

## Curriculum

Sean Harford of Ofsted published a blog entitled "A Working Definition of Curriculum" on the 24th April 2018. This is set out below.

"A framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage (intent).....for translating that framework over time into a structure and narrative within an institutional context (implementation).....and for evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations (impact)."

Inspectors will apply the definition in their practice.

It is important to analyse the assumptions regarding education which lie beneath the working definition. Contrary to earlier definitions of curriculum, notably HMI (DES 1980) in "A View of the Curriculum", the definition is embodied in a framework doubtless chosen as most appropriate to the inspection of schools which relies heavily upon performance data and written records. The word "narrative" is revealing. Essentially the definition relates to the school system, "each stage" implies pupils brought together in organisational years or groups of years such as a key stage, rather than to the stage of development and growth of the individual child. Similarly "expectations" implies expectation of the organisational stage rather than of the individual. The definition is in fact a blueprint, a syllabus to be followed and not a description of all that is implied by the curriculum. It omits a vital element, that of the learner who is in a dynamic relationship with the teacher using the syllabus.

In seeking a more valid definition of the early years and primary school curriculum there is no better place to start than the Hadow Report (1931) which has been foundation of the education of young children over many years. The statement "the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored. Its aim should be to develop in a child the fundamental interests of civilized life in so far as these interests lie within the compass of childhood...." puts the child at the centre of primary education.

The primacy of the child was reiterated in the Plowden report (1967) which affirmed "Teachers must rely both on their general knowledge of child development and on detailed observation of individual children for matching their demands to children's stage of development".

A View of the Curriculum (DES 1980) followed a commitment to the need to reflect the broad aims of education with an uncompromising affirmation that the curriculum "has to allow for differences in the abilities and other characteristics of children, even of the same age ...."

Jerome Bruner in 2006 summed up the definition of the curriculum widely held by primary practitioners "We have learned that there is no such thing as *the* curriculum; it is very specific to a particular situation and a particular student, and it will vary. For in effect it's an

animated three-way conversation between a learner, someone who is more expert in an area of study and a body of knowledge that is difficult to define but that exists in the culture".

That is it ---- curriculum is much more than a framework, it is *what happens* and always has the child at the very centre. What happens takes into account the child as a whole and the individual responses of the children in the conversation concerning the act of teaching and learning set out so wisely by Jerome Bruner. Our definition of the curriculum both informs and reconciles all the elements which make up the rich fabric of primary education. The child is at the centre as we acknowledge the curriculum's complexity revealed through the experience of children as they learn.

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