

Curriculum design and delivery: Part 1

In a new seven-part series, **Matt Bromley** will look at the central tenets of an effective curriculum and how to design and deliver this. He begins with a general discussion about what a good curriculum should look like

In June 2017, the chief inspector of schools, Amanda Spielman, gave a speech at the Festival of Education in which she advocated a broad and balanced school curriculum. All too often, she argued, schools lose sight of the real substance of education: “Not the exam grades or the progress scores, important though they are, but instead the real meat of what is taught in our schools and colleges: the curriculum.”

She said that although education had to prepare young people to succeed in life and make their contribution in the labour market, “to reduce (it) down to this kind of functionalist level is rather wretched”. Education, she argued, “should be about broadening minds, enriching communities and advancing civilisation”.

Intent, implementation and impact

As a response to Ms Spielman’s call to arms, the curriculum will feature more prominently in Ofsted’s next Common Inspection Framework (CIF), due for release in 2019. It is likely to be under a new judgement area called “the quality of education”.

In an Ofsted blog in October 2017 Sean Harford said: “Without (the curriculum), a building full of teachers, leaders and pupils is not a school. If pupils don’t get the benefit of a rich and deep curriculum then they will have learnt too little and made little progress.”

Mr Harford bemoaned the fact that, in recent years, “there has been a lack of reflection on the design, content and implementation of curriculums” and that, even today, there is “a lack of coherent debate and discussion about the curriculum”.

Perhaps this lack of debate about the curriculum is down to the fact that no-one knows what it is. “Too often,” Mr Harford says, “the school curriculum is seen as the same as the school timetable” and yet it is clearly much more than a schedule of subjects.

Ofsted has proffered a working definition to support its consultations on the new CIF. The curriculum, they said, is “a framework for setting out the aims of the programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage” – what the inspectorate calls “intent”. The curriculum is also a means of “translating that framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an instructional context” – what Ofsted calls “implementation”. And the curriculum is also a means of “evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations” – what Ofsted calls “impact” (see Sean Harford’s presentation from June 2017).

Currently, the curriculum in maintained schools consists of three distinct elements:

- 1 The national curriculum which is prescribed by statute and consists of core and foundation subjects.
- 2 The basic curriculum which describes the statutory requirements for curricular provision beyond the national curriculum, comprising the requirements in current legislation for the teaching of RE, sex education, careers education, and opportunities for work-related learning. 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.

Oates et al (2011) argued 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 of these key elements. The school curriculum structures these processes.”

In 2000, the now defunct QCA, 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 Philip Jackson (*Life In Classrooms*, 1968). 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 curriculum, therefore, we need to think carefully about all the ways in which pupils learn, not solely in structured lessons but also in



the space between lessons and in the behaviours and values of the adults working in the school. As Sir 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, but in the subjects and qualifications on the timetable, in the pedagogy and behaviours teachers and other adults use, in the space between lessons when pupils interact with each other, in approaches to managing behaviour, uniform and attendance and punctuality, in assemblies 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.

So, if the curriculum is the whole experience of education, what, then, makes it broad and balanced?

Broad and balanced

The 2002 Education Act requires schools to provide a “balanced and broadly-based 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.

Although only maintained schools are required to teach the national curriculum, all schools – including independent schools and academies – must meet the requirements of the Education Act. However, there are no legal requirements for any school about the methods of delivery of the curriculum or the amount of time allocated to each subject.

So, within this rather vague legal framework, how can schools ensure that their curriculum is broad and balanced and will, therefore, produce well-rounded young people who can succeed in life and work as well as stand up to the increased scrutiny of Ofsted post-2019?

The regulatory standards for independent schools 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 subjects on a pupil’s timetable to cover all these experiences. Narrowing the curriculum for less able pupils or stretching GCSE study into key stage 3 clearly runs counter to this definition of breadth. A broad curriculum offers all pupils a wide range of subjects for as long as possible.

A balanced curriculum, meanwhile, might be regarded as one in which each subject 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 timetable by English, maths and

science. It is not uncommon for English to have five or more lessons on the timetable per week and art just one, or for the arts to operate on a carousel whereby design technology is only taught for one term of the year.

In his Ofsted blog, Mr Harford said that in 10 out of the 23 secondary schools inspectors visited as part of their consultation on the curriculum, school leaders admitted to “reducing key stage 3 to just two years”. While this might work for subjects where concepts are revisited at deeper levels (such as English and maths), “it doesn’t work for all subjects, especially those that pupils drop before GCSE”.

In her speech, Ms Spielman bemoaned this increasing “cannibalisation” of key stage 3 into key stage 4: “Preparing for GCSEs so early,” she said, “gives young people less time to study a range of subjects in depth and more time just practising the tests themselves.”

“Narrowing the curriculum for less able pupils or stretching GCSE study into key stage 3 clearly runs counter to this definition of breadth.”

We have, she said, “a full and coherent national curriculum and (it is) a huge waste not to use it properly”.

All children should study a broad and rich curriculum, she said, and yet “curtailing key stage 3 means prematurely cutting this off for children who may never have an opportunity to study some of these subjects again”.

In short, Ms Spielman said that schools had “a tendency to mistake badges and stickers for learning itself... (and put their own interests) ahead of the interests of the children in them”.

“We should be ashamed,” she said, “that we have let such behaviour persist for so long.”

In light of such strong language, we can be confident that the CIF in 2019 will seek to put an end to this behaviour and encourage schools – with the carrot and stick of inspection – to develop broader, more balanced curriculums that better prepare pupils for the future.

As schools prepare for this change, they may find it helpful to refer to the current inspection framework

for some useful insights into what Ofsted regards as an effective curriculum. Currently, the quality of the curriculum is inspected under leadership and management and there are three paragraphs worth considering here. Inspectors are told to evaluate:

- 1 The design, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum, ensuring breadth and balance and its impact on pupils’ outcomes and their personal, development, behaviour and welfare.
- 2 How well the school supports the formal curriculum with extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding, and to improve their skills in a range of artistic, creative and sporting activities.
- 3 How well the school prepares pupils positively for life in modern Britain and promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for, and tolerance of those with different faiths/beliefs and for those without faith.

When designing and delivering our curriculum, we might infer from this the following:

- We should consider the curriculum in its widest sense – it takes place in and between lessons, in subjects and in extra-curricular activities, and it develops pupils’ skills in a range of areas including in the arts and sport, and – although important – it is not solely concerned with the pursuit of academic outcomes.
- We should ensure our curriculum prepares pupils, not only for the next stage of their education and training, but also for their lives as active citizens and for success in the world of work, developing employability skills and work-ready behaviours, and educating pupils on their career options.
- We should think carefully about how, once we have designed the curriculum, we will implement and evaluate it in order to ensure it delivers its stated aims and continues to be relevant.

Next week (September 13) and in the remainder of this series I will explore the central tenets of an effective curriculum and I will share my advice on how to design such a curriculum and deliver it in the classroom. **SecEd**

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Further information

- *Ofsted’s findings about the school curriculum*, Sean Harford, Ofsted, October 2017: <http://bit.ly/2LFAhZI>
- *Curriculum: intent, implementation and impact. Development work for the new inspection framework*, presentation by Sean Harford, national director, education, Ofsted, Festival of Education, June 2017: www.slideshare.net/Ofstednews/educationfest17

Continuing his seven-part series, **Matt Bromley** looks at key questions to ask when creating your curriculum vision and explores Ofsted’s view of what makes an effective school curriculum (and some common weaknesses)

Curriculum design and delivery: Part 2



In the first part of this series, I explained that, when it publishes its new Common Inspection Framework (CIF) in 2019, Ofsted will shine a brighter light on school curriculums. This, I said, posed a problem because there is no agreed definition of what the curriculum is.

Whereas Ofsted believes it is “a framework for setting out the aims of the programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage”, a means of “translating that framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an instructional context”, and a means of “evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations”, others promote a broader definition of the curriculum which comprises “everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned” (QCA, 2000).

The notion of an unplanned curriculum is important because pupils learn not solely through their experiences in the classroom, but also from other pupils, and through the accidental juxtaposition of a school’s stated values and its actual practice. As Sir John Dunford (2012) put 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, but in the subjects and qualifications, in the pedagogy and behaviours teachers and others use, in the space between lessons when pupils interact with each other, in approaches to managing behaviour, uniform, attendance and punctuality, in assemblies and extra-curricular activities, and in the pastoral care.

In part one, I defined what makes a curriculum “broad and balanced”. A broad curriculum is one in which there are enough subjects on the timetable – for all pupils – to cover all the experiences deemed important by society. A broad curriculum offers all pupils a wide range of subjects for as long as possible.

A balanced curriculum, meanwhile, is one in which each subject is not only taught to all pupils but is afforded enough time on the timetable. The danger is that some subjects, such as art, music and languages, are squeezed out by English, maths and science.

This week, I turn my attention to writing a curriculum vision. But first I think it worthwhile exploring recent inspection evidence because this might prove useful when considering what Ofsted regards as the strengths and weaknesses of the school curriculum and what, therefore, might be a focus of the 2019 CIF.

Evaluations of inspection reports show that Ofsted regards the following – which I have paraphrased – as strengths:

- Leaders review the curriculum regularly and check the impact on outcomes for all pupils, then remodel it to help all pupils perform well.
 - Leaders are attuned to research findings, as well as reforms to national curriculum and qualifications, and use this to inform how their local curriculum is developed to improve outcomes and pupils’ personal development.
 - Careers guidance and information is integral to the curriculum and pupils’ progression. The curriculum helps pupils to experience and learn about their options for the future.
 - There is a recognition that challenge is for all, not just the most able pupils.
- Conversely, Ofsted regards the following – again paraphrased – as weaknesses:
- Coordination of numeracy and literacy across the curriculum is poor and, as such, pupils struggle to read and access learning.
 - Support from middle leaders to develop pedagogy is poor – notably in mixed ability classes in key stage 3.
 - Pupils in key stage 3 repeat work from primary school which leaves them bored and frustrated by the lack of challenge.
 - There is a lack of understanding and coherence in assessment, and a lack of oversight.
 - Expectations of pupils are low.
 - The timetable is fragmented and poorly planned, leading to a lack of coherence across the curriculum.
 - Leaders are slow to tackle issues as a result of teacher vacancies and lack innovation to sustain a good curriculum despite teacher shortages.

That, in broad terms, is what a broad and balanced curriculum looks like to Ofsted and how, therefore, they might inspect your curriculum from 2019.

A curriculum vision

Ofsted recommends that, in the run-up to the new CIF, schools should know their curriculum (the design

and intent), know how their curriculum is being implemented, and know what impact their curriculum is having on children and young people’s knowledge and understanding.

Let’s begin, therefore, with design and intent – or what I call “curriculum vision”.

The process of curriculum design, I believe, should commence with a clear and shared vision articulating what the school thinks is important and what it regards as the purpose of education. This curriculum vision may be influenced by the school’s existing values, by “the way we do things around here”, and by what makes the school and its community unique.

The vision should also comprise a list of the broad and rich learning experiences each pupil in the school can expect in each subject as well as outside of lessons. The vision should make reference to the hidden curriculum and remember that pupils’ learning is not confined to the classroom – they also learn from each other and from the way in which all the adults in school behave.

I recommend you start the process with a vision because this vision will provide the benchmark against which all subsequent decisions about the curriculum content, structure, sequence, monitoring, evaluation and review can be tested.

Finnish education experts attribute much of their success to the driving force and guiding power of their curriculum vision, which is: to improve access to previously under-represented groups excluded or restrained by poverty, ethnicity, (and) gender, (and) to provide for broader meta-cognitive and interpersonal skills requiring deeper learning to meet the needs of an emerging knowledge society with more sophisticated labour requirements and built-in instability (Sahlberg, 2006).

Here are some questions to consider when drafting your vision:

- What are the desired outcomes of our curriculum? Are academic outcomes – including high grades and value added – enough on their own? What of progress from individual starting points? What else do we desire for our pupils?
- What will excellence look like? Will it always look this way? Will it be the same for all pupils?
- What does social, moral, spiritual and cultural development mean for our pupils?
- What does employability mean for our pupils? How can we support its development at all stages of education and beyond school?
- What do we really believe about our pupils, their potential and their destiny? How does this translate in practice? How can we ensure high expectations – and high challenge – for all pupils, not just the higher performing, compliant ones?
- What, ultimately, is the purpose of education at our school? Why?

It is, I think, the last question on the list that will influence your curriculum vision the most and yet it is perhaps the most difficult question of all...

The purpose of education

In a 2014 speech, Michael Gove – during his tenure as education secretary – set out what he regarded as the purpose of education: “I want every child to be able to go to a state school which excels, which nurtures their talents, which introduces them to the best that has been thought and written, which prepares them for the world of work and adult responsibility, which imbues them with the strength of character to withstand life’s adversities and treat other humans with courtesy and dignity, which gives them the chance to appreciate art and culture, to enjoy music and drama, to participate in sport and games, which nurtures intellectual curiosity and which provides a secure grounding in the practical skills the modern world requires.”

“Our curriculum vision should be to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which gives pupils a solid grounding from which, later, they can build their mastery in a specific field. In short, our curriculum vision should be to produce polymaths”

In practice, Mr Gove’s divisive, ill-thought-out policies prevented much of his vision from being realised and rather than afford pupils the opportunity to appreciate art and culture, and enjoy music and drama, the curriculum in many schools was narrowed to the academic suite of subjects contained in the English Baccalaureate. But his vision, albeit undetermined by his own actions, is a good place to start when considering the purpose of education in our schools: to introduce pupils to the best that has been thought and written.

With this last statement, Mr Gove was alluding to Matthew Arnold who, in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), argued that “Culture ... is a study of perfection (and) seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that

has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light.”

In the preface, Arnold argued that culture is the pursuit of “total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically”.

Arnold – and indeed Gove – was therefore arguing in favour of polymathy and a resurgence of the Renaissance Man – and I think we could do worse than shape our curriculum vision around this Renaissance ideal.

Renaissance of the Renaissance?

The Renaissance is the name given to a period of European history which provided a bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history. The intellectual foundations of the Renaissance lay in “humanism”, a concept that derived from Roman Humanitas and the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy, such as that of Protagoras, who said: “Man is the measure of all things.”

This new way of thinking came to permeate the fields of architecture, art, literature, politics, and science. As a cultural movement, the Renaissance signalled a resurgence of learning based on classical sources, which contemporaries credited to Petrarch, as well as gradual but widespread educational reform.

The Renaissance began in Italy in the 14th century but had spread to the rest of Europe by the 16th century. During this time, Renaissance humanists studied classical Latin and Greek, and its authors began to use vernacular languages which – combined with the introduction of printing presses – allowed many more people access to books.

The term “Renaissance Man” was first recorded in written English in the early 20th century to describe great thinkers living before, during, or after the Renaissance.

The Italian painter, Leonardo da Vinci – whose impressive array of interests included anatomy, architecture, art, botany, cartography, engineering, literature, maths, music, science, sculpting and writing – is often described as the archetypal Renaissance Man.

Da Vinci and other notable polymaths who lived during the period were called Renaissance Men because they had a rounded approach to education that reflected the ideals of the humanists of the time. For example, a gentleman or courtier of the era was expected to speak several languages, play a musical instrument, write poetry and so on, thus fulfilling the Renaissance ideal.

The universal

The idea of a universal education was essential to becoming a polymath, hence the word “university” was used to describe a seat of learning. At this time, university students did not specialise in specific subjects as is the case today, but rather trained in science, philosophy and theology. This universal education gave them a grounding from which they could build their mastery of a specific field through subsequent apprenticeships.

Today, we use the term Renaissance Man – or “polymath” which comes from the Greek “having learned much” – to refer to a person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas, and who is therefore able to draw on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems.

If we are to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for our pupils, I believe we should return to this Renaissance ideal. Our curriculum vision should be to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which gives pupils a solid grounding from which, later, they can build their mastery in a specific field. In short, our curriculum vision should be to produce polymaths.

Having fixed on this aim, the big question is: how do we decide what core knowledge is included in our broad and balanced curriculum? And why, in this internet age, does it matter what knowledge pupils learn? Next week (September 20), I will attempt to answer these questions.

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Further reading

Be ‘bold and courageous’ with your curriculum, Ofsted urges, SecEd, April 2018: <http://bit.ly/2KhTSiG>

Knowledge, they say, is power. Continuing his seven-part series, **Matt Bromley** looks at the role that knowledge and building cultural capital through vocabulary must play as part of a broad and balanced curriculum offer

Curriculum design and delivery: Part 3



In the first part of this series on the curriculum, I said that one of the problems of curriculum design and delivery was that no-one really knows what the curriculum is and what content it should include.

The notion of an unplanned curriculum – or a hidden curriculum as it's often called – is important because pupils learn not solely through their experiences in the classroom, but also from other pupils, and through the accidental juxtaposition of a school's stated values and its actual practice.

The curriculum, therefore, can be found, not just in a policy statement, but in the subjects and qualifications on the timetable, in the pedagogy and behaviours teachers and other adults use, in the space between lessons when pupils interact with each other, in approaches to managing behaviour, uniform, and attendance and punctuality, in assemblies 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.

In part one, I attempted to define what makes a curriculum “broad and balanced”. Last week, in part two, I talked about the importance of curriculum vision – a statement which sets out what you regard to be the purpose of education in your school.

We could do worse, I said, than turn to the Renaissance ideal of polymathy – a term which comes from the Greek “having learned much” and refers to a person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas, and who is therefore able to draw on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems.

This week I want to explain why it is important that pupils learn “complex bodies of knowledge”.

Just Google it

The world is full of education experts, it seems. The people who criticise schools for their outdated pedagogy wouldn't dream of proselytising their views on medicine or law without having first qualified in these areas, but because they have been to school, they think they know what works and what doesn't.

Many of the highest profile commentators are what we might call “outliers” – successful entrepreneurs who failed at school. They are the exceptions who think they prove the rule that traditional schooling doesn't work, is outdated and doesn't prepare people for the world of work.

Knowledge in long-term memory is essential in helping make sense of new information because, among other things, it improves reading comprehension and critical thinking

Virgin boss Richard Branson, for example, has said that, at school, “children are taught to pass exams rather than understand concepts and expand their minds” and thus schools are failing to teach the skills that are needed in the business world. He said that “many children are set up to fail by a system that only cares about exam results”.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, has bemoaned the fact that “every student (has to) sit in a classroom and listen to a teacher explain the same material at the same pace in the same way” and has argued that “students will perform better if they can learn at their own pace, based on their own interests, and in a style that fits them”.

Every exam results day brings with it unhelpful interjections from the likes of Russell Brand who once tweeted: “Good luck today – I didn't get any (A levels) and still ended up with a job as a psychedelic bus driver.” And Jeremy Clarkson who tweeted: “If your A level results are disappointing, don't worry. I got a C and two Us, and I'm currently on a super-yacht in the Med.”

Some of these messages may be well-intentioned, reassuring young people that life is full of second chances. But they also reinforce the message that education doesn't matter.

I once hosted – at the recommendation of a neighbouring school – a local TV news anchor, hired to give an inspirational speech to pupils as they neared the end of year 11. Rather than encouraging pupils to work hard, she used the opportunity as therapy and recalled her own unhappy school days and how she'd failed, and yet she still had a nice new BMW parked outside. The moral of her story: don't listen to your teachers, school doesn't matter. She was later fired for not paying her taxes.

Many of education's detractors make the mistake of thinking we live in a world where technology has replaced knowledge and we must prepare young people for jobs that haven't yet been invented, perhaps by developing 21st century skills.

And yet, as ED Hirsch said, skill is content and content is skill. A 21st century skill such as creativity – which, according to Sir Ken Robinson, schools kill off – isn't really a skill at all, rather creativity is a combination of many different skills which are specific to a particular discipline and require a lot of content knowledge.

Having said this, I do believe that pupils need to be taught traits such as resilience or grit, but not as an isolated “skill” taught out of context, rather resilience needs to be developed as the hallmark of an effective learner who willingly grapples with difficult tasks and finds a way through the quagmire towards clarity. Resilience is best developed in context when pupils face challenges head-on and – through trial and error and learning from their mistakes – find their own light in the darkness.

These “experts” also believe the industrial model of education – whereby pupils sit in rows and are taught facts – is dead because we live in an internet age where you can “just Google it”. Knowledge doesn't matter, they say, because knowledge is easily accessible on the web. What matters, therefore, are workplace skills such as team-work and problem-solving.

But there's a fundamental flaw with this argument: you can't just Google it, because acquiring new knowledge requires existing knowledge and we

process new information within the context of what we already know. ED Hirsch argues that: “Those who repudiate a fact-filled curriculum on the grounds that kids can always look things up miss the paradox that de-emphasising factual knowledge actually disables children from looking things up effectively.”

Hirsch goes on to say that: “To stress process at the expense of factual knowledge actually hinders children from learning to learn. Yes, the internet has placed a wealth of information at our fingertips. But to be able to use that information – to absorb it, to add to our knowledge – we must already possess a storehouse of knowledge.”

It may sound paradoxical, but it is a theory easily tested.

Knowledge is power

The cognitive scientist George Miller, for example, conducted an experiment whereby pupils were asked to look up definitions in a dictionary and then use those words in a sentence of their own construction. Miller received back sentences such as “Our family erodes a lot”, meaning they frequently eat out, and “Mrs Morrow stimulated the soup”, meaning she stirred the broth.

Commenting on Miller's study, Hirsch said: “Miller is in favour of dictionaries in appropriate contexts where they can be used effectively... those contexts turn out to be the somewhat rare occasions when nuances of meaning can be confidently understood.”

In his book *Why Don't Our Students Like School?* the cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham says that: “Thinking well requires knowing facts, (and) critical thinking processes such as reasoning and problem-solving are intertwined with factual knowledge stored in long-term memory.”

Knowledge really is power

As John Sweller (2011) said: “Novices need to use thinking skills. Experts use knowledge.”

Knowledge in long-term memory is essential in helping make sense of new information because, among other things, it improves reading comprehension and critical thinking.

Knowledge in long-term memory is essential for reading comprehension because, although the ability to decode words is transferable to different texts, pupils are more likely to understand a text if they have prior knowledge about the topic.

Put simply, the more you know about a topic, the more effectively you can read a text on that topic and understand it. If I asked you to read a text on, say, nuclear physics or macro-economics, you would probably struggle to make full sense of it because some of the words would be unfamiliar, and many of the con-

cepts certainly would be. However, if I asked you to read an article on teaching strategies, you would probably fare well, bringing your prior knowledge to bear on the words and meanings contained within the text.

Knowledge in long-term memory is also essential for critical thinking – often regarded as a transferable skill that can be taught in isolation – cannot occur if a pupil does not have sufficient foundational knowledge on the topic being discussed.

In history, for example, in order for pupils to be able to reason effectively about chronology and cause and effect, they must know enough curriculum content. Teaching pupils about history in an abstract way doesn't work as well as arming them with lots of knowledge with which to better understand the way the world works.

In maths, pupils need to be taught through worked examples rather than unstructured problems. And in science, pupils need to be taught the knowledge gained through scientific discovery not necessarily how science discovered that knowledge. Facts matter. Put simply, you cannot be critical about something of which you are ignorant.

But not only is factual knowledge essential to reading comprehension and critical thinking, it is also a means of closing the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged learners and their non-disadvantaged peers, and this is the reason our curriculum vision should promote challenge for all, not just the most able...

Building cultural capital

Educational disadvantage starts early – certainly before a child enters formal education. One of the reasons for this is that children born into families who read books, newspapers and magazines, visit museums, art galleries, zoos, and stately homes and gardens, take regular holidays, watch the nightly news and documentaries, and talk – around the dinner table, on weekend walks, in the car – about current affairs and about what they are reading or doing or watching – develop what's called “cultural capital”.

In other words, they acquire an awareness of the world around them, an understanding of how life works, and – crucially – a language with which to explain it, all of which provides a solid foundation on which these children can build further knowledge, skills and understanding.

Those children not born and raised in such knowledge-rich environments don't do as well in school because new knowledge and skills have nothing to “stick” to or build upon.

Put simply, the more you know, the easier it is to know more and so the culturally rich will always stay ahead of the impoverished, and the gap between rich and poor will continue to grow as children travel through our education system.

One of the aims of our broad and balanced school curriculum, therefore, must be to help the disadvantaged build their cultural capital, and this takes one tangible form: vocabulary.

The size of a pupil's vocabulary in their early years of schooling is a significant predictor of academic attainment in later schooling and of success in life. Most children are experienced speakers of the language when they begin school but reading the language requires more complex, abstract vocabulary than that used in everyday conversation.

Young people who develop reading skills early in their lives by reading frequently add to their vocabularies exponentially over time. Department for Education research suggests that, by the age of seven, the gap in the vocabulary known by children in the top and bottom quartiles is something like 4,000 words (children in the top quartile know around 7,000 words).

For this reason, when designing our curriculum, we must recognise the importance of vocabulary and support its development across the curriculum – in lessons and in the space between lessons – so that pupils who do not develop this foundational knowledge before they start school are helped to catch up. Literacy – or “the language of learning” – should permeate our curriculum plan.

Next time (September 27), I will turn my attention to Shakespeare's schooling to see what we can learn from his experiences of the curriculum. And I will explore the notion of curriculum planning backwards.

SecEd

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Continuing his quest for a broad and balanced curriculum, **Matt Bromley** looks back at the curriculum to which Shakespeare was exposed while at school in Stratford...

Curriculum design and delivery: Part 4



Among the many slurs directed at the playwright William Shakespeare, it is claimed he was a plagiarist. *The Tempest*, we are told, is his only truly original play. Robert Greene famously called Shakespeare “an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers”.

Plagiarism software has recently been used to analyse Shakespeare’s texts and has found, among other things, that he “borrowed” liberally from a book called *A Brief Discourse of Rebellion and Rebels* by George North.

“Shakespeare not only uses the same words as North, but often uses them in scenes about similar themes, and even the same historical characters,” explains the *New York Times*.

Geoffrey Bullough’s eight-volume *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* lifts the lid on some of the source texts from which Shakespeare shamelessly stole. He was inspired by Plutarch’s *Lives* and Hollinshed’s *Chronicles*, as well as Montaigne’s *Essays* and of course by Ovid, Seneca and Plautus.

But his plays were not merely carbon copies, Shakespeare combined them in unconventional ways, subverted them, and made substantial changes to them.

For example, Bullough shows us how Shakespeare entwined two separate tales to make *The Merchant of Venice* and decided to kill Lear and Cordelia at the end of *King Lear* when in his chronicle source both characters survived with Lear restored to the throne.

Bullough also shows us how Shakespeare had Othello murder Desdemona, when in Cinthio’s original Italian story, Iago did the devilish deed. He also added an extra set of twins to *The Comedy of Errors*.

Therefore, to call Shakespeare a plagiarist is unfair: his originality was his ability to transform what he had read, heard recited, or remembered from his school days and make something new and startling from them. Indeed, I’m reminded of TS Eliot’s aphorism: “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better or at least something different.”

What’s more, Shakespeare inhabited a literary culture in which imitation of earlier models was applauded rather than derided. In Renaissance creative writing – or “rhetoric” as it was called – invention was highly regarded.

In *Shakespeare’s Originality* by John Kerrigan, there’s a chapter devoted to *Much Ado About Nothing* which reveals a play that is “pieced and patched and recycled” out of various Italian tales. It’s “radical novelty” was a matter of the “piecemeal superflux” of reused materials.

As such, Shakespeare’s gift, it could be argued, is the breadth and depth of the foundational knowledge – his cultural capital – upon which he was able to draw to create his original works. It is therefore worthwhile, as we seek to set the parameters of our own broad and balanced curriculum, exploring the curriculum to which Shakespeare was exposed while at school in Stratford.

Shakespeare’s schooling

In *Teaching Shakespeare*, Rex Gibson says that: “Shakespeare’s schooling provided an excellent resource for the future playwright. Everything Shakespeare learned at school he used in some way in his plays.” For example, Gibson tells us: “Having mastered the rules of language, he was able to break and transform them.”

We believe Shakespeare attended King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford, although there is no record of Shakespeare’s name on the register. His father’s position on the council (by the time Shakespeare was of school age, his father John was an alderman) brought with it free education for his sons so it’s inconceivable to think he wouldn’t have taken advantage of the opportunity.

Grammar schools like King Edward VI were part of the Tudor educational revolution of which the chief beneficiaries were middle class boys like Shakespeare, who were being groomed to be lawyers and clerks, Church of England ministers, and secretaries to politicians or indeed politicians themselves.

Grammar school pupils didn’t study history or maths, and they didn’t study geography, or indeed science. However, they did study grammar (hence “grammar school”) and did so from dawn to dusk, six days-a-week, all year round. They translated

from Latin into English and from English into Latin. At school, ordinary conversation was in Latin and any boy caught speaking English would have been flogged.

The boys also mastered the tropes of rhetoric, from antimetabole (where words are repeated in inverse order) to zeugma (where one verb looks after two nouns). Rhetoric was – and still is – the language of power and politics; it was – and still is – the language of law and government.

Shakespeare would have started school at 6am in the summer months and 7am in winter. In his seven years at King Edward VI, Shakespeare is likely to have spent in excess of 2,000 hours studying which is more than double what a pupil today would spend in school, meaning he accessed the equivalent of 14 years of education.

The Renaissance was the driving force behind the curriculum. Shakespeare would have memorised entire textbooks by heart, and would have studied Aesop’s fables, Cicero, the Geneva Bible, Ovid, Plutarch, Seneca and Virgil among many others. In short, Shakespeare studied the best that had been thought and said.

In tackling the design of our curriculum, therefore, I think we can learn from Shakespeare’s experience of school life.

Curriculum planning backwards

We may no longer regard learning Latin as essential to success, but much of the knowledge Shakespeare learnt is still relevant. The best means of identifying what knowledge should underpin our curriculum, I think, is to start at the end and work backwards.

I will model the process by exploring the foundational concepts – the knowledge and skills – that pupils need to have mastered by the end of key stage 4 in order to succeed at GCSE. I will then consider how we might use these foundations to build our secondary curriculum, starting in year 7 and moving progressively through key stages 3 and 4.

Next, I will consider how to bridge the gap between the primary and secondary curriculums, ensuring that year 7 builds upon the knowledge and skills pupils bring with them from year 6. In other words, the curriculum needs to make sure the transitions between years, key stages and phases of education are smooth and progressive, and that the knowledge and skills pupils bring with them from primary school are consolidated and extended, not disregarded or repeated.

Finally, weaving its way through all of this, and across the curriculum, I will look at how we might make provision for the development of pupils’ language for learning and language of learning.

Deciding what matters

Lawton (1975) argued that the curriculum is “a selection from the culture of a society” and, as such,

each school’s local curriculum will be different; it will reflect the community it serves and prepare its pupils for the particular society in which they will live and work. That’s why I said your school’s curriculum vision should be unique. However, there is clearly a bank of knowledge – perhaps dictated by national curriculum and qualifications – that all pupils in the UK should acquire in order to succeed in school, in work and in life.

I will model selecting content for this basic curriculum using English language as an example. I will start at the end of compulsory schooling by examining what pupils need to know in order to do well at GCSE.

However, first a word about tracking GCSE outcomes into key stage 3...

“If we do not start secondary schooling with the end in mind, how can we be certain we are best preparing our pupils for success? How can we be sure we’re teaching them what they will need to know and do?”

Key stage 3

I am going to advocate identifying the knowledge and skills required at GCSE and to begin teaching them in year 7. However, this is not synonymous with stretching the GCSE programme of study down into key stage 3, thus squeezing or narrowing the key stage 3 curriculum.

Rather, it is about providing the skills and foundations for GCSE success as early as possible and ensuring we teach a progressive, joined-up curriculum. If we do not start secondary schooling with the end in mind, how can we be certain we are best preparing our pupils for success? How can we be sure we’re teaching them what they will need to know and do? And how can we be confident we are planning sufficient opportunities to repeat and reinforce – through deliberate practice – the knowledge and skills that matter most?

Mapping from the beginning of year 7 the foundational concepts required for success at GCSE is not the same as teaching GCSEs in key stage 3 – schools which extend GCSEs into key stage 3 narrow their curriculum and begin teaching the GCSE specification early.

I believe that key stage 3 should provide as broad and balanced a curriculum as possible and should be different to that which proceeds and succeeds it, but at the same time it should provide a bridge from primary to secondary and from key stage 3 to 4 and beyond.

Mapping foundational concepts from year 7 is about teaching a logical, ever-expanding and developing curriculum that best prepares pupils for their current and future schooling and indeed later life.

Some might argue that tracking GCSE outcomes back to year 7 is asking too much of younger pupils and that we cannot possibly expect the same of year 7 pupils as we do of year 11. But this is similar, to my mind, as arguing that we cannot expect children to talk at 18 months because we also expect them to do so as adults. We teach children to talk from an early age and continually improve their ability – both in terms of the biological function of articulating meaning through sound, and their vocabulary and syntax – throughout their childhood and indeed throughout life.

Tracking outcomes back through the years, key stages and phases of education means we begin the process of teaching pupils the knowledge and skills that are essential for academic success as early as possible in order to afford us the time to repeat learning several times and deepen pupils’ understanding of that knowledge over time. In short, we expect the same basic content knowledge but for the depth of that knowledge and the connections between different pieces of knowledge (thus improving transferability) to increase as the pupil gets older.

A cognitive balancing act

The working memory is always trying to balance intrinsic cognitive load (the space in working memory dedicated to performing a task), germane cognitive load (the space in working memory dedicated to trying to understand the task), and extraneous cognitive load (the space in working memory dedicated to understanding and responding to the instructional context).

John Sweller suggests that in order to minimise extraneous cognitive load, instructional design (the way we teach the curriculum) should address the needs of three broad groups of expertise:

- Novice: “Detailed, direct instructional support ... preferably in integrated or dual-modality formats.”
- Intermediate: “A mix of direct instruction and problem-solving practice with reduced support.”
- Advanced: “Minimally guided problem-solving tasks ... provide cognitively optimal instructional methods.”

In other words, we need to design a curriculum that affords sufficient repetition of content knowledge and to return to prior learning with increasing complexity. In year 7 we might begin by teaching our “novices” through detailed direct instruction and introduce new content knowledge at a basic – though not superficial – level. As pupils return to this learning in years 8 and 9 we might teach our “intermediates” through a combination of direct instruction and problem-solving activities. And then, at GCSE, we might teach the same content knowledge at an advanced level through minimally guided problem-solving activities. In short, the way we teach the same content knowledge as pupils get older necessarily changes as pupils move from being novices to experts. The scaffolds fall away and pupils become increasingly independent.

But we also return to the content knowledge we taught previously and add more and more layers of meaning in order to develop schemata. In so doing, we encourage pupils to practise, not until they solve a problem correctly, but until they can no longer get it wrong.

Next week (October 4), I will continue to explore the foundational concepts that are required for success at GCSE and how we can track these back to year 7.

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Curriculum design and delivery: Part 5

When designing our curriculum, we should work backwards from the intended outcomes. Continuing his curriculum series, **Matt Bromley** models what this process might look like



Image: Adobe Stock

So far in this series on curriculum design, I've examined the likely focus of Ofsted's 2019 Common Inspection Framework which will evaluate the intent, implementation and impact of the school curriculum.

In part one, I explained that there are three distinct elements to the curriculum: the national curriculum, the basic curriculum, and the local curriculum. However, I've also argued that the curriculum is more than this. It is, as the QCA put it in 2000, "everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned".

The hidden curriculum, I said, is learning that takes place outside the classroom such as from other pupils as well as learning that arises from an accidental juxtaposition of the school's stated values and its actual practice.

A broad curriculum, I've argued, is one in which there are enough subjects on the timetable to provide, say, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A balanced curriculum, meanwhile, is one in which each subject is not only taught to all pupils but is afforded enough time on the timetable to deliver its distinct contribution.

In short, I've argued that we should consider the curriculum in its widest sense – it takes place in and between lessons, in subjects and in extra-curricular activities, and it develops pupils' skills in a range of areas including in the arts and sport, and – although important – is not solely concerned with the pursuit of academic outcomes.

In part two, I explained that establishing a vision for your curriculum will provide the benchmark against which all subsequent decisions about its content, structure, sequence, monitoring, evaluation and review can be tested.

Having fixed on this vision, the big question is: how do we decide what core knowledge is included in our broad and balanced curriculum? In part three, I said that knowledge is power because information held in long-term memory is essential in helping make sense of new information. Knowledge is essential for reading comprehension, critical thinking and for closing the gap because children not born and raised in knowledge-rich environments don't do as well in school because new knowledge and skills have nothing to "stick" to or build upon. One of the aims of our broad and balanced school curriculum, therefore, must be to help the disadvantaged build their cultural capital and this takes one tangible form: vocabulary.

In part four I said we should begin developing our curriculum by exploring the foundational concepts – the knowledge and skills – that pupils will need to have mastered by the end of key stage 4 in order to succeed at GCSE and then consider how we might use these foundations to build our secondary curriculum, starting in year 7 and moving progressively through key stages 3 and 4. Let me now model this process using the example of English language.

Back to the beginning

My starting point is to look at the assessment objectives and learning outcomes and to identify the key concepts upon which success is contingent.

For example, one of the outcomes required for success in GCSE English language is for pupils to be able to "identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas". I therefore need to ensure that the concept of explicit and implicit meanings form a part of my curriculum from year 7 onwards.

We might start in year 7 by teaching pupils what is meant by the words "explicit" and "implicit". We might introduce these words, once we have assessed their prior knowledge from primary school, by following Beck's advice:

- Read a sentence in which the word appears.
- Show pupils the word and get them to say it out loud.
- Discuss possible meanings of the word.
- Identify any parts of the word that may be familiar (e.g. Greek or Latinate roots, common prefixes and suffixes).
- Re-read the sentence with the word in it to detect any contextual clues.
- Explicitly explain the meaning of the word through definition and the use of synonyms.
- Provide several other examples of the word being used in context.

- Ask pupils to use the word in sentences of their own. Thus, in year 7, pupils will be expected to know that "explicit" means stated clearly, leaving no room for doubt or confusion, whereas "implicit" means suggested though not directly stated or expressed. This will form part of our assessment of the curriculum.

But knowing what the words mean isn't enough. As pupils travel through our curriculum we need to return to these concepts and teach pupils how to identify explicit and implicit meanings in a range of different texts.

Then we need to teach them how to interpret both explicit and implicit meanings, and comment on why the writer used explicit or implicit language and what effect their choice has on the reader.

Our end goal is for pupils to be able to comment on what a text overtly says and also discern what is implied or suggested – for example, what the writer might have been trying to say.

To arrive at this destination, we begin teaching explicit and implicit meanings from year 7 but do so at different levels of complexity and skill as we return to it, in different contexts and tied to different content knowledge, throughout the curriculum.

We do the same for all the other outcomes in GCSE English language including, for reading:

- What language features to identify and comment on.
- What structural features to identify and comment on.
- How to compare two or more texts.
- How to make references to a text, using quotations.
- What tone, style and register mean and how to identify them in texts as well as how to use them to influence writing.
- What form, purpose and audience mean and how to identify them in texts as well as how to use them to influence writing.
- What is meant by grammatical features and how to use various grammatical features for effect.
- What is meant by sentence structure and how to use different types of sentence for effect.
- As we return to these foundational concepts at increasingly complex levels, we could make use of "threshold assessments", which encourage pupils to move up the reading comprehension "ladder":
- From identifies – whereby a pupil shows a simple awareness of language, identifies and gives a simple explanation, identifies literal meanings, and shows some understanding of what is going on...
- To explains – whereby a pupil understands language and how it works, for example, they can talk about effects on the reader and use appropriate quotations...
- To analyses – whereby a pupil explains the effects of language, goes beyond the literal, analyses words and sentences, and shows an awareness of different meanings, both implicit and explicit...
- And finally to evaluates – whereby a pupil evaluates

the writer's choice of language or impact on the reader, and offers their own opinion which is supported by appropriate evidence.

Breaking all the rules

Last week, in part four, in my defence of Shakespeare's "inventive borrowing", I quoted TS Eliot who said: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal."

The same can be said of pupils: they need to learn the rules before they can break them. For example, to help pupils know how to write a textual analysis, we need to teach them a framework such as PEE (point, evidence, explanation/or exploration) or SQI (statement, quote, inference) so that they can learn how to analyse a text and practise doing so until the process becomes automatic – until they cannot fail.

“My starting point is to look at the assessment objectives and learning outcomes and to identify the key concepts upon which success is contingent”

Once they have ingrained this useful framework, they can develop the confidence to deviate from it and to find their own voice.

As an English examiner I quickly recognise the classes who have been drilled on PEE and use it effectively if somewhat mechanically. They pick up the marks and certainly achieve a grade 5 or higher, but offer formulaic responses. I also recognise the highest performing pupils who achieve grades 8 and 9 because they retain the depth of analysis that PEE promotes but lose the formulaic structure and write in a distinctive manner, offering their own considered opinions.

I make no apology, therefore, for recommending our joined-up, progressive curriculum teaches pupils a series of useful frameworks and formula – what we might call schemata – to help them cheat the limitations of working memory by providing them with cues to knowledge in long-term memory which, in turn, allows them to automate certain processes.

Certainly in English (and other essay-based subjects), the PEE paragraph is a useful starting point and should be taught from year 7 onwards so that

pupils are afforded sufficient time before they sit their GCSEs to practise using it in a range of contexts until they can automate it (thus, it becomes second nature and releases space in working memory for thinking about content). Once they have automated it, they can learn to deviate from it (in order to develop a voice of their own).

We can teach useful frameworks – or schema – for writing, too. For example, when teaching pupils how to write for different purposes, we could begin by drilling pupils on the types of text they need to write, what conventions they need to be aware of for each text type (teaching them first to obey those conventions before knowing when and how – and having the confidence – to ignore or subvert them for effect).

For each of these conventions, we should explain how it works, model using it, construct a model with the class, then allow pupils to practice using the convention themselves. Practice is made easier if pupils have mnemonics to rely on...

Mnemonics – a type of schemata – help cheat the limitations of working memory by short-cutting to knowledge stored in long-term memory.

For example, the acronym AFOREST – commonly used in schools – is an easy way for pupils to remember what to include in a piece of persuasive writing. AFOREST takes up little space in working memory but each letter stands for a feature that is stored in long-term memory because we have taught it from year 7 onwards and allowed pupils to repeat their prior learning in order to improve both the storage and retrieval strength of that information in long-term memory.

AFOREST, at least in my version, stands for: Amazing opening, Facts, Rhetorical questions, Emotive language, Statistics, and a Thought-provoking ending.

Conclusion

I recommend we design our curriculum by starting at the end and working backwards. We can do this by using, as a starting point, the assessment objectives and learning outcomes and identifying within them the key concepts upon which success is contingent, then ensure we introduce those concepts in year 7 and repeat them throughout key stages 3 and 4, albeit with increasing complexity.

Next week (October 11), having looked forward to the concepts pupils need in order to succeed at GCSE, we will look backwards at what pupils have been taught in year 6 in order to ensure we bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and our curriculum is joined-up at both ends. SecEd

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Curriculum design and delivery: Part 6



Image: Adobe Stock

In the penultimate part of his curriculum design series, **Matt Bromley** considers how we can ensure our curriculum builds on what pupils have learnt in primary, and also looks at how we should approach key stage 3

In last week's instalment I modelled how to use GCSE outcomes (in the form of assessment objectives) to determine some of the foundational concepts (or content knowledge) that should underpin our secondary curriculum.

For example, I said that, to succeed at GCSE English language, pupils need to be able to identify and explain explicit and implicit meanings and, as such, we should introduce pupils to the words "explicit" and "implicit" in year 7 and revisit these concepts throughout key stages 3 and 4, albeit with increasing complexity each time.

In other words, I said we should teach the same concepts throughout key stages 3 and 4 – building in time for repetition and reinforcement as retrieval practice – but develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of these concepts as they travel through the school curriculum.

Think of our progressive curriculum as peeling back the layers of an onion, deepening pupils' understanding of content but also enabling them, as they acquire more and more content knowledge, to make connections and develop schemata in long-term memory that permits thinking – including thinking about any new content they encounter – to become more efficient and accurate.

As I said last time, the more we know, the easier it is to know more because we process new information in the context of what we already know. We can't think critically about something of which we are ignorant.

This week I want to look backwards rather than forwards. In other words, rather than look at the end goal – GCSE outcomes – I want to investigate pupils' pasts and identify what they have been taught at primary school, because a truly joined-up and progressive curriculum bridges the gaps between years, key stages and phases of education and this includes the gap between primary and secondary school. But first a note on skills...

Transferable and non-transferable skills

It is helpful, I find, once we have determined the concepts that provide the foundations of our curriculum – the content knowledge upon which success at GCSE is dependent – to differentiate between the transferable concepts that a particular programme of study will introduce and embed, and those concepts which are indivisible from their context. Allow me to elaborate...

When teaching *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, pupils will need to learn about how playwrights work and about stagecraft; they'll need to understand the language used, including blank verse; they'll need to learn about themes such as conflict, romance, and tragedy; and so on.

These concepts are all transferable because they can – and should – be applied to different texts and indeed to life. The narrative shape of an Elizabethan tragedy is almost the same for every tragic play – certainly the audience would know to expect mass bloodshed in the fifth act, whereas they'd expect a romance to end in marriage. Knowing this can help pupils to understand a range of different texts and compare one with another.

By the same token, when teaching prose fiction, it's helpful to teach pupils Freytag's Pyramid or the six-part story structure, and get pupils to comment on how the author builds towards a climax.

But, in order to study *Romeo and Juliet*, pupils will also need to learn the names of characters and details about the plot, as well as contextual information about when and where the play is set, and when and where it was written and first performed. These concepts are not transferable because they are specific to this play.

Both transferable and non-transferable concepts are important, but the transferable concepts must be mapped across the curriculum and repeated and reinforced regularly. We must make the explicit link between the study of these concepts in the context of *Romeo and Juliet* and how these concepts apply in other parts of the curriculum.

So long as we teach the non-transferable concepts well when taught in context, there is no need to repeat them beyond the bounds of normal exam revision. For example, we do not – knowing we will teach *Romeo and Juliet* in year 11 – need to start introducing the play in year 7. It is enough to introduce the transferable concepts that will aid pupils' understanding of the play.

Key stage 3 – the poor relation?

In our new curriculum, key stage 3 must not be regarded as a poor relation to key stage 4 for this will only prove to be a vicious cycle. For example, we need to avoid the temptation to timetable key stages 4 and 5 first then fill

in the gaps with key stage 3 lessons, thus increasing the chances of key stage 3 classes being split between two or more teachers.

And we need to avoid timetabling non-specialist, underperforming and/or inexperienced teachers for key stage 3 lessons. Rather, we should utilise our best teachers because this will pay dividends in later years and limit the need of remedial interventions to help pupils catch up for lost time.

In addition to being appropriately staffed, the key stage 3 curriculum should strike the right balance between providing pupils with a grounding for GCSE and being different enough to key stage 4 so as to be engaging. Last week I explained how we can ensure key stage 3 provides a springboard for GCSE. But key stage 3 also needs to flow naturally from key stage 2.

Ofsted's 2015 report, *The Wasted Years*, argued that too many secondary schools do not work effectively with partner primary schools in order to understand pupils' prior learning and therefore ensure that they build on this during key stage 3. Indeed, some secondary leaders simply accept that pupils will repeat what they have already done in primary school. This problem, sadly, has only worsened since the government implemented its new national curricula...

Richard Hudson, emeritus professor of linguistics at University College London, who was part of an expert group advising the government on the primary curriculum, has admitted that the process – overseen by then education secretary, Michael Gove – was "chaotic". Prof Hudson says that, as a result, the new curriculum and assessments are not based on good research evidence and many primary teachers are not equipped to teach it.

Prof Hudson is not alone in criticising the new primary curriculum he helped to write. Indeed, all four members of the expert panel have spoken publicly about their concerns.

The government's key curriculum advisor, Tim Oates, has also warned that the spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) tests "need a rethink (because there is a) genuine problem about (the) undue complexity of demand (of the) 'language about language' that pupils are now expected to know".

David Crystal, one of Britain's leading English language experts, has argued that the SPaG test, and its underlying view of language, "turns the clock back half a century" because it places too much emphasis on simply spotting and labelling linguistic features and regards this as an end in itself rather than as a starting point that enables discussions about effective writing.

Prof Hudson, in an interview with *The Guardian* in May 2017, recalled the disorganised process of writing the curriculum: "To give you an idea of how chaotic things were, when (the expert panel) was originally put together, we had about four meetings and were supposed to be devising a grammar curriculum to cover the whole of compulsory education: primary and secondary. We started off with the primary curriculum, which we were a bit unconfident about as none of us had much experience of primary education and were looking forward to getting stuck into the real thing: secondary.

"Then the DfE pulled the plug by saying 'we are not going to do any secondary curriculum'. So (the primary curriculum that) was published was meant to be about

building the foundations for the real thing. But that's all there is."

Prof Hudson went on to say that the result is "terribly worrying, because it means that all the work children do in primary is wasted, as they probably won't take it on in secondary".

The government did eventually produce a new secondary curriculum but it was a slimmed down, less prescriptive version of what had gone before, and therefore did not build upon the foundations laid down by the primary curriculum.

So, in short, we have a primary national curriculum which is much more prescriptive than that which preceded it. However, because it proved so problematic to write and implement, the government abandoned its plan to follow it with a progressive secondary curriculum. The secondary curriculum the government did eventually introduce was less prescriptive. As a result, the primary curriculum does not flow naturally into the secondary curriculum and the knowledge and skills taught at key stage 3 do not build upon that which is taught in key stage 2.

“We need to avoid the temptation to timetable key stages 4 and 5 first then fill in the gaps with key stage 3 lessons, thus increasing the chances of key stage 3 classes being split between two or more teachers”

The problem seems to be that curriculum reforms at the national level have been implemented in isolation, and primary and secondary schools don't have enough time to talk to each other about what and how they teach. What's more, the government hasn't provided – or equipped schools with the funding for – staff training on the new curriculum and so many teachers are stumbling in the dark.

Another consequence of this lack of joined up thinking on the curriculum is that the primary curriculum now better prepares pupils for the new, more demanding GCSEs but renders near-pointless the three years of key stage 3 sandwiched in between. This poses an additional challenge to secondary schools than those outlined in Ofsted's report: what can we cover in the year 7, 8 and 9 curriculums to ensure that pupils are challenged, engaged and making progress?

One answer, I think, in English at least, is to put into context the technical terminology now taught at primary. This involves reading and writing increasingly complex texts, developing a love of reading for reading's sake, and developing pupils' ability to write in a range of contexts, for a variety of purposes, and in different styles.

Another solution is to ensure that pupils are fed a rich diet of subjects from across the arts, humanities, languages and sciences, and are afforded experiences outside the classroom by visiting museums and art galleries, theatres and monuments. In short, schools should do as Ofsted's chief inspector Amanda Spielman advised in her Festival of Education speech in 2017 and ensure that the key stage 3 curriculum broadens minds, enriches communities, and advances civilisation.

Bridging the gap

As I say above, the primary curriculum provides pupils with an impressive knowledge of, say, grammatical terms. Indeed, the terminology and concepts now being taught in key stage 2 would not, ordinarily, be introduced until A level. However, the primary national curriculum encourages schools to teach concepts and skills in isolation. One job for our joined-up, progressive secondary curriculum, therefore, is to place these concepts and skills into some sort of context, for example by studying the best that has been thought and said.

In fact, I would advise a teaching sequence that begins with the development of spoken language, then develops reading comprehension, before moving onto writing composition. Once this sequence has been followed, we can zig-zag back and forth so that writing composition can inform reading comprehension and spoken language, and so on.

We need pupils in key stage 3 to enjoy whole texts – and, yes, reading and writing in silence for a full lesson. Studying extracts is valuable, too, of course, in allowing pupils to apply their skills and knowledge, particularly to unseen texts as they will need to in the exam. But there is no substitute for reading a book from cover to cover, understanding and appreciating the plot arc and the detailed, sustained development of character, setting and theme. What's more, in this digital age of instant gratification, pupils rely on schools to teach them the art of concentration and attention.

Next week, in the final part of this series, I want to turn to the language of learning and the language for learning and consider how we might further bridge this gap between primary and secondary schools by being consistent in the words we use.

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Further reading

- *Battle on the adverbials front: grammar advisers raise worries about Sats tests and teaching*, *The Guardian*, May 2017: <http://bit.ly/2Csx6UO>
- *Key Stage 3: The Wasted Years?*, Ofsted, September 2015: <http://bit.ly/228mj5R>

In the final part of his series on designing and delivering a whole-school curriculum, **Matt Bromley** recaps his key advice, discusses the importance of the language of learning used by teachers, and looks at Ofsted's latest comments ahead of its new inspection framework

Curriculum design and delivery: Part 7



This is the final part of my series on curriculum design. Before I conclude, here's a recap.

I began the series by predicting the likely focus of Ofsted's 2019 Common Inspection Framework. We can infer from the content of chief inspector Amanda Spielman's speeches and from a consultation the inspectorate has conducted, that Ofsted will evaluate the intent, implementation and impact of the school curriculum.

This content now includes Ms Spielman's most recent speech last week (October 11) confirming that the framework in 2019 will focus on "the substance of education and a broad curriculum" and will include a new judgement (subject to consultation) on the Quality of Education.

In part one of this series, I explained that there are three distinct elements to the curriculum:

- The national curriculum, prescribed by statute and including core and foundation subjects.
- The basic curriculum, the requirements in current legislation for the teaching of RE, sex education, careers education, and opportunities for work-related learning.
- The local curriculum, which schools are free to adopt in order to complement the national and basic curriculums.

However, I also argued that we should regard the curriculum as more than this: it is, as the QCA suggested in 2000, "everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned". This unplanned or hidden curriculum encompasses learning that takes place outside the classroom, too.

It is nevertheless important to start the process of curriculum design by articulating a clear vision of what the curriculum seeks to do in your school – and a good place to begin is by defining what is meant by a "broad and balanced" curriculum.

A broad curriculum, I argued, is one in which there are enough subjects on the timetable to provide linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A balanced curriculum, meanwhile, is one in which each subject is not only taught to all pupils but is afforded enough time on the timetable to deliver its distinct contribution.

I argued that we should consider the curriculum in its widest sense – it takes place in and between lessons, in subjects and in extra-curricular activities, and it develops pupils' skills in a range of areas including in the arts and sport, and – although important – is not solely concerned with the pursuit of academic outcomes. And we should think carefully about how, once we have designed the curriculum, we will implement and evaluate it to ensure it delivers its stated aims and continues to be relevant.

In part two, I explained that establishing a vision for our curriculum will provide the benchmark against which all subsequent decisions about its content, structure, sequence, monitoring, evaluation and review can be tested. A good place to start, I said, is to consider what the school regards as the purpose of education. One answer is this: to produce polymaths – pupils with a well-rounded knowledge in a range of subjects so that they leave school with a solid grounding from which they can build their mastery of a specific field.

Having fixed on this vision, the big question is how do we decide what core knowledge is included in our broad and balanced curriculum? And why, in this internet age, does it matter what knowledge pupils learn?

In part three I said that knowledge is power, because information held in long-term memory is essential in helping make sense of new information. Knowledge is essential for reading comprehension, critical-thinking and for closing the gap.

Put simply, the more you know, the easier it is to know more and so the culturally rich will always stay ahead of the impoverished, and the gap between rich and poor will continue to grow. One of the aims of our broad and balanced school curriculum, therefore, must be to help the disadvantaged build their cultural capital and this takes one tangible form: vocabulary.

In part four, we learned from Shakespeare's schooling. In *Teaching Shakespeare*, Rex Gibson says that "Shakespeare's schooling provided an excellent resource for the future playwright. Everything Shakespeare

learned at school he used in some way in his plays."

In tackling the design of our curriculum, therefore, I think we can learn a lot from Shakespeare's experience of school life and the best way to do this is to plan the curriculum content backwards.

In part five I explained this further. We begin by exploring the foundational concepts – the knowledge and skills – that pupils will need to have mastered by the end of key stage 4 in order to succeed at GCSE. We then consider how we might use these foundations to build our secondary curriculum, starting in year 7 and moving progressively through key stages 3 and 4.

In part 6, we then considered how to bridge the gap between the primary and secondary curriculums, ensuring that year 7 builds upon the knowledge and skills pupils bring with them from year 6. In other words, we need to make sure transitions between years, key stages and phases of education are smooth and progressive. And we need to make sure that the knowledge and skills pupils bring with them from primary school are consolidated and extended, not disregarded or repeated.

Weaving its way through all of this, and across the curriculum, we need to consider how we will make provision for the development of pupils' language of learning and language for learning...

Primary and secondary schools could work together more closely to identify the avoidable differences in the language of learning they use – the unnecessarily confusing and contradictory

The language of learning

One way in which key stage 3 can bridge the gap between the primary and secondary curriculums is to ensure teachers on either side of the divide use the same, or at least similar, language of – and language for – learning.

By "language of learning" I mean the technical vocabulary that pupils are required to learn as part of the curriculum content knowledge. For example, if teachers in primary schools (as stated in the primary curriculum) refer to the word "and" as a "conjunction" but their secondary school colleagues are wedded to the term "connective", it is confusing for pupils, and year 7 teachers may assume they haven't been taught, or at least haven't

learnt, what a connective is when their use of the term is greeted with a wall of blank faces.

Likewise, in science, secondary teachers might refer to independent variable, dependent variable and controlled variables when conducting an experiment, whereas primary teachers might simply ask "how do you make it a fair test?" without introducing the technical vocabulary. The concepts are familiar but the language is not.

Of course, there will always be differences in the language used in primary and secondary – some terms will be too difficult or complex for younger pupils to say and use knowingly. However, primary and secondary schools could work together more closely to identify the avoidable differences in the language of learning they use – the unnecessarily confusing and contradictory.

The language for learning

By "language for learning" I mean the vocabulary we, as teachers, use to describe teaching and learning methods and activities. For example, in primary schools teachers routinely talk about WAGOLLS: "What a good one looks like."

Pupils become confident using this term and certainly know what it means. However, when they transfer to secondary school they're unlikely to hear it uttered again and may, instead, be confronted with the Latinate term "exemplar". Some pupils may make the link with "example" and understand its meaning but many – particularly the word-poor who, more than anyone else, need the social and emotional effects of transition to be mitigated – may not be familiar with the word family and may miss its meaning.

Our teaching is littered – often unknowingly – with pedagogic jargon and the teaching terms we use in secondary are often different to those used in primary.

Again, primary and secondary teachers need to work more closely to ensure what they teach and the way in which they teach it – including the language they use and how they operate their classrooms (e.g. what they expect of pupils, what roles pupils are given, how they manage behaviour and use rewards and sanctions, and how they plan transitions between tasks) – is consistent.

Of course, just as content knowledge needs to grow in complexity as is it retaught throughout the curriculum, the language teachers use should also develop. But more needs to be done to smooth the transition and to draw links between the end of year 6 and the beginning of year 7.

A postscript

In March 2018, I attended *SecEd's* ninth National Ofsted and Pupil Premium Conference in Birmingham. The keynote speaker, Peter Humphries, Ofsted's senior HMI for schools in the West Midlands region, provided an update I think worth including here. He told delegates that the 2019 inspection framework will reward schools for having a "bold and courageous" curriculum.

Mr Humphries said: "Amanda Spielman has looked a lot at the curriculum and in the framework in 2019 I think there will be a focus on the curriculum. How well does your curriculum meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, SEND, boys excluded, etc? (She) feels that schools are too focused on how the curriculum prepares children and young people for SATs and GCSEs. From

a disadvantaged pupil's point of view, if all you get is teaching to the test and a focus on examinations, you can see how that might affect you and disengage you. And it's not just (the case for) disadvantaged pupils.

"Please be assured," he told delegates, "that if you are bold and courageous to adapt your curriculum and do exciting things you will get credit for it."

And lo and behold, as this article was being prepared for publication, Ms Spielman made a speech to the SCHOOLS NorthEast conference in which she set out some of the key changes we will see in the new framework (the draft for which will be launched for consultation in January 2019).

Ms Spielman said that the focus will be on "the substance of education and a broad curriculum". She confirmed that Ofsted is to consult on the introduction of a new judgement for "Quality of Education". This will replace the current "outcomes for pupils" and "teaching, learning and assessment" judgements. Ms Spielman said the new focus would bring "the inspection conversation back to the substance of young people's learning and treating teachers as experts in their field, not just data managers".

She added that Ofsted will also challenge those schools where too much time is spent on preparation for tests at the expense of teaching, where pupils' choices are narrowed, or where children are pushed into less rigorous qualifications purely to boost league table positions.

Three further inspection judgements will be Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes, and Schools' Leadership and Management. See *SecEd's* report on this week's news pages for more information.

Back in Birmingham in March, Mr Humphries reminded conference delegates of the evidence showing that certain groups of students are more likely to be excluded than others. This too, is on Ofsted's radar he said. He urged schools to reflect on their own situation.

We can infer from this that Ofsted will evaluate whether or not the curriculum is suitable for pupils and promotes equality of opportunity. This suggests the "hidden curriculum" will be of particular importance, especially the way in which a school manages behaviour and attendance, supports pupils pastorally, and sends positive messages about inclusion and diversity through the words and actions of all the adults in the school.

Mr Humphries also emphasised the key role literacy plays in the curriculum and inferred this would also be a focus of the new framework.

A school's curriculum is likely to be evaluated for the extent to which it helps close the gap. He told delegates: "We know that literacy is an issue for disadvantaged pupils and it's sometimes a bit of a surprise that it's not being addressed more rigorously in schools."

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Further information

Be "bold and courageous" with your curriculum, *Ofsted urges, SecEd*, April 2018: <http://bit.ly/2KhTSiG>