by human, non-human and non-tangible elements within (and beyond) a teacher educator's figuration.

Power relations within the H/PETE Figuration as it relates to policy – The data suggest that policy enactment is shaped by disparate power relations within the figuration. For the most part, the

H/PETE's did not feel they were able to inform the development of policy (e.g. by working with curriculum writers or officers). Connor, for example, felt 'like policies get developed from the top and administered from the top but I think probably the best policies would take into account both high-level thinking but kind of grassroots efforts as well'. Whilst spaces for agency and influence were sometimes identified, there was a collective sense that policy was a top-down process. Taking this sentiment further, Beau commented that 'We can't overlook or underestimate the extent to which we in teacher education are preparing professionals for the institution of schooling, which is so thoroughly an instrument of the State.' Some of the teacher educators suggested that whilst they sometimes felt they are at the mercy of the State, organisations and/or institutions, they are simultaneously identifying opportunities for greater agency related to policy. For example, Catalina stated that.

> We just have to follow the rules … I'm just receiving the policies of others, and I create the way to implement that. But I'm not creating or trying to create new policies, and I think that I'm not doing that because I don't have the tools to do that. I don't know how to start my own policy work.

This quote illustrates the processual nature of engaging with policy, whereby Catalina seems to feel like a relatively passive recipient of policy, but at the same time is acknowledging her agency regarding the 'implementation' of policy. Following a similar line of contraction, Catalina is suggesting that she does not have the tools to do 'policy work', but also highlighting that she creates 'the way to implement' policy, or as Ball et al.'s (2011) would say, *enact* policy. What these contradictions might suggest is that through reflecting on her own experience, Catalina has a particular conceptualisation of what is and isn't policy work. She considered the development of policy as 'policy work' but did not necessarily view policy implementation (enactment) as policy work.

As we alluded to above, the findings demonstrate how, depending on their position of power, the teacher educators' felt simultaneously constrained and enabled in terms of opportunities to engage with policy that went beyond their localised context (e.g. their curriculum). Most felt that policy was 'imposed' on them but at the same time acknowledged that they had a particular type of agency to interpret and enact policy in their context, as they thought best. As mentioned earlier, Fred, for example, felt that 'Most policy in education is imposed' (constrained) yet he acknowledged that 'we all have some flexibility about how we interpret it or enact it' (enabled).

Also linked to the notion of power, some of the H/PETE also felt that there was inequity in terms of whose 'voices' were most likely to influence policy development. Frankie, for example, stated that 'I think certain voices have probably been very dominant. And when I say that I think more than anything in terms of the whole emphasis on obesity and mental health'. The data also suggested that policy development was something that H/PETEs had to be 'invited' to participate in. This might be explained, at least in part, by the ways in which H/PETEs felt that policy was a feature of their social and/or individual habitus (or not).

Social and Individual Habitus of H/PETEs as it relates to policy From a figurational perspective, an exploration of habitus should ideally be traced longitudinally over time. Whilst the methodology of this research did not allow for that, the participating H/PETEs were asked to consider how and why policy had been a feature of their professional lives over time, or not. The responses of the teacher educators participating in this study suggested that policy was a strong feature of H/PETEs social habitus. For example, Archie shared a representative comment in saying 'we're all policy actors', suggesting that engaging with policy is an inextricable, habitual component of teacher educator practice. The findings reflected an interesting tension between the ways in which policy was seen as a feature of teacher educators' social habitus ('we' identity) but rarely a clear feature of their individual habitus ('I' identity). Even when policy was seen as a feature of teacher educators' professional 'I' identity, their thoughts were usually in flux. For example, when asked if they viewed themselves as a policy actor, Reggie stated that,

> I don't know if I view myself as a policy actor, I guess, based on giving feedback on the state standards, even though I don't want to waste my time doing it. … So I do take part in that. There's definitely more that I

could do. But I would say that yes, although with a cold question without being in an interview, I probably wouldn't agree that I'm a policy actor. But as I think about it, and I think about the definitions, then I would say, 'Yes.'.

As illustrated, Reggie was at first unsure if he viewed himself as a policy actor, despite sharing evidence of specific incidences of policy engagement. After further consideration, he said 'yes' but added the caveat that if he was asked outside of an interview situation he probably would not identify as a policy actor. This quote suggests that at least some teacher educators are in a liminal space of policy translation, oscillating between viewing themselves as a policy actor and not ('I' identity), despite a clear, collective commitment to policy ('we' identity).

Discussion and concluding comments

It is important to examine H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy for a few reasons, not least because teacher educators play a crucial role in supporting future generations of teachers who themselves will need to engage with policy as a core feature of their professional lives. This policy engagement, UNESCO (2015) argues, is key to enhancing the quality of H/PE. As such, this paper responds to the following questions: (i) how do H/PETEs conceptualise policy? and (ii) how have these conceptualisations come to be? In terms of the first research question, the data suggest that H/PETEs tended to view policy as informing intended *action* and *change*. This perspective aligns with part of the aforementioned definition provided by Olssen et al. (2012, p. 17) whereby policy is 'any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals'. A smaller number of the H/PETEs offered more traditional and post-structural-inspired responses that felt that policy was primarily a means to *govern* and *shape* behaviour. Acknowledging that some teacher educators share this perception is important because if policy is primarily viewed by H/PETEs as an instrument of the State, this will likely impact the ways in which they engage with policy. For example, the data suggested that H/PETEs who viewed policy in a traditional sense (Diem & Young, 2015) felt that policy was imposed on them, and not something they were in a position to contribute to. As such, the H/PETEs who understood policy from a largely traditional perspective felt they were only able to engage with policy in limited ways. Some H/PETEs appeared to be simultaneously adopting more traditional and more complex perspectives on policy (Diem & Young, 2015). What the data suggest, therefore, is that the H/PETEs were conceptualising policy in different and sometimes contradictory ways, thus suggesting that their understandings around policy were still forming, and probably always will be. This finding supports the work of scholars such as Lambert and O'Connor (2018) who highlighted how H/PETEs conceptualisations of, and engagement with policy fluctuate over time.

To answer the second research question, figurational sociology helped to extrapolate the elements of the H/PETE figuration that the teacher educators felt had influenced their conceptualisations of policy over time. The work of Elias helped us identify and explore the multiple recognised (e.g. teacher education colleagues), unrecognised (e.g. schools), face-to-face (e.g. pre-service teachers), non-face-to-face (e.g. policy makers), interdependent relationships of varying strengths that had influenced the HPETEs conceptualisations of and engagement with policy. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we were also able to decipher the non-human (e.g. books and journal articles) elements alongside the human (i.e. interdependent relationships) and non-tangible (e.g. frustration) elements. It is important to highlight here that, true to figurational tradition, humans as social beings are very much at the centre of this analysis. Whilst it could be argued that some 'non-human' elements of the H/PETE figuration would not exist without humans (e.g. policy itself), categorising them can allow for a deeper analysis of the 'situation', highlighting the connections and negotiations between 'things' (human, non-human and non-tangible), and emphasising the complexity of situations in which people exist (Clarke, 2003). This perspective is important to this research in that it enables us to more deeply understand the complexity involved in the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of teacher educators' engagement with policy.

The deductive analysis suggested that the three key elements of the H/PE figuration that most impacted the teacher educators' conceptualisations and engagement with policy included: (i) *interdependence* with relevant human, non-human, tangible and non-tangible elements of the H/PETE figuration; (ii) shifting balances of *power* between groups of people enmeshed the H/PETE figuration; and (iii) dissonance between the H/PETEs social ('we' identity) and individual ('I' identity) *habitus* as they related to policy. In terms of the latter, Elias (1991, p. 182) suggested that individual habitus can only ever be understood in relation to social habitus. Linking back to the two remaining elements mentioned above – interdependence and power – this dissonance between the H/PETEs 'we' and 'I' identities can be explained, at least in part, by the less powerful positions that many of the teacher educators felt they occupied in relation to the development of policy in particular. In response, some of the teacher educators had begun to strengthen their interdependent relationships with other human elements (e.g. teacher education colleagues) and non-human elements (e.g. books and journal articles) to support them in their conceptualising of and engagement with policy. The influence of non-human elements reinforces the work of Lambert et al. (2021, p. 258) who argued that artefacts have important 'performative policy potential' and can play a pivotal role in supporting and shaping curriculum policy enactment.

Before offering some concluding thoughts, it is also important to identify some limitations to the study, in the hope that this may support the enhancement of future research. Firstly, we acknowledge that the participants self-selected themselves and thus, it is fair to assume, had some interest in policy as part of their work as H/PETEs. Interestingly, though, many did not view themselves as policy 'experts', 'workers' or 'actors'. Whilst the aim was to have an international study, all participants were from the Global North and spoke English as their first or second language. This, we acknowledge, limits the data and excludes other perspectives.

In conclusion, this paper has offered insight into and analysis of H/PETEs conceptualisations of policy, and how they came to be. The theoretical work of Elias, as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) informed an interrogation of the data in a way that allowed for an identification and categorisation of the key factors influencing H/PETE's engagement with policy. Elias (1970) argues how we can only develop our 'I' (self) identity in relation to our network of interdependent relationships ('We' and 'They'). Most of the H/PETEs felt that policy was a crucial part of their 'We' identity but not necessarily a prominent part of their 'I' identity, suggesting there is work to be done in this regard. For example, H/PETEs might benefit from being supported to engage with policy in productive and meaningful ways (e.g. draw on theory to inform self-reflexivity and future policy engagement). This, we argue, could also support a greater alignment between H/PETEs 'We' and 'I' identities, as they relate to policy engagement. The findings highlighted specific interdependencies with elements of the H/PETE figuration – human, non-human, tangible and non-tangible – that have proved to be influential in partly constraining and partly enabling teacher educators' engagement with policy. Given that engaging with policy is viewed as professional responsibility of H/PETEs (Penney, 2017), and many – if not all – of the H/PETEs felt they needed support in this regard, this should be a key focus for the field.

As our final note, the H/PETEs who participated in this study all felt that they required a formal 'invitation' to engage with policy, especially beyond the context of their classroom or university. If you are a teacher educator, please consider this your formal invitation to explore, embrace and engage with the complexity of policy and its enactment. Yes, we have a collective responsibility to engage with policy, but it is important to consider how this responsibility – at both 'we' and 'I' levels – is and could be nurtured by the H/PE figuration within which we are all enmeshed. Hopefully, this paper can inform and contribute to such nurturing within the H/PE figuration and beyond.

Disclosure statement

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