'Partnership is a daft concept': policy implementation and the role of the myth in Scottish education

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This paper emerges from a larger study that traced the development and implementation of a recent teacher education policy in Scotland, 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (TSF; Donaldson, 2011). Shortly after the publication of TSF, the Scottish Government set up a partnership model, the National Partnership Group (NPG) to refine and begin to implement a number of its recommendations. The membership of the NPG consisted of representatives from these key organisations, as well as a small number of individual teachers. This 'partnership' approach to policy-making is often celebrated as a long-standing feature of Scottish education and claims are often made about the democratic, inclusive, and participative nature of Scottish education policy processes. Although some researchers have hinted that there is a degree of 'mythology' associated with such claims (e.g. Menter & Hulme, 2011), there is very little research that examines this in any depth. This research therefore seeks to fill this gap, by investigating the participation of representatives within the policy process. This paper employs elements of actor-network theory (ANT) (Edwards, 2012), literature in the area of policy networks (Ball & Junemann, 2012) and theories of democratic network governance (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005) in order to examine the processes by which the NPG operated. The data used in this paper consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the NPG. Drawing on the perspectives of individuals central to the process, this paper highlights the complexity and subtly of the policy processes at work. The findings suggest that this 'partnership' approach worked to conceal a multitude of democratic problems, unequal power relations, and a conservative network culture that favoured the participation of some actors over others.

References

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