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Curriculum design

The new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework has thrust the curriculum into the spotlight. The intent, implementation and impact of what we teach are under scrutiny as inspectors look for a broad and balanced curriculum. **Matt Bromley** offers us a four-step plan for curriculum design and asks some key questions about what we teach...



A four-step plan for curriculum design

The school curriculum is a hot topic in England thanks in part to Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Ofsted implemented its new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) in September 2019, which places the quality of the curriculum at its heart (Ofsted, 2019).

As we all know by now, Ofsted defines the curriculum according to its intent, implementation and impact...

A new vocabulary for curriculum provision Intent

When inspecting intent, inspectors will evaluate whether the curriculum builds towards clear "end-points". In other words, they will want to see clear evidence of what pupils will be expected to know and do by each of these end-points, be they the end of a topic, module, year, key stage or phase of education.

Inspectors will also want to see evidence that the school's

curriculum is "planned and sequenced" so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before, and towards these end-points.

As well as being clearly sequenced and building towards clear end-points, Ofsted says that the curriculum should also "reflect the school's local context" by addressing typical gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.

The curriculum should "remain as broad as possible for as long as possible", too, and pupils should be afforded the opportunity to study a strong academic core of subjects.

Inspectors will want to see evidence that there are "high ambitions for all pupils" and will want to see that the school does not offer disadvantaged pupils or pupils with SEND a reduced curriculum.

There are several mentions of "cultural capital" in the schools inspection handbook (Ofsted, 2019). Ofsted says that inspectors will judge the extent to which schools are using the curriculum to

equip pupils with "the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life".

Ofsted's definition of this knowledge and cultural capital matches that found in the aims of the national curriculum: namely, that it is "the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement".

Implementation

Under curriculum implementation, inspectors will seek evidence of how the school curriculum is taught at subject and classroom level. They will want to see how teachers "enable pupils to understand key concepts, presenting information clearly and promoting appropriate discussion", how teachers check pupils' understanding effectively, identifying and correcting misunderstandings, and how teachers ensure that pupils embed

Impact

Under impact, Ofsted says that national assessments such as the key stage 2 SATs are useful indicators of the outcomes pupils in a school achieve, but that they only represent a sample of what pupils

have learned. As such, inspectors will balance these with their assessment of the standard of pupils' work from the first-hand evidence they gather on inspection.

Ofsted says that learning in schools must build towards a goal. As such, at each stage of pupils' education, from Reception through to year 6, they will want to see evidence that children are being prepared for the next stage of education – that they are "secondary-ready".

Further, they will want to see if the subject curriculum that classes follow is designed and delivered in a way that "allows pupils to transfer key knowledge to long-term memory" and is sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before and towards defined end-points. Inspectors will want to see evidence that teachers use assessment to check pupils' understanding, and they will evaluate how assessment is used in the school or college to support the teaching of the curriculum, but – crucially – not in a way that substantially increases teachers' workloads.

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Beyond Ofsted

Now that we have a good understanding of the Ofsted context, let me suggest four steps for curriculum design:

- 1 Agree the vision.
- 2 Set the destination.
- 3 Assess the starting points.
- 4 Identify the way-points.

I would add a fifth and sixth step to these four: define excellence and diminish disadvantage. However, given space limitations – and the fact I have recently focused on disadvantage and Pupil Premium practice in *Headteacher Update* (Bromley, 2019) – I will focus here on the first four steps...

Step 1: Agree the vision

Before we can embark upon the complicated process of curriculum design, we must first understand what a curriculum actually is. After all, you would not try to manufacture a widget without first knowing what a widget looks like, what it does, and how it works.

Professor Dylan Wiliam, in his SSAT pamphlet *Principled Curriculum Design* (2013), said: "In recent years in England, discussion of the school curriculum has been all but absent. This neglect has been largely driven by the adoption in 1988 of a national curriculum for schools in England and Wales. Many teachers, leaders and policy-makers assumed that because the government had specified what

schools were required to teach, then no further discussion of the issue of curriculum was necessary."

Prof Wiliam argues that this belief is mistaken for two reasons: "The first is that the legal framework of the national curriculum specified only what schools were legally required to teach – any school was entirely free to teach whatever it wished in addition to the prescribed national curriculum.

"The second is that the real curriculum – the lived daily experience of young people in classrooms – requires the creative input of teachers. For example, the national curriculum may require that students learn about negative numbers, but the kinds of analogy that a teacher might use to teach this topic (e.g. heights above and below sea level, temperatures above and below zero, positive and negative bank balances, and so on) must be chosen with an understanding of the students, their experiences, and a range of other contextual factors."

The real curriculum, then, is created by teachers, every day. In fact, the "real" curriculum consists of at least three distinct elements, of which the national curriculum is only one:

- 1 The national curriculum which is that prescribed by statute and consists of the core and foundation subjects.
- 2 The basic curriculum which describes the statutory requirements for curricular provision beyond the national curriculum, such as current legislation for the teaching of RE or the forthcoming requirements to teach relationships education from September 2020. These are compulsory requirements, but schools are able to determine for themselves the specific nature of this provision.
- 3 The local curriculum which is one that schools are free to adopt in order to complement the

national and basic curriculums with other curricular elements that are determined at school or community level. Often, these will reflect the individual nature of the school and its community.

Primary schools are highly effective at developing a local curriculum because they truly reflect their local communities and bring parents together. They work well with local organisations and institutions and provide plenty of opportunities for children to learn beyond the school gates and experience what their community has to offer.

For example, school projects often provide a means of exploring the local community; whether that be its history, geography or culture. Each primary school should, therefore, offer a unique curriculum grounded in its context. It should be clear upon entering a primary school where it is located, who it serves, and what makes it special.

The national curriculum

We can trace the evolution of the national curriculum in England back to a speech by Sir James Callaghan at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1976 (for a full text, see UKPOL, 2015). Certainly, this speech signalled the state's intention to assume a greater role in, not just funding and facilities, but deciding what was taught in its schools.

In his so-called 'Great Debate' speech, Callaghan argued that education should "equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both".

It took until the Education Reform Act of 1988 which led to the publication of the first national curriculum for Callaghan's dream to be realised.

The original national curriculum was a substantial document. Indeed, when it was first published, prime minister Margaret Thatcher

“School projects often provide a means of exploring the local community; whether that be its history, geography or culture”

famously decreed that she "never meant it to be this big". As such, each subsequent review of the national curriculum has seen the documents slimmed down and simplified.

The current version of the national curriculum (DfE, 2013) says that: "Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life."

Furthermore, the national curriculum provides pupils with "an introduction to the core knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement".

With this last sentence, the curriculum borrows from Matthew Arnold, who said that a good modern society can only come about when all of its citizens are educated in "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold, 1869).

The current primary national curriculum includes programmes of study for core and foundation subjects from key stages 1 to 2. Languages only become statutory from key stage 2.

It states: "Teachers should set high expectations for every pupil. They should plan stretching work for pupils whose attainment is significantly above the expected standard. They have an even greater obligation to plan lessons for pupils who have low levels of prior attainment or come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers should use appropriate assessment to set targets which are deliberately ambitious." (DfE, 2013).

The current primary national curriculum is much more challenging than the one it replaced with a heavier focus on the teaching of powerful knowledge. It sets out a vision for the development of numeracy and mathematics, and language and literacy that we must take into account.

Numeracy and literacy

On numeracy, the primary national curriculum states: "Teachers should use every relevant subject to

develop pupils' mathematical fluency. Confidence in numeracy and other mathematical skills is a precondition of success across the national curriculum.

"Teachers should develop pupils' numeracy and mathematical reasoning in all subjects so that they understand and appreciate the importance of mathematics."

On literacy, it adds: "Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject."

"English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects."

In developing spoken language in primary school, pupils should be taught to "speak clearly and convey ideas confidently".

It continues: "They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication."

In developing reading and writing, pupils should be taught to "read fluently, understand extended prose (both fiction and non-fiction) and be encouraged to read for pleasure".

It adds: "Schools should do everything to promote wider reading. They should provide library facilities and set ambitious expectations for reading at home. Pupils should develop the stamina and skills to write at length, with accurate spelling and punctuation. They should be taught the correct use of grammar."

And for vocabulary, primary school teachers should "increase pupils' store of words in general; they should also make links between known and new vocabulary and discuss the shades of meaning in similar words".

It adds: "It is particularly important to induct pupils into the language which defines each subject in its own right, such as accurate mathematical and scientific language."

The wider curriculum

Oates et al (DfE, 2011) argue that "education can be seen, at its

simplest, as the product of (an) interaction between socially valued knowledge and individual development. It occurs through learner experience of both ... key elements. The school curriculum structures these processes" (see also Oates, 2014).

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2000), meanwhile, offered a broader definition which included "everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned".

The unplanned parts of the curriculum are often referred to as the "hidden curriculum", a term first used by Phillip Jackson in 1968 in his book *Life In Classrooms*.

Jackson argued that what is taught in schools is more than just the formal curriculum and that schooling should be understood as a socialisation process whereby pupils receive messages through the experience of being in school, not just from what they are explicitly taught in lessons.

The hidden curriculum, therefore, includes learning from other pupils, and learning that arises from an accidental juxtaposition of the school's stated values and its actual practice.

When designing a school curriculum, therefore, we need to think carefully about all the ways in which children learn, not solely in structured class-time, but also in the space between classes – before school starts, at break and lunch times, and after school officially finishes – as well as in the behaviours and values of the adults working in the school.

As Dr John Dunford (2012) puts it: "The school curriculum is not only the subjects on the timetable; it is the whole experience of education."

The curriculum, therefore, can be found, not just in a policy statement, and certainly not just in the timetable or even in the national curriculum, but in the subjects we teach and how much

“The school curriculum is not only the subjects on the timetable; it is the whole experience of education”



time and weight we give to each subject discipline, in the links we make between subjects in project-based learning or topic-teaching, in the pedagogy and behaviours teachers and other adults use, in the space between lessons when children interact with each other, in approaches to managing behaviour, uniform, and attendance and punctuality, in assemblies, clubs and extra-curricular activities, and in the pastoral care and support offered to pupils.

In short, in the holistic experience every child is afforded in school.

The hidden curriculum is particularly important for young children who are always learning – consciously and subconsciously – from every adult around them

about how to behave, what to value, and what attitudes to adopt.

Children need good role models to show them how to interact with others, how to handle difficult situations, and how to respect others and their surroundings. Socialisation may seem innate, but it does not happen by accident; rather, it must be planned and explicitly taught in and out of the primary classroom.

Once you have clearly defined what is meant by the term "curriculum" in your school and how the national, basic, local and hidden curriculums will interact, the next step, I think, is to agree and articulate a clear and shared vision setting out what you think is important and what you regard as the purpose of education.

Broad and balanced

You need to articulate what your school interprets as being a broad and balanced curriculum. A broad and balanced curriculum is, at least to begin with, about ensuring children are prepared for the next stages of their education and lives – that they are developed holistically, and leave primary school skilled and knowledgeable students ready for secondary school, as well as well-rounded, healthy and active citizens of the world. But what else?

The 2002 Education Act requires schools to provide a "balanced and broadly based curriculum" – a phrase echoed in the national curriculum – which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils

at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The regulatory standards for independent schools (DfE, 2016) provide a useful way of thinking about breadth. The standards require schools to provide a curriculum that gives pupils experience in the following areas: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative, so that it promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

A broad curriculum, therefore, might be regarded as one in which there are enough subject disciplines available to children to cover all these experiences. Narrowing the curriculum for less able pupils or

focusing solely on preparation for SATs in year 6 clearly runs counter to this definition of breadth. A broad curriculum offers all pupils a wide range of subject experiences for as long as possible.

If your school runs a project-based or thematic curriculum, how can you make sure that each subject discipline is still taught with sufficient breadth and depth? How can you make sure, while celebrating the interconnectedness of subjects, their natural links and the transferability of knowledge and skills, that their differences are not ignored? Each subject discipline is a discipline in its own right because of its differences to other disciplines.

An English curriculum is distinct from a maths curriculum, which is distinct from a science curriculum and so on. The key concepts are different and will likely take different forms; the ways in which experts in each field think differ, too – for example, if you apply a scientific way of thinking to the study of poetry, it will fail, and vice-versa.

Language and its meanings also differ in each subject – for example, to "analyse" something in English is not quite the same as to "analyse" something in history, maths or science.

The shape of the curriculum in each subject discipline is different, too – some are linear, some helical or spiral in nature – and so the time it takes children to progress through a curriculum and the path they must take is also going to be different.

In some subjects, we may see a neat line of progress as children incrementally increase their knowledge and skills and build upon their prior learning. In other subjects, children will likely go backwards as well as forwards, or will succeed in one topic but then be required to learn a different, unconnected set of skills and knowledge, which means any attempts to extrapolate progress between the two points is meaningless.

It is important, therefore, when considering how broad your curriculum is, to remain mindful of how subject disciplines are taught and how well children are being prepared for their continued study at secondary school and beyond.

If that is "broad", then a "balanced" curriculum might be

regarded as one in which each subject discipline is not only taught to all pupils but is afforded sufficient space on the timetable to deliver its distinct contribution.

The danger here is that some subjects, such as art, music, and languages, are squeezed out of the primary curriculum by English and maths, particularly in years 5 and 6.

The deep dive controversy

The way the Ofsted inspection framework is translated into practice in primary schools is a bone of contention. Deep dives, for example, require a detailed knowledge of each subject discipline being inspected and are a drain of subject leaders' time during an inspection.

In secondary schools, each subject leader will run one subject discipline and be an expert in that discipline. How, then, can a subject coordinator in a primary setting do the same job justice when they may lead several subjects and not be a subject specialist in some or all of them?

This is perhaps one of the biggest controversies of the EIF. As *Headteacher Update* reported in January (HTU, 2020a): "Concerns are being raised that the deep dive approach may be putting undue pressure on primary schools – small ones in particular. Specifically, how can a subject leader in charge of perhaps three or four subjects meet the growing expectations surrounding curriculum leadership and the deep dive agenda?"

In February, the National Association of Head Teachers published a report – *A change for the better?* – which warned that the experience of inspection is regularly described as "brutal" (NAHT, 2020; HTU 2020b).

Writing in *Headteacher Update* in March, Paul Whiteman, NAHT general secretary, warned: "The curriculum methodology is driving new workload and demanding a model of curriculum management that schools do not have the capacity or resource to implement. While many classroom teachers are willing to co-ordinate the work of a subject, they do not have the capacity, training or time to lead it." (Whiteman, 2020)

A blog written by Ofsted's regional director for London, Mike Sheridan, in October (2019) claims that inspectors will be sympathetic and will avoid two deep dives

with the same curriculum leader. Since then, Ofsted has extended its transition period for another year until July 2021 for the curriculum mapping expectations.

Speaking in March at the Association of School and College Leaders' annual conference, chief inspector Amanda Spielman acknowledged concerns (Ofsted, 2020).

She said: "(One) concern has been that we are expecting primary schools to be run like secondaries, with specialist subject leaders for every national curriculum subject. This really isn't the case. All we are trying to do is to make sure that we are talking to the person or people who make the relevant curriculum choices.

"Even if a primary school has a topic-based curriculum, someone in the school (or perhaps in their MAT) is responsible for thinking about what it is meant to cover, that it plays its part in the coherent sequencing of subjects, and how the school knows whether children come out with the level of knowledge and skills they will need to do well in secondary education. We just want to make sure we talk to the right person. And that person absolutely can be joined by a senior colleague such as the headteacher if they want.

"We aren't judging that person, nor are we judging the curriculum in the subject covered by that deep dive. The evidence from each deep dive simply contributes to the evidence for the quality of education judgement, which is made at school level."

In practice, we have to hope that inspectors will be pragmatic about what to expect in primary settings but, to help subject coordinators lead on the development of subject curriculums, I would suggest the headteacher has a number of roles to play.

The role of the head Vision and clarity

First, it is the responsibility of senior leaders to agree the vision for their whole-school curriculum. This, as we have already explored, involves defining what is meant by the term "curriculum" and making decisions about the national, basic, local and hidden curriculums.

Breadth and balance

Second, the headteacher is key to determining how broad and

balanced the whole school curriculum will be and why. They must make decisions about which subject disciplines matter most and which subjects are afforded the most teaching time.

Purpose and outcomes

Third, the headteacher articulates the purpose of education in their school – and therefore guides subject coordinators in determining the broad end-points to be taught. For example, the headteacher must have an overview of what topics and texts are better than others. Only the head and senior leaders have the necessary oversight of the whole school curriculum to be able to make these decisions.

The headteacher can also help their subject coordinators and class teachers to determine the end-points they plan to teach within each subject by asking some broad questions about their curriculums:

- Why teach this subject? Why does it matter to primary pupils? In what way is it or will it be useful now and in the future? Will children need this subject at secondary school?
- Within each subject, why teach this topic or text? Why is this knowledge more important than that knowledge?
- How does each subject relate to other subjects? How will you make the links explicit? If taught in a project-based or thematic way, how will the differences be respected and made explicit?
- What do you expect children to know and be able to do at the end of the topic/scheme/term/year/key stage/school?
- Why is this knowledge important? Who decides and why?
- What knowledge and skills will be most useful to pupils in the future? Says who? Is this likely to change?
- What knowledge gaps (including vocabulary) might some pupils need to have filled before they can access the curriculum? How will you identify the gaps and the pupils? How and when will the gaps be filled?
- When do you expect children to have acquired these knowledge/skills? Why then?
- What must be taught before and after these knowledge/skills? Why?



- How will the learning be sequenced? Is this a logical order?
- How will the curriculum build increasing complexity over time and ensure children are secondary-ready?
- How do class teachers work together to plan a logical curriculum so that, for example, year 2 builds on year 1 and prepares children for year 3, and so on?
- How will these knowledge/skills be taught to ensure long-term learning? Will all teachers teach in this manner? How will you know?
- How will prior knowledge be activated? How will pupils be helped to transfer knowledge/skills from one context to another, and from the classroom to life?
- How will retrieval practice be built into the curriculum to ensure prior learning is kept active?
- How will the curriculum be spaced and interleaved to aide long-term retention?

Teacher workload and skills
Finally, and perhaps most critically

of all, the headteacher is the gatekeeper and defender of staff skills and time. They have a duty to provide appropriate training to staff to ensure that they are skilled at curriculum thinking, and they have a duty to provide protected time for staff to engage in the time-consuming task of designing, delivering and reviewing the curriculum in their subjects.

With a just focus on teacher workload, the headteacher must do all they can to prevent this renewed focus on curriculum design from adding to subject coordinators' and teachers' workloads and must decide what to stop doing in order to carve out the time for teachers to focus their energy on the real substance of education.

Step 2: Set the destination

Once schools have agreed the vision for their curriculum, they must – also under the broad heading of intent – set the destination of that curriculum.

If you want to find directions on a satnav, first it will ask you "where to?" then it will ask you "where from?". Curriculum design is no different. First, we need to know what the intended outcomes of our

curriculum are – what we want pupils to know and be able to do at the end. Then we need to know from where pupils are starting their journeys towards these clear end-points. With these two pins in our map, we can begin to plot a course. But how do we decide where our pupils are headed?

In *Knowledge and the Future of School* (2014), Young et al talk of "powerful knowledge" as a type of knowledge that "allows those with access to it to question it and the authority on which it is based and gain the sense of freedom and excitement that it can offer". They argue that facts alone do not constitute powerful knowledge. Meanwhile, back in the *Principled Curriculum Design* pamphlet (2013), Prof William sets out four purposes of education which you may find useful in terms of articulating the goals of your own curriculum. These four purposes are as follows:

1 Personal empowerment

Arguably the most important aim of education is to allow young people to take greater control of their own lives, perhaps best exemplified by the work of Paulo Freire. The idea is that rather than simply

enculturating young people into the existing systems, education is the means by which people "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, 1968).

2 Cultural transmission

Another reason that is often given for educating young people is, in Matthew Arnold's words, to pass on from one generation to the next, "the best that has been thought and known in the world" (Arnold, 1869). Those who do not know what people are expected to know are regarded as ignorant – not stupid, but simply lacking the knowledge expected of them.

“ We know that the gap opens up before children start school and that the early years of primary education are the most important ”

3 Preparation for citizenship
Democratic citizenship arguably works only if those who are voting understand the choices they are given, and education therefore has a vital role to play in preparing citizens so that they can make informed decisions about their participation in democratic society (Council of Europe, 2010).

4, Preparation for work

As a number of reports from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development have shown, more educated workers are more productive (e.g. Hanushek & Woessman, 2010). Educational achievement is therefore inextricably linked with economic prosperity.

Young et al (2014) says that the purpose of education "is to enable all students to acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience. It is knowledge which many will not have access to at home, among their friends, or in the communities in which they live. As such, access to this knowledge is the right of all pupils as future citizens".

They are therefore arguing that the purpose of education, and therefore the destination of our curriculum, is to achieve social justice and improve social mobility.

This is important in the UK when you consider that the academic achievement gap between rich and poor is detectable from an early age – as early as 22 months – and the gap continues to widen as children travel through the education system.

Indeed, disadvantaged pupils fall two months further behind their peers each academic year and by the end of secondary school the gap is nearly 20 months. And, crucially, we know that the gap opens up before children start school and that the early years of primary education are the most important. The early years curriculum is therefore deserving of special attention and resources to ensure children are taught the vocabulary they need to access and achieve within the primary school curriculum (Sharples et al, 2011).

Step 3: Assess the starting points

Back with our satnav, when answering the "where from?" question, there are two aspects to consider: the starting points of the

taught curriculum and the starting points of the learnt curriculum.

The taught curriculum can be found in curriculum plans, assessment schedules and schemes of work, as well as in what teachers deliver in the classroom.

But we also need to understand what individual pupils have actually learnt, what they know and can do. In other words, we need to understand individual pupils' starting points and identify the gaps in their knowledge and skills. This can be achieved in part by ensuring that class teachers and subject coordinators plan together so that each year builds on what has gone before and better prepares pupils for what comes next. Planning together will also help ensure that teachers use the same language of learning across the years and key stages of primary education, and could help cut workload.

But collective planning is only half the battle won – we also need to assess as pupils begin their curriculum journey with us, and we need to continue to assess them as they travel through our curriculum.

One method of doing just this is to activate prior knowledge. For example, if I wanted my pupils early in year 6 to conduct some internet research into, say, the Second World War in order to inform their reading of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, I should not assume that they have conducted internet research in year 5 or that, even if they have, they can remember how to do it or be able to transfer their prior experience of this skill (or procedural knowledge) into a new context or domain.

I need to activate their prior knowledge of this skill by asking them questions about what they have done before, what they remember of this, how they went about it, what decisions they had to make, and what they had to think about.

By so doing, I can retrieve from long-term memory the procedural knowledge pupils previously encoded and bring it into their working memories so they can think about it. Then, because activating prior knowledge is a form of retrieval practice, through repetition, we can begin to automate the decisions pupils have to make in order to free up space in their working memories for them to actively think about the context and task in hand.

Put simply, because pupils have done internet research before, they do not need to use as much of their limited working memory capacity to do it again as they would if performing the task for the very first time. If I had not taken time to activate their prior knowledge and instead had assumed all pupils were starting from scratch, they might not have made the link (and developed schema) and would have found the task harder.

Activating prior knowledge in this way also enables me to uncover and unpack any gaps in pupils' knowledge of internet research as well as any misconceptions they may have.

I can then ensure that all the class are "on the same page" and are following the same steps.

What is more, activating prior knowledge helps join-up the curriculum in pupils' minds because they can see how they use and expand the knowledge and skills they learnt previously as they progress through school, and this provides intrinsic motivation because they can see the purpose of what they learn and can begin to understand the usefulness of curriculum content.

Further, as pupils activate prior knowledge, they can add increasing complexity to it, progressively developing their knowledge and applying it to different contexts.

Think of it like putting a Russian Doll inside a slightly bigger version of that doll, and then another and another, and so on. In the example above, we might start with some basic rules of internet research such as how to use a search engine. Next, we might put that knowledge inside a slightly bigger doll by teaching the skills of using at least three sources and identifying trustworthy sources. Next, we might add the skill of skimming and scanning webpages for key facts, etc.

Each time, the doll gets bigger, but pupils are helped to make active connections between all the interrelated knowledge and skills

they are learning, and as such create ever-more complex schema in long-term memory.

Step 4: Identify the way-points

Once you have set the destination and assessed the starting points of your curriculum, you must plot a course between the two. This course is what populates curriculum plans and schemes of work. Here, you may find it useful to identify threshold concepts or checkpoints on the way towards the destination.

Checkpoints have several advantages: first, they provide manageable and achievable stepping stones for children to aim for along the way, rather than setting pupils a goal they cannot hope to hit; second, they provide a useful pitstop – a means of assessing, recognising and celebrating pupils' progress to date.

When these threshold concepts are used well, they can also become a meaningful means of assessment.

In English, threshold concepts might encourage pupils to move up the reading comprehension ladder from identifies to explains to analyses and, finally, to evaluates. Or, more simply, we could write a sequence of "can-do" statements. There are several advantages to the latter approach, including – in no particular order:

- "Can-do" statements make sense to children – they are simple and concrete not abstract.
- Pupils can be assessed easily against each statement with a "yes/no".
- The assessment will inform us what each pupil knows and do, and what they do not yet know and cannot yet do.
- Assessment outcomes can be used to inform our teaching, notifying us if we need to reteach or recap a concept or concepts, or if can we move on.
- Pupils' journeys through this hierarchy of statements can

- provide tangible evidence of progress – to pupils, parents and others.
 - The statements can also be used as learning objectives to provide a clear focus to a lesson or sequence of lessons which can be revisited in the plenary or used on an exit ticket.
- Of course, as I have already admitted, learning is neither easy nor neat. Pupils do not often make linear progress and our curriculum is not often linear in shape. Rather, learning is messy; children can go backwards as well as forwards, and

not all assessments can be used to extrapolate progress over time because what is being assessed at various points through the year may be very different.

As such, "can-do" statements may work for some curriculum content in some subject disciplines but may not – indeed, probably will not – work for everything.

Sometimes, the key concepts and their various layers of accomplishment may take the form of questions, factual statements, key features, schools of thought, or exemplars. **hu**



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